

DEVELOPING AN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT FOR ADULT LEARNERS WITH DISABILITIES: AN EXPLORATION OF ACCOMMODATIONS AND ACCESSIBILITY IN CAPRICORN DISTRICT COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTRES

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Abstract

Inclusive education has been a sustaining value in South Africa's adult and community education sector; yet adults with disabilities seem to encounter major barriers when they try to participate effectively in Community Learning Centres especially in rural and less privileged areas. Through a qualitative approach, this research looks at the development of an inclusive classroom environment by investigating what accommodations and accessibility practices exist for adult learners with special needs in Community Learning Centres in Capricorn District, Limpopo Province. To explore to what extent institutional conditions, teacher practices, as well as classroom interactions influence students' experiences, the study is informed by the perspectives of inclusive education, as well as disability studies. Data were collected through semi structured interviews with adult learners with disabilities, adult educators and centre managers, the interviews were complemented by non-participant classroom observations and document analysis. Thematic analysis revealed four major overlapping themes: it was found that the physical and infrastructural accessibility persistently cause great inconvenience; then the teaching methods and assessment accommodations are variably adjusted; furthermore, there is a lack of readiness of educators to teach inclusively, and finally the support for disability inclusion from the institutions is limited. The results show that the implementation of inclusive education in the classroom is still far from the policy ideals of the same and often inclusive education depends more on the willingness and initiative of the individual teacher than on the support of the whole institution. The lack of resources, the absence of proper assistive instruments, and the limited professional development opportunities keep the implementation of inclusive education at a low level. Nonetheless, the examples of flexible instruction, students helping each other, and students' capability evidence the possibility of creating more inclusive adult education settings. In light of these findings, the author suggests that in order to make inclusion more effective in the Community Learning Centres it calls for a long term commitment from the institutions, regular training for educators, physical and curriculum accessibility and approaches that involve adult learners with disabilities as helpers of their education thus jointly providing national lifelong learning opportunities that are fair.

Keywords: Inclusive education; Adult learners with disabilities; Accessibility; Community Learning Centres; Capricorn District

1. Introduction

The cornerstone of South Africa's education system post-apartheid lies on the three key constitutional values of equality, human dignity, and social justice where education is regarded as the most potent tool of social transformation and redress (Republic of South Africa, 1996). Inclusive education has thus become a significant feature of policy and practice aimed at eliminating the different ways in which people were excluded historically because of their race, class, gender, language, and disability (Department of Education, 2001; Engelbrecht, 2020). Even though inclusive education has gone through significant conceptual works and has been increasingly put into practice in basic and higher education, its translation in adult and community education is still patchy and little has been done to look at the situation of adult learners with disabilities (McKay, 2016; Walton, 2018).

Adult and community education holds quite a unique and special place in the education sector of South Africa, most especially in relation to lifelong learning, social justice, and access to education post school (Baatjes & McKay, 2019). Community Learning Centres (CLCs) forming part of the Community Education and Training (CET) sector are tasked with making learning opportunities for adults flexible and accessible especially for those who were either completely without formal education or their education was severely disrupted during the apartheid era due to its inequalities, poverty, labour migration, rural marginalisation, and disability (Department of Higher

Education and Training [DHET], 2013). For many adults with disabilities, Community Learning Centres serve as critical spaces for education, skills development, and social inclusion. Nonetheless, merely having a door open to a CLC does not guarantee participation as these institutions usually are not sufficiently ready to respond to diverse learner needs (Phasha & Moichela, 2018).

