



The impact of resource constraints on teaching and learning in South Africa's community learning centres

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ABSTRACT

The persistent lack of resources in Community Learning Centres (CLCs) and its impact on educator morale, teaching quality, and learner engagement remains a serious concern that has not been sufficiently explored. This qualitative study seeks to address that gap by drawing on data collected through semi-structured interviews and observations involving nine educators and three centre managers from three Johannesburg-based CLCs in Gauteng Province, South Africa. Thematic analysis revealed key challenges, including shortages of teaching materials, limited access to technology, poorly maintained facilities, and inconsistent administrative support. These constraints not only hinder effective teaching but also contribute to educator absenteeism, low morale, and burnout. Using Christopher Hood's Public Management Theory, the study interprets these institutional challenges within broader structural and systemic limitations. The findings further indicate that weak infrastructure, inadequate funding, and limited professional development opportunities undermine the capacity of educators and managers to deliver quality teaching and learning. The study recommends that fair and strategic resource allocation is essential for improving teaching quality and learner outcomes. A coordinated response is required, including urgent infrastructure upgrades, sufficient funding for materials and digital tools, stronger centre-level communication, ongoing professional development, and stricter policy enforcement. This research contributes to the existing body of knowledge by highlighting how resource inadequacies in adult education settings erode both teaching efficacy and educational equity.

Keywords: Adult Education, Community Learning Centres, Educator, Resource challenge.

INTRODUCTION

Community Learning Centres (CLCs), previously referred to as Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) centres, occupy a critical position in promoting lifelong learning and driving social transformation in South Africa. According to Rogers, CLCs serve as vital learning hubs for individuals and communities, particularly

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in contexts where access to formal education remains limited.¹ Over time, their scope has expanded beyond basic literacy and numeracy to include social empowerment, critical civic engagement, and economic development within historically marginalised communities.²

Despite their transformative potential, CLCs continue to face entrenched systemic challenges that compromise their effectiveness. Chronic underfunding remains a persistent constraint, significantly undermining operational efficiency and long-term sustainability.³ In addition to financial limitations, many centres grapple with deteriorating infrastructure, limited access to teaching and learning resources, and a shortage of professionally qualified educators.⁴ These challenges are particularly noticeable in rural areas, where even the most basic requirements for effective educational delivery are often lacking.⁵

Furthermore, opportunities for ongoing professional development among CLC educators are limited, which directly affects the quality of instruction and contributes to high learner absenteeism and dropout rates. The absence of structured and continuous training diminishes andragogical effectiveness and deepens existing educational inequalities.⁶ While national policy frameworks conceptualise CLCs as inclusive, equitable, and transformative learning spaces, their under-resourced and structurally marginalised conditions continue to hinder the realisation of this vision.

Belete et.al. assert that although CLCs remain integral to community development and the advancement of adult literacy, their capacity to deliver quality education is severely constrained.⁷ Despite the progressive intentions underpinning policies such as the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training,⁸ the persistent lack of both material and human resources presents a major barrier. Educators are frequently deprived of essential teaching materials, access to technological infrastructure, and adequate institutional support. As Engbrecht observes, although technological advancements have revolutionised education globally, many CLCs remain on the periphery of these developments due to insufficient funding and poor infrastructure.⁹

A significant gap remains in the literature regarding how resource constraints affect teaching and learning within South African CLCs. While Aitchison addresses systemic and policy-related challenges, his analysis focuses more on governance and access than on resource shortages at the centre level.¹⁰ Similarly, Munje and Jita note that poor infrastructure and the underutilisation of information and communication technology, often due to ineffective planning, negatively affect teaching strategies and learner engagement.¹¹

This study generated context-sensitive insights into how funding shortfalls, infrastructural inadequacies, and limited professional support influenced educational practice in selected CLCs. The

¹ Alan Rogers, "Second-Generation Non-Formal Education and the Sustainable Development Goals: Operationalising the SDGs through Community Learning Centres," *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 38, no. 5 (2019): 515–26.

² Morakinyo Akintolu, Chinaza Uleanya, and Moeketsi Letseka, "Examining Key Challenges in the Programmes of Adult Community Learning Centres in KwaZulu-Natal," *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education* 28, no. 2 (November 21, 2022): 595–614, <https://doi.org/10.1177/14779714211070307>.

³ J. Aitchison, *Post-School Education and Training in South Africa: Pathways, Qualifications and Opportunities* (HSRC Press, 2017).