Physical, structural, pedagogical, and institutional barriers continue to limit the participation of adult learners with disabilities in Community Learning Centres, despite the existence of national and international policy frameworks that promote inclusive education and reasonable accommodation (United Nations, 2006; DHET, 2018). Among other things, such barriers consist of buildings that are not friendly to disabled people, facilities or equipment for disabled people, curricula that leave out the special needs of disabled individuals and unpreparedness of educators for disability inclusive teaching (Engelbrecht et al., 2017; Walton & Osman, 2018). In a district like Capricorn in Limpopo Province, where the majority of the people live in rural areas, these problems become even more serious due to the lack of resources, limited capacity of the institutions, and unavailability of specialised support services thus resulting in educational exclusion becoming a more deeply engrained feature of the lives of disabled people (Letseka & Maile, 2008).

Most of the literature on inclusive education in South Africa has emphasized schooling and higher education settings while adult and community education being largely ignored (Ainscow, 2020; McKay, 2016). When the issue of adult education is raised it is usually disability, which is very much at the periphery of the discourse, and therefore there is a lack of solid empirical evidence on how inclusive education policies are being understood and carried out in Community Learning Centre classrooms (Walton, 2018). This gap in the literature has been preventing the creation of informed local evidence regarding accessibility and accommodation practices in adult education environments, as well as the experiences of adult learners with disabilities in terms of inclusion, exclusion, agency, and participation within these environments.

Considering the above, this paper is an attempt to contribute to the body of knowledge in both inclusive education and adult education by addressing the educational needs of adults with disabilities in the Community Learning Centres of Capricorn District in Limpopo Province. Through the study, the researcher intends to find out both the visible and hidden ways in which inclusive learning is constructed and understood by looking at the situation of adults with disabilities in relation to not only the physical environment, teaching practices and the support from the institutions but also the involvement of the local community in these selected CLCs. With the adult learners with disabilities as the main sources of information and in dialogue with adult teachers and centre managers, this study can provide a fine grained and context sensitive depiction of adult education inclusiveness. First, it seeks to shed light on the structural, pedagogical, and institutional factors that determine inclusive practice and predictions which help policy implementation, educator professional development, and institutional planning in the Community Education and training sector.

2. Theoretical Framework

Two interrelated and synergistic theories have served as the conceptual underpinnings of this research work: the social model of disability and inclusive education. Together, these theories provide a broader analytical perspective and prevent oversimplified interpretations of the educational experiences of adult learners with disabilities. They also enable the study to provide an operational definition of a "good" inclusive classroom environment which goes beyond the characteristics of that one setting and offers a look at the systemic changes necessary.

2.1 The Social Model of Disability

Essentially, this research study bases itself on the social model of disability that comes from the field of critical disability studies. It postulates that human impairment is an anomaly, but the disability is a problem created by society through the lack of understanding and lack of facilities to accommodate the impairment (Oliver, 2013; Barnes, 2012). Simply put, a person's disability does not arise from their physical or mental condition but from the environment that they live in, the society that surrounds them, and the institutions that are available or missing.

Adult and community education is a field where the social model of disability has great potential to be applied. Adults with disabilities going to Community Learning Centres are normally very disadvantaged learners whose lives, in many ways, reflect socio economic deprived situations such as poverty, rural localities, and the denial of proper education over years (Phasha & Moichela, 2018). In such cases, the situation of disability overlaps with other social and structural inequalities thus making any analysis that is solely focused on the 'defect' of the learners flawed in both reason and morality. Therefore, the social model allows the investigation to be shifted away from the learners' weaknesses to the ways in which Community Learning Centres as institutions, organise teaching, learning, assessment and support.

Throughout this research, the social model has acted as an analytic framework which helps to question the physical access point, the availability of assistive technologies, institutional policies, and the lecturers' practices in the Community Learning Centres. It also facilitates an interrogation of how the structural factors either provide opportunities or result in further limitations for participation of adult learners with disabilities. In addition, the social model offers the study a critical lens regarding accessibility, accommodation, and institutional responsibility in adult education contexts.

2. 2 Inclusive Education Theory

Inclusive education theory is the other main theoretical pillar of the study. This theory has a lot in common with the social model of disability, but it goes further in its goal to emphasize not only the removal of barriers but also the real dire need for education systems that are inclusive in their practice and way of thinking (Slee, 2018; Ainscow, 2020). Inclusive education is against segregated and compensatory methods of treatment of the disabled and it is therefore a call for a redefinition of curricula, pedagogy, assessment, and institutional cultures to a point where diversity in the classrooms is taken as a natural feature of education.

Community Learning Centres, whose role is clearly to provide access, equity, and lifelong learning opportunities within the post school education and training system, are probably best understood through the lens of inclusive education theory (DHET, 2013). The mere fact of being included cannot simply mean a person is physically present, but that person should be able to be meaningfully engaged, recognized by their peers and educators, and have their needs met (including the necessary adjustments and modifications to the learning environment physical and pedagogical). Inclusive education theory thus serves the dual function of being both the conceptual and analytical framework for investigating the connectedness of educational practice, relationships within the classroom, and the cultures of institutions to the lived experiences of adult learners with impairments.

Pedagogical accommodation, the curricular adaptability, educators' disposition towards inclusive education and institutional support are the elements of inclusion that have been analysed in the study drawing on the inclusive education theory internalisation. This provides a way to look at whether CLCs inclusion is more of a systemic embedding or just an individual teacher endeavour. Besides that, the theory also shines a light on the shared responsibility for inclusion by placing teachers, centre managers, and policymakers as the main players in the game of constructing inclusive learning environments.

2. 3 Justification for Using Two Theories Combined

The dual application of the social model of disability and inclusive education theory in a study is not a random act, but a choice well justified theoretically. Whereas the social model gives a very powerful diagnosis of the problem by challenging the mainstream, individualistic and medicalizing the idea of disability, it has been criticized for lacking the pedagogical side of things. Inclusive education theory can be seen as an attempt to overcome this deficiency by offering a set of useful concepts for thinking about the ways in which education systems can be adapted and changed to meet diversity. As a result of their complementarities, these two perspectives have the potential to offer a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of inclusion in Community Learning Centres. Where the social model of disability uncovers the structural and institutional barriers, inclusive education theory gets to the heart of classroom processes, professional practices, and institutional cultures. This holistic approach is particularly appropriate in adult education settings where the physical environment, teacher confidence and skills, policy delivery, and learner autonomy all play a role in determining the level of inclusivity.

Therefore, by combining the two approaches, the present inquiry can move beyond the portrayal of a mere descriptive story of exclusion towards a bold and full-scale critique of the extent to which inclusive classroom environments can be deliberately and systematically established within the CET sector. Hence, the theoretical framework constitutes the basis of the research in that it informs data collection strategies, guides thematic coding of the data, and provides the theoretical base for discussing the results in line with the recommendations given for the improvement of practice and policy coherence.

3. Literature Review

3. 1 Adult Education and Disability in South Africa

Historically, adult education in South Africa has been considered one of the social justice mechanisms regarded largely as a vehicle to achieve justice, equal rights and continuing education, especially for those groups that were excluded during apartheid (Baatjes & McKay, 2019; McKay, 2016). Community Learning Centres (CLCs) in the Community Education and Training (CET) sector are the main agents of this policy, providing educational opportunities to adults in a flexible manner who were traditionally shut out from the formal education system. Nevertheless, Phasha & Moichela (2018), Walton (2018) argues that the existing literature on adult learners with disabilities reveals that this group is still largely neglected in the CLCs. Disability in adult education is often

overlooked to such an extent that there is very little policy focus, resourcing is inadequate, and there is a lack of research addressing the special needs and experiences of people with disabilities in education.