⁴ E. N. Tibane, L. M. Ncube, and S. S. Nkosi, "Infrastructure and Staffing Challenges in South African CLCs: A Case Study Approach," *Journal of Lifelong Learning and Adult Education* 3, no. 1 (2024): 59–74.

⁵ Oluwatoyin Ayodele Ajani, "Exploring the Teacher Professional Development Activities: Perspectives of Nigerian High School Teachers," *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research* 21, no. 6 (June 30, 2022): 34–49, <https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.21.6.3>.

⁶ Marcina Singh and Tabitha Mukeredzi, "Teachers' Experiences of Continuous Professional Development for Citizenship and Social Cohesion in South Africa and Zimbabwe: Enhancing Capacity for Deliberative Democracies," *Frontiers in Education* 9 (February 23, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.3389/educ.2024.1326437>.

⁷ Sonja Belete et al., "Community Learning Centres (CLCs) for Adult Learning and Education (ALE): Development in and by Communities," *International Review of Education* 68, no. 2 (2022): 259–90.

⁸ Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training: Building an Expanded, Effective and Integrated Post-School System* (Pretoria: DHET, 2013).

⁹ Jamie R Engbrecht, "Digital Textbooks versus Print Textbooks," 2018.

¹⁰ Aitchison, *Post-School Education and Training in South Africa: Pathways, Qualifications and Opportunities*.

¹¹ Paul Nwathi Munje and Thuthukile Jita, "The Impact of the Lack of ICT Resources on Teaching and Learning in Selected South African Primary Schools," *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research* 19, no. 7 (July 30, 2020): 263–79, <https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.19.7.15>.

findings aimed to inform both policy development and practical interventions to improve adult education provision in resource-constrained environments.

The investigation was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the key resource constraints affecting Community Learning Centres in South Africa?
2. How do these resource constraints impact educational practice and learner outcomes?
3. What institutional and policy-level responses have been implemented to address these challenges?

LITERATURE REVIEW

South Africa's post-apartheid vision embraces the ideals of social justice, equity, and lifelong learning. Central to the realisation of this vision are Community Learning Centres (CLCs), conceptualised as inclusive spaces for adult and community education.¹² This national aspiration aligns with global trends, where CLCs are increasingly recognised as vehicles for providing education responsive to local community needs.¹³ This literature review examined the impact of resource constraints on teaching practices in CLCs, situating the South African experience within the broader sub-Saharan African and international contexts.

Resource Constraints in South African Community Learning Centres

Literature consistently highlights how inadequate resources, such as poor infrastructure, limited teaching materials, and staff shortages, undermine the effectiveness of Community Learning Centres and compromise the quality of adult education provision.¹⁴ While policy frameworks, such as the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training, advocated for sectoral transformation, implementation was often fragmented and inconsistent.¹⁵ Educators frequently reported the absence of basic teaching resources, including textbooks, learning aids, and digital tools. In certain centres, essential items such as educator guides and learner workbooks were entirely lacking, illustrating the severity of material deprivation.¹⁶ These deficiencies hindered effective lesson planning, reduced learner engagement, and stifled andragogical innovation.

Further compounding these challenges was the lack of access to ongoing professional development, contributing to low morale and high staff turnover. Du Plessis and Mestry documented widespread infrastructural deficiencies, particularly in rural areas, which intensified the systemic constraints faced by educators.¹⁷ Such structural inadequacies discouraged the adoption of innovative and learner-centred teaching methods, resulting instead in predominantly rote learning, limited learner engagement, and superficial assessment practices.¹⁸

These constrained andragogical approaches ultimately compromised the transformative aims of adult education by limiting opportunities for critical thinking, sustained engagement, and skills acquisition. The Community Education and Training system remained underdeveloped, with insufficient resources undermining learner attainment in literacy, numeracy, and vocational training.¹⁹

¹² L. Cooper and M. Hamilton, "Social Justice and Adult Education: Theoretical and Political Frameworks in South African and Global Contexts," in *The Palgrave International Handbook on Adult and Lifelong Education and Learning*, ed. M. Milana et al. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 139–55.

¹³ UNESCO, "Strengthening Capacities of Community Learning Centres," 2021, <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/strengthening-capacities-community-learning-centers>.

¹⁴ Tibane, Ncube, and Nkosi, "Infrastructure and Staffing Challenges in South African CLCs: A Case Study Approach."

¹⁵ Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training: Building an Expanded, Effective and Integrated Post-School System*.

¹⁶ J., Aitchison and S. Land, "Resource Constraints in South African Community Learning Centres: A Field Report" (University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2019).

¹⁷ Pierre du Plessis and Raj Mestry, "Teachers for Rural Schools – a Challenge for South Africa," *South African Journal of Education* 39, no. Supplement 1 (September 30, 2019): S1–9, <https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v39ns1a1774>.

¹⁸ Tibane, Ncube, and Nkosi, "Infrastructure and Staffing Challenges in South African CLCs: A Case Study Approach."

¹⁹ OECD, *Community Education and Training in South Africa (Getting Skills Right)* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264312302-en>.

Sub-Saharan African Perspectives

Across sub-Saharan Africa, Community Learning Centres continue to face challenges that closely mirror those experienced in South Africa. In Kenya, for instance, inadequate capitation and financial support have severely undermined the sustainability of Adult and Continuing Education (ACE) programmes by limiting the availability of essential teaching and learning materials.²⁰

Overcrowded classrooms and limited instructional resources in Tanzania continue to undermine learner engagement and academic outcomes in adult education settings.²¹ Even though certain African countries like Nigeria have made efforts towards using adult education as a means of social and economic development, the continuous existence of structural constraints reveals that policy commitments have not always translated into better learning conditions for adult learners.²²

Some countries adopted more innovative and integrated models. In Ethiopia, adult education was embedded within local development programmes, which facilitated resource mobilisation and supported the implementation of locally relevant curricula.²³ Although still limited in scale, such initiatives exemplified the potential of community-based and cross-sectoral collaboration to address systemic barriers. Taken together, these regional examples highlight a common pattern, with adult education being vital for fostering inclusion, civic participation, and skill development, yet frequently receiving insufficient prioritisation and funding within national education agendas.²⁴

International Experiences and Lessons

Internationally, adult education systems vary widely in terms of institutional support and financial investment. In Denmark, for example, reductions in public funding for formal and non-formal adult education led to diminished programme delivery and increased fees for learners.²⁵ Similar constraints were evident in regions such as Asia and Latin America. In Ireland, community adult education programs encounter structural obstacles; these include small funding, policy mismatch, and lack of support for learners as well as tutors, which limit the participation and jeopardize the continuation of learning opportunities.²⁶ Nonetheless, innovation continued to emerge. Community adult education providers in Ireland took up flexible approaches, among which digital learning was a key feature, to open up access and provide low-cost opportunities for adults who had various barriers, such as lack of funding, transport and competing responsibilities.²⁷

Conversely, CLCs in India continued to struggle with chronic underfunding, inadequate infrastructure, and fragmented policy implementation.²⁸ Canada presents a compelling model of multisectoral integration, where the adult education framework aligns educational initiatives with employment, health, and community development strategies.²⁹ This form of interdepartmental collaboration enhances the accessibility, relevance, and effectiveness of adult learning provision.

²⁰ Iddah Kituyi Wanyama, "Challenges Facing the Sustainability of Adult and Continuing Education Programmes in Kenya," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, April 1, 2014, <https://doi.org/10.5901/mjss.2014.v5n5p159>.

²¹ A. Mlahagwa and P. Mushi, "Adult Education in Tanzania: Institutional Weaknesses and Policy Gaps," *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education* 26, no. 2 (2020): 238–56.

²² M. Okenwa-Ojo and A. A. Adewole, "The Role of Adult Education in Achieving Social-Economic Development in Nigeria," *Journal of African Advancement and Sustainability Studies*, May 13, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.70382/sjaass.v8i2.021>.

²³ H. Dedehouanou, "Challenges to Adult Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: Reflections from Ethiopia and Uganda," *International Review of Education* 64, no. 6 (2018): 761–82.

²⁴ Marcella Milana et al., "Adult Education and Learning: Endorsing Its Contribution to the 2030 Agenda," *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 36, no. 6 (November 2, 2017): 625–28, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2017.1405869>.

²⁵ European Commission/EPALE, "Adult Learning in Denmark – An Overview," EPALE, 2018.

²⁶ L. W. Smyth, "The Drivers and Barriers to Participation in Community Adult Education Classes: A Review of Literature and Policy" (University College Dublin, 2023).

²⁷ Smyth, "The Drivers and Barriers to Participation in Community Adult Education Classes: A Review of Literature and Policy."

²⁸ Heikkilä Pia, "India's Adult Education Facing Challenges," *ELM Magazine*, September 4, 2017, <https://elmmagazine.eu/indias-adult-education-facing-challenges/>.