Letseka and Maile (2008) and Engelbrecht et al. (2017), amongst others, argue that issues such as lack of money, being geographically cut off in rural areas, and not having had much schooling generally come together with and worsen the problem of disability facing those learners who are thus excluded from the educational system. Adult learners with disabilities suffer not only from lack of access to basic physical and material provisions but they also frequently must contend with negative attitudes and low expectations of teachers and institutions which hinder the learners' participation and performance even more (Walton & Osman, 2018). These problems make it clear that adult education studies should be placed within the overall framework of social justice that acknowledges the multiple disadvantaging factors of disability

International studies discuss adult learners with disabilities in many countries and show that these learners still have very limited social participation. That is not only in South Africa. For example, UNESCO (2020) points out that even inclusive lifelong learning systems worldwide have difficulties in changing their policies into actual practices, especially in low-resource environments. Likewise, research from Europe and Latin America reveals that adult education systems generally do not have well-organised strategies for the inclusion of people with disabilities, which has led to support for learners being fragmented and inconsistent (Ebersold & Meijer, 2019; Moria, 2020).

3. 2 Accessibility and Reasonable Accommodation

Accessibility refers to how easy it is for people to get into and use buildings, to have access to educational materials and to understand communication, to be assessed and it also considers the ways in which the institution runs (UNESCO, 2017). A reasonable accommodation as explained in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006), basically means any change or adjustment appropriate to the person's needs that a negative impact on the rights, the dignity and worth of others or on the operation and efficiency of the institution is prevented from happening. Numerous indicate that adult educational centres' environments are very different when it comes to how they can provide these accommodations. Often the educators, depending on their own personal commitment, make the decisions whereas the whole institution seems unaware or uninterested in providing the necessary support for the educators (Phasha & Moichela, 2018; Walton & Osman, 2018). A number of research articles have confirmed that adult learners with disabilities are disabled enough by the lack of proper building designs, the shortage of availability of the right kind of technology for assisting disabilities, and the absence of classroom resources that they cannot support themselves even if they want to (Engelbrecht et al., 2017; Rao et al., 2014). Despite diverse learner needs, rigid curricula and assessment practices often marginalise learners with disabilities and restrict their access to learning. For this reason, it is quite clear that there is a big and persistent gap between the ideal or theory and the actual scenario on the ground (Florian & Black Hawkins, 2011; Slee, 2018).

3. 3 Educator Preparedness and Attitudes

This group has faced many challenges, one of which has been that preparedness in the matter of disability inclusive pedagogy, as well as practices, is barely if not at all, changing, with professional education of adult education facilitators still standing apart, according to Florian and Black Hawkins (2011), Walton and Osmani (2018). Educators can only overcome systemic barriers thoroughly, if at all, when their positive attitude towards inclusion is supported by something latest and more effective (e. g., policy, increasing staff, and training), or at least habits (McKay, 2016; Phasha & Moichela, 2018). Results of empirical survey and interview of adult educators were that they rely most of the time, no matter what resources they have, on their personal experiences which leaves room to a very different levels of use of inclusive strategies in the classrooms (McKay, 2016; Phasha & Moichela, 2018). Therefore, this makes it clear how important it is to have merely professional development and education of educators in addition to mechanisms of support.

Recent research carried out in the USA and Europe has emphasized the great value of continuous professional development in the field of inclusive education. Smith & Lowrey (2020) revealed through their study that teachers who are regularly trained in inclusive teaching methods feel much more confident and can perform better in meeting the needs of a variety of learners. Similarly, a study done in Europe (Ebersold & Meijer, 2019) shows that it is the organizational backing mechanisms that matter most in supporting teachers' use of inclusive practice, not just individual teacher willingness and efforts.

3. 4 Pedagogical Strategies and Curriculum Flexibility

Inclusive education refers to a process of the transformation of the educational environment to remove barriers to learning and participation and it is the most effective strategy to ensure that all learners can access and participate in quality education (Ainscow, 2020; Slee, 2018). This means that, in particular for those with

disabilities, adult education has to use a pedagogical approach that is learner centred and also employs participatory methods; and, especially, the curriculum, on which the learning is based, should be flexible so as to be able to acknowledge and take into account the prior experience and capacity of the learner (Baatjes & McKay, 2019). UDL refers to a set of principle designed to guide the development of curricula that can meet the needs of all learners without the need for adaptations or accommodations by providing students with multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression (CAST, 2018; Rao et al., 2014). Research around this topic have found that although the adoption of UDL in CLCs is still very limited, working towards its application can largely eliminate barriers and create ways for equitable learning (McKay, 2016; Engelbrecht et al., 2017).