²⁹ Kjell Rubenson, "Conceptualizing Participation in Adult Learning and Education: Equity Issues," in *The Palgrave International Handbook on Adult and Lifelong Education and Learning* (Springer, 2017), 337–57.

Implications for Teaching Practice

The interplay between resource availability and teaching practice is particularly evident in adult education contexts. Resource limitations constrain educators from employing interactive and learner-centred methodologies or integrating digital technologies into their teaching. Saloviita emphasises that the availability of sufficient resources is fundamental to supporting effective teaching and learning.³⁰ Guirguis and Pankowski further argue that the effective use of technological resources could foster collaboration among educators and promote innovation at centre level, thereby enhancing learner performance.³¹

Restricted access to professional development inhibits educators' ability to meet the diverse needs of adult learners and impedes the integration of novel andragogical approaches. Chisango et.al. found that the absence of professional learning communities within CLCs contributes to educator isolation and diminishes opportunities for peer support and reflective practice.³² In contrast, well-resourced environments enable the use of differentiated instruction, formative assessment techniques, and more inclusive teaching strategies.

A fundamental goal of CLCs is to equip adult learners with practical competencies, including technical and entrepreneurial skills. However, limited resources and insufficient equipment often hinder effective practical training.³³ Therefore, providing resources in CLCs should be viewed as a strategic investment to improve the quality, inclusiveness, and overall impact of adult education.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was guided by Christopher Hood's Public Management Theory, as articulated in **The Art of the State: Culture, Rhetoric, and Public Management**.³⁴ Hood's framework draws on the cultural theory developed by Mary Douglas, which identifies four distinct management styles: fatalist, egalitarian, individualist, and hierarchist. These management styles illustrate how institutional culture shapes administrative behaviour and decision-making processes. Institutional culture, administrative capacity, and resource allocation are interrelated factors that collectively shape the effectiveness of public service delivery.³⁵

Within Community Learning Centres (CLCs), the prevailing management style appears to align with a closed hierarchical model, characterised by limited autonomy in decision-making and chronic shortages of resources. This study employed Hood's theoretical framework to interpret these issues not merely as operational shortcomings but as manifestations of deeper systemic deficiencies in public sector management and governance.³⁶

The framework proved particularly useful in highlighting the disjuncture between policy rhetoric and actual educational practice. It provided a lens through which to examine how institutional culture shapes both accountability measures and the quality of service delivery in the adult education sector. Through this perspective, the study gained critical insight into the structural constraints that continued to undermine effective teaching and learning in CLCs.

³⁰ T. Saloviita, "The Role of Resources in Effective Teaching: A Review of Literature," *Educational Research Review* 15, no. 1 (2020): 22–35.

³¹ Ruth Guirguis and Jennifer Pankowski, "Potential Effects of Teaching Strategies on Students' Academic Performance under a Trump Administration," *Journal of Education and Training Studies* 5, no. 4 (March 7, 2017): 103, <https://doi.org/10.11114/jets.v5i4.2263>.

³² Grasia Chisango et al., "Teachers' Perceptions of Adopting Information and Communication Technologies in Teaching and Learning at Rural Secondary Schools in Eastern Cape, South Africa," *Africa Education Review* 17, no. 2 (2020): 1–19.

³³ M. M., Rakoma and S. Schulze, "Challenges of Curriculum Implementation in Adult Learning Centres," *Journal for New Generation Sciences* 13, no. 2 (2015): 23–40.

³⁴ C. Hood, *The Art of the State: Culture, Rhetoric, and Public Management* (London: Oxford University Press, 1998).

³⁵ C., Pollitt and G. Bouckaert, "Public Management Reform: A Comparative Analysis — New Public Management, Governance, and the Neo-Weberian State," *Public Administration Review* 83, no. 4 (2023): 657–72.

³⁶ R., Andrews and G. A. Boyne, "Exploring Governance Deficits and Public Service Delivery Failures: The Role of Institutional Capacity," *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 34, no. 1 (2024): 134–49.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design situated within the interpretivist paradigm to explore how resource limitations affect teaching and learning in selected Community Learning Centres (CLCs) in Johannesburg, South Africa. The qualitative approach enabled an in-depth understanding of participants' lived experiences and interpretations of their working environments. This design supported inductive reasoning and iterative engagement with the data, allowing the researcher to examine how institutional challenges, infrastructural constraints, and managerial practices interact to influence educational delivery in CLCs.

Study Population and Sample

The study targeted centre managers and educators working in CLCs under the Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality. A purposive sampling strategy was used to select twelve participants from three centres, comprising three centre managers and nine educators. Centre managers were required to have served in their roles for at least three consecutive years, while educators needed to have completed a minimum of one full year of teaching experience at their current centre. These criteria ensured that participants had adequate institutional knowledge and relevant experience to contribute meaningfully to the research. To maintain confidentiality, participants were identified using codes such as CM1–CM3 for centre managers and ED1–ED9 for educators.

Data Collection

The data was collected through semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation. Each participant took part in a thirty-minute semi-structured interview designed to explore issues relevant to the study's objectives. The interview questions explored themes such as resource shortages, teaching strategies, institutional management, and infrastructure challenges. Interviews were conducted outside regular instructional hours to avoid disruption and were audio-recorded with participants' consent before being transcribed verbatim. Observations were carried out during standard operating hours to complement and verify interview data. The researchers observed teaching sessions, classroom conditions, learning resources, and overall centre operations, recording detailed field notes throughout. Sixteen full-day observation sessions were conducted across the three centres, alternating between morning and afternoon visits to capture variations in activity and context. Triangulating data from both interviews and observations enhanced the trustworthiness and depth of the study findings.

Data Analysis Procedure

Data was analysed using Braun and Clarke's six-step thematic analysis method, which involved familiarising with the data, generating initial codes, identifying and reviewing themes, defining and naming them, and finally producing the report. Interview transcripts and field notes were repeatedly read to ensure a deep understanding of the data.³⁷ Codes were manually generated, grouped into categories, and refined into themes that captured recurring patterns and insights. Content analysis was also applied to observational data to identify patterns in institutional behaviour and teaching practices. The integration of thematic and content analyses ensured that the findings were coherent, credible, and reflective of both participants' perspectives and contextual realities.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance for this study was obtained from the College of Education Research Ethics Committee at the University of South Africa (UNISA). Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Written

³⁷ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide," 2021.

informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection commenced. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout, and all data were handled with strict adherence to ethical research principles to protect participants' identities and ensure the integrity of the study.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Theme 1: Ineffective Teaching and Learning Materials

Inadequate Basic Education Facilities

Participants across all three centres report a serious lack of essential teaching and learning resources, including textbooks, chalk, charts, and student workbooks. This shortage negatively affects both teaching effectiveness and learner performance.

CM 1 remarks, *“Learners copy everything from the board because we do not have enough textbooks or charts, and there is hardly any chalk. Educators find themselves rewriting the same things repeatedly.”*

Similarly, CM 3 expresses, *“Materials for both educators and learners are a significant challenge in our centre. We try to share the few resources we have, but it is never enough.”*

Educators echo these managerial concerns, elaborating on the practical effects in the classroom.

ED 1 states, *“It is awful; I will not sugarcoat it. Without resources, teaching becomes really difficult, and I believe this issue also affects learner performance because we cannot provide enough practice.”*

ED 5 shares, *“We just have to make do. There are no written materials or textbooks. I either use old newspapers or write everything on the board, which is not ideal.”*

ED 6 comments on the impact on assessment, *“Sometimes I find myself teaching without being able to give an activity because there are no paper or pens to hand out.”*

These accounts reveal a systemic lack of basic materials. Both educators and centre managers report similar struggles, highlighting the improvisational strategies they must use. This shared experience highlights institutional neglect and points to the urgent need for structured and equitable resource allocation.

Limited Access to Technology

Participants highlight a complete absence of technological integration in teaching. In the few cases where computers are available, they are outdated and used solely for administrative purposes.

CM 2 remarks, *“There are no laptops, projectors, or internet access. It feels as though we are stuck in the past. Our learners miss out on the digital world.”*

Supporting this, CM 3 states, *“Technology is just a topic we hear about in meetings. The learners here have never even typed a sentence or opened a laptop.”*

Educators express both frustration and embarrassment about the lack of ICT infrastructure. ED 2 explains, *“In our centre, learners never get to use a computer. We do not even have a printer. Everything is done by hand.”*

A strong consensus emerges that the lack of technology is not merely a logistical issue but a form of educational exclusion. Educators and managers unite in their concern that learners are being left behind in an increasingly digital society. This deficiency affects curriculum delivery, learner engagement, and future job prospects.