3. 5 Institutional and Policy Considerations

Inclusion cannot be promoted without an institutional policy framework that explicitly prioritizes it and without the non-controversial support of resource allocation for activities subverting exclusion. It is policy frameworks like the Education White Paper 6 and the DHET Strategic Policy Framework on Disability that provide the necessary policy provisions for inclusivity and reasonable accommodation in South African education (Department of Education, 2001; DHET, 2018). Nonetheless, there exists several publications which show that in remote areas and resource limited settings the practicing of an inclusion principle leaves a lot to be desired, and the gap between what is said in the policy and what is done in real life, is a wide bottomless pit (Letseka & Maile, 2008; Walton, 2018). The research suggests that poor financing, lack of reliable oversight, a serious shortage in assistive technologies and almost non-existent integration of inclusion in strategic institutional planning are among the factors that have led to this situation (Engelbrecht et al., 2017; Phasha & Moichela, 2018).

Globally, there is increasing recognition that inclusive education requires systemic reform rather than isolated interventions. According to UNESCO (2020), successful inclusion depends on coherent policy implementation, adequate funding, and robust monitoring mechanisms. Evidence from South America and Asia suggests that without institutional accountability, inclusive education policies remain largely symbolic (Moriña, 2020; Singal, 2019). These insights resonate strongly with the South African context, where policy–practice gaps remain a persistent challenge.

3. 6 Rurality and Resource Constraints

Contexts of rural education are not friendly towards inclusive adult education at all. CLCs in Limpopo are mostly housed in church halls, or rooms people have lent them, or some other such spots that have been taken over and turned into a learning facility. They are therefore almost always lacking in basic facilities like ramps, toilets for persons with disabilities and other necessary equipment for persons with impairments (DHET, 2013; Walton & Osman, 2018). These kinds of limitations are further exacerbated by the remoteness of the place and the fact that there are hardly any supply or specialist educator services at all. It is therefore no surprise at all that the vulnerable group of CLCs learners with disabilities suffers most from the systemic barriers and thus, there is a need for sound policies as well as pedagogical measures that are aware of the realities of the rural area and that are hence, able to respond suitably to them (Letseka & Maile, 2008; Phasha & Moichela, 2018).

3. 7 Synthesis and Research Gap

The most significant message that the literature conveys to us is that while the policy regime is firmly behind inclusive education, the level in adult education, and especially that of learners with disabilities in rural Community Learning Centres (CLCs), is still very far from being ideal and is rather neglected. There is a glaring lacuna in empirical research into how issues of accessibility, accommodation and teaching practices overlap and together influence the educational inclusion (Walton, 2018; Engelbrecht et al., 2017).

Besides that, there are hardly any studies that give the voice to the learners with disabilities in adult education, which in turn limits knowledge on the extent and nature of their life experiences and their capability to act in individual and collective ways during their learning process (Walton, 2018; Engelbrecht et al., 2017). This study hence situates itself in the very core of this gap as it investigates the perspectives of learners, educators, and centre managers on inclusive classroom environments and through such inquiry, it generates localised knowledge that has the capability of making a significant contribution in the areas of policy, pedagogy, and institutional practice within the CET sector. Although the existing studies have given a clue to the knowledge landscape, there is still a huge gap in contextually based research that connects views of different stakeholders in adult education, especially in rural African contexts. The present study locates the local experience within the global discourse on inclusive adult education (Chataika et al., 2021; UNESCO, 2020).