Theme 2: Poor Infrastructure and Learning Environments

Dilapidated Physical Facilities

Observations confirm major infrastructure problems at Centres A and C. Participants describe buildings with leaking roofs, broken windows, damaged walls, and a shortage of furniture.

CM 1 explains, *“We were promised renovations three years ago, but nothing has changed. We just keep reporting damages.”*

CM 2 adds, *“We are stuck in an old building with a roof that leaks whenever it rains. Classes have to stop because we cannot concentrate with water dripping all around us.”*

Educators confirm these accounts, sharing specific instances of disruption.

ED 3 notes, *“Sometimes I have to teach while standing because there are no chairs. Learners either sit on the floor or stay away altogether.”*

ED 6 reports, *“We lose valuable learning time when it rains. The smell and damp walls make it impossible to continue.”*

ED 8 expresses concern about hygiene: *“The toilet is either locked or filthy. It is demoralising for both learners and teachers. Some even return home during lessons.”*

Participants described very similar challenges, emphasising how the learning environment fails to meet even the most basic safety and hygiene standards. The combination of structural neglect and unfulfilled promises contributes to poor attendance, learner discomfort, and staff dissatisfaction across centres.

Theme 3: Inadequacy of Institutional and Professional Support

Lack of Professional Development

A significant concern is the limited access to ongoing training and development opportunities. Most educators feel stagnant in their professional growth, and managers acknowledge the absence of training budgets.

CM 1 admits, *“There is no budget or time for development. We are just going through the motions. Educators have to push themselves to stay motivated.”*

CM 3 notes, *“Workshops are really rare. If they happen, only one or two educators can attend because of limited time.”*

Educators voice their dissatisfaction.

ED 2 says, *“I attended just one workshop in the past seven years. That is not enough to grow or keep up with new teaching methods.”*

ED 5 adds, *“Sometimes I hear about training sessions others attend, and I am not even informed. It feels like favouritism or neglect.”*

ED 9 explains, *“I am still using the same lesson plans I created years ago. I want to improve, but there is no support for that.”*

Across all centres, educators and managers agree that the system lacks effective mechanisms for continuous professional development. This leads to frustration, outdated teaching methods, and a decline in instructional quality. The absence of support for professional growth further undermines educator morale.

Inefficient Administrative Communication and Support

Both educators and managers report frequent communication breakdowns. Important updates, inspections, and meetings are often poorly communicated or entirely missed.

CM 2 acknowledges, *“Sometimes we only hear about policy changes through WhatsApp groups from other centres.*

There is no formal communication system.” CM 3 remarks, *“We try to share information, but there are no printed memos or noticeboards. Everything is done informally.”*

Educators express similar frustrations.

ED 1 says, *“We often hear about inspections on the morning they are scheduled. We are caught off guard and then criticised.”*

ED 4 adds, *“Management feels distant. We are on our own when problems arise. There is no collaboration or shared planning.”*

ED 7 states, *“There are no meetings where we can share updates or concerns. Everyone seems to be in survival mode.”*

A recurrent pattern across all centres is the absence of structured administrative communication and support. Educators feel disconnected from management processes, while managers appear overwhelmed or unsupported by regional-level structures. This organisational fragmentation reduces accountability and coherence within the centres.

DISCUSSION

This study highlighted an ongoing and systemic crisis in the provision of adult education at CLCs in Johannesburg. The findings indicated that CLCs continued to operate under conditions of chronic material shortages, decaying infrastructure, inadequate professional development, and fragmented governance. These challenges significantly hindered educators' ability to deliver quality learning experiences and deprived adult learners of equitable access to fair educational opportunities. In doing so, the findings aligned with and expanded upon existing literature regarding the structural challenges facing adult education in South Africa.³⁸ From the perspective of Hood's Public Management Theory, these challenges reflect the dominance of a hierarchist management culture within CLCs, where centralised decision-making and limited local autonomy constrain effective teaching and learning.