4. Research Methodology

4. 1 Research Design

For this study, a qualitative research design was chosen to provide comprehensive and locally informed insights into the experiences of adult learners with disabilities in Community Learning Centres (CLCs) within Capricorn

District. Qualitative research fits well when one wants to understand complex social phenomena like inclusion and accessibility as it helps to investigate participants views, interpretations, and actual experiences in their settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Such a method offers a level of understanding of the changes in education environment that is consistent with the acting culture and is educational and institutional environment.

4. 2 Research Site and Participants

The research was carried out in the Community Learning Centres of Capricorn District, Limpopo Province that were representative of adult education involving rural, semi urban, and resource limited areas. The choice of the sites was based on a desire to recognise the diversity of the learners with disabilities and the challenges they face in different institutional environments, as well as to extend the contextual depth of the study. These centres are typical of the wide scale of operations within the CET sector, which includes differences in facilities, availability of assistive devices, qualification of teachers, and support from the institution (DHET, 2013; Walton & Osman, 2018). The participants were chosen purposively so as to bring in depth and relevance to the study, comprising three major groups. The inclusion of persons with disabilities among the adult learners was intended to obtain direct experiences of the application of inclusion, the extent of accessibility, and the provision of accommodations in CLC classrooms of learners who vary in impairment kinds, educational levels, ages, and social circumstances. Thus, the investigation went from the diversity of learning needs and experiences. Adult educators who facilitate learning were incorporated to reveal pedagogical methods, professional development, and their views of institutional support for inclusive education. Their perspectives shed light on the issues of practical challenges and the possibilities for the implementation of inclusive education principles at adult learning centres. Centre managers were also interviewed to get their administrative and strategic views on policy implementation, resource distribution, and institutional commitment to inclusive practices. By eliciting these diverse stakeholder views, data triangulation and an extensive understanding of both structural and experiential aspects of inclusion in CLCs were facilitated (Patton, 2015). In this regard, purposive sampling was not merely a tactic of choosing participants but a strategic move to ascertain that the study grasped the subtle and locally embedded realities of adult learners with disabilities and the education systems that cater to them.

4. 3 Data Collection Methods

Various data collection methods were used to guarantee the methodological soundness and to get a ground-breaking view of learning environments that accommodate disabilities. To obtain the data, semi structured interviews were held with disabled adult learners, teachers and centre managers. This approach allowed participants to speak freely while ensuring that the discussion remained focused on accessibility, accommodation, and pedagogical practice (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The interview questions focused on the participants' histories and their insights concerning matters of inclusion, the role of the institution, and the actual working of the policies. The result is that the researcher can understand the adult education environment better because there were many layers and complexities involved. Besides interviews, the researchers made observations during the classes where the participants were taught but without the interaction with them. These observations were aimed at understanding the teaching techniques, the response of the learners to the lesson, and the general physical accessibility of the classroom. The information gotten from the observation by the eye was an important supplement to the stories that people talked about themselves by words only, thus allowing the researchers to have a rolling funnel presentation of the data from bigger to smaller the system, the classroom, and learner/policy experience (Patton, 2015). Comprehensive field note taking was the medium for recording teaching and learning methods, as well as the interactions between the different stakeholders of the educational environment and the surrounding environmental features, which, together, offer an in-depth insight into real life examples of inclusive practices. Document analysis supported the other two data sources.

The institutional records, policy documents, curricula, and other guidelines helped reveal how the policy for the inclusive education was understood, enacted, and supervised within the CLCs. Such a document analysis exposed the framework at the institutional level and policies compared to the classroom and individual experiences, giving the researcher the opportunity for a more critical evaluation of the correspondence between the formally set up frameworks to the lived realities (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All these practices, on the one hand, ensured the triangulation of the data and, on the other, increased the credibility of the study, thus providing a broad and more comprehensive angle for viewing the conceptualization and implementation of inclusive environments for adult learners with disabilities. Nonparticipant classroom observations were performed to capture real teaching methods, classroom engagements