Poor Teaching and Learning Facilities

The study showed that educators operated in resource-constrained settings where the availability of essential materials such as textbooks, chalk, printed resources, and teaching aids was severely limited. These limitations forced educators to improvise, which compromised both the effectiveness and consistency of their teaching. Such conditions reflected findings by Aitchison and Land, who pointed out that adult education programmes often lacked even the most basic learning resources.³⁹ The responsibility of sourcing materials frequently fell on educators themselves, a situation that was not only financially unsustainable but also professionally demoralising. These circumstances made it challenging to implement participatory and learner-centred teaching methods that are vital in adult education contexts, where learners are often presented with diverse needs and uneven educational backgrounds.⁴⁰

The absence of digital infrastructure was particularly concerning given South Africa's curricular emphasis on enhancing digital literacy. This study found that essential digital tools such as laptops, projectors, internet access, and printers were completely missing from all three centres. This situation exacerbated the existing digital divide and excluded adult learners from developing skills essential for thriving in today's economy. Baloyi observed that technology was only marginally integrated into education,⁴¹ while Cooper emphasised that information and communication technologies were crucial for facilitating relevant, future-oriented learning.⁴² The technological deprivation highlighted in this study highlighted a deeper structural failure to modernise adult education in line with twenty-first-century demands. This scarcity can be understood through Hood's framework as a result of fatalist tendencies and hierarchist rigidity, where educators feel powerless to change outcomes, and bureaucratic procedures delay resource allocation.

Poor Infrastructure and Learning Environments

The physical conditions of the CLCs examined were often substandard and, in some cases, unsafe. Issues such as leaking roofs, broken windows, inadequate sanitation, and a lack of furniture were commonly reported. These findings echoed the arguments made by Ion and Hammburda, who stated that poor infrastructure directly hampered educational delivery.⁴³ Learning in these environments is often physically uncomfortable, logistically challenging, and psychologically demotivating for both learners and educators.

³⁸ J. Aitchison, "Struggle and Compromise: A History of Adult Education Policy in South Africa 1990–2001," *Aitchison, J.* 29, no. 1 (2003): 125–78; V. McKay, "A Policy Perspective on Lifelong Learning in South Africa," *International Review of Education* 61, no.3(2015):341–60.

³⁹ Aitchison and Land, "Resource Constraints in South African Community Learning Centres: A Field Report."

⁴⁰ Timo Saloviita, "Attitudes of Teachers Towards Inclusive Education in Finland," *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research* 64, no. 2 (February 23, 2020): 270–82, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2018.1541819>.

⁴¹ Ouma Patricia Baloyi, "Professional Development of Teachers for Effective Curriculum Implementation in Selected Primary Schools in the Johannesburg North District in Gauteng Province" (University of South Africa (South Africa), 2023).

⁴² L. Cooper, "This Is Our Way of Life: Literacy Practices of Two Street Committees in Khayelitsha, Cape Town" (University of Cape Town, 2003).

⁴³ Cristina Elena Ion (Stroe) and Ramona Oana Hammburda (Bauer), "The Impact of School Infrastructure on the Performance of Pupils," *LUMEN Proceedings*, April 1, 2020, 362–67, <https://doi.org/10.18662/lumproc/gidtp2018/40>.

Poor infrastructure also reinforced perceptions of neglect. Du Plessis and Mestry argued that the state of school buildings and facilities sent symbolic messages about the value of education and the status of learners and educators.⁴⁴ In adult education, where many learners already faced marginalisation and exclusion, deteriorating facilities may have further discouraged attendance and hampered retention. Despite formal policy commitments by the Department of Higher Education and Training, a clear gap remained between stated goals and actual implementation.⁴⁵ This policy-practice gap perpetuates inequities in adult education provision, especially in historically disadvantaged communities. Educational facility conditions significantly affect student outcomes. Kassab et.al. found that factors like classroom environment influence academic performance and engagement.⁴⁶ This supports the current study's finding that infrastructure problems, alongside systemic challenges, reduce the effectiveness of CLCs. These infrastructural challenges reflect a weak hierarchist culture in which centralised authority exists but lacks the capacity for timely response, producing fatalist perceptions among educators and learners.

Inadequate Institutional and Professional Support

The lack of sustained professional development for educators was a significant concern identified in this study. Many educators had little to no access to in-service training, workshops, or opportunities to update their skills. This absence of structured support contributed to professional stagnation, limited andragogical innovation, and prevented educators from effectively addressing the evolving needs of adult learners. The literature consistently highlighted that professional development played a crucial role in teaching quality.⁴⁷ Without such opportunities, educators felt isolated and professionally vulnerable, leading to diminished morale and reduced instructional effectiveness.

To compound this issue, communication between teaching staff, centre management, and higher departmental authorities was weak. Administrative processes were often inconsistent, informal, and at times completely absent. There was a noticeable lack of coordination around curriculum changes, inspections, and planning, which led to confusion, miscommunication, and missed opportunities for improvement. This pointed to a failure in organisational culture and governance, where roles and responsibilities remained poorly defined and collaborative planning was limited.

Baatjies emphasised the importance of participatory management in adult education, advocating for inclusive decision-making that involved educators as partners rather than mere subordinates.⁴⁸ The findings of this study concluded that such participatory frameworks were absent in the CLCs investigated. The prevailing model remained hierarchical, reactive, and administratively fragmented. This scenario not only diminished accountability but also eroded trust and collegiality within centres, further hindering prospects for systemic improvement. Hood's theory explains this as a consequence of hierarchical and fragmented management that excludes staff from participatory decision-making, undermining accountability and professional growth.

⁴⁴ du Plessis and Mestry, "Teachers for Rural Schools – a Challenge for South Africa."

⁴⁵ Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), *National Policy on Community Education and Training* (DHET, 2017).

⁴⁶ Salah Eldin Kassab et al., "The Impact of the Educational Environment on Student Engagement and Academic Performance in Health Professions Education," *BMC Medical Education* 24, no. 1 (November 7, 2024): 1278, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-024-06270-9>.

⁴⁷ M. Hlatshwayo, "Precarious Pedagogy in Adult Education: The Working Conditions of CET Lecturers in South Africa," *Journal of Education* 82 (2021): 66–85.

⁴⁸ I. Baatjies, "The New Knowledge Economy and Higher Education: The Implications for Adult Education," *Adult Education and Development* 60 (2003): 197–213.

Table 1: Key Challenges and Recommended Solutions in Community Learning Centres (CLCs)

	Key Challenges	Impact on Teaching and Learning	Recommended Solution
1	Shortage of teaching and learning materials	Educators improvise, reducing teaching effectiveness and learner performance.	DHET should prioritise targeted investment and equitable distribution of teaching resources.
2	Lack of digital technologies	Excludes learners from developing digital literacy; limits curriculum delivery and engagement.	Invest in digital infrastructure and provide training for educators to integrate technology into teaching.
3	Poor physical infrastructure	Unsafe, uncomfortable learning environments; disrupted classes; lower learner attendance	Targeted investment in physical facilities; implement regular maintenance and monitoring
4	Poor sanitation and hygiene	Demoralises learners and educators; may discourage attendance	Ensure functional sanitation facilities; maintain hygiene standards in all centres
5	Limited professional development opportunities	Stagnation of teaching methods; low educator morale; reduced instructional quality	Provide structured, continuous training, workshops, and collaborative professional learning.
6	Weak administrative communication and support	Miscommunication, low accountability, and poor coordination of educational activities	Strengthen centre management practices through capacity building, clearer roles, and adherence to policy frameworks.
7	Fragmented management and low accountability	Delays in decision-making, educators feel unsupported, and operational inefficiencies	Active monitoring, evaluation, and adaptation of policies to improve oversight and support
8	Limited community and private sector engagement	Reduced resource mobilisation; low local ownership	Foster partnerships with NGOs, the private sector, and the community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the study makes the following recommendations:

The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) should prioritise targeted investment in physical infrastructure, learning materials, and digital technologies to address material shortfalls at CLCs. Regular and structured training opportunities must be provided to educators to enhance teaching quality and support andragogical innovation. Centre management practices should be strengthened through capacity-building initiatives, improved oversight, and better adherence to existing policy frameworks. Existing policies aimed at supporting CLCs must be actively implemented, monitored, and adapted to meet emerging needs in the adult education sector. Policymakers should consider engaging in partnerships with the private sector, NGOs, and community organisations to mobilise additional resources and foster local ownership of adult education initiatives.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how resource constraints affected teaching and learning in under-resourced Community Learning Centres (CLCs) in Johannesburg, South Africa. The findings highlighted persistent challenges such as the shortage of teaching materials, inadequate infrastructure, and limited professional development opportunities. These constraints compromised the quality of adult education and threatened the sustainability

of the CLC model. While CLCs hold significant potential to promote lifelong learning and social empowerment, this promise remains largely unfulfilled due to systemic neglect and insufficient institutional support. These challenges mirror global trends in adult education systems, particularly in developing countries, where resource limitations continue to hinder inclusive and equitable access to education. Although this research achieved its objectives, its geographical focus limited the generalisability of the findings. Nonetheless, the identified challenges are consistent with broader patterns in underfunded adult learning environments. Future studies should adopt a broader comparative approach, incorporate learners' voices, and assess the long-term impacts of resource interventions. Further research into public-private partnerships, community engagement, and digital innovation could offer valuable strategies for revitalising adult education in similar contexts.

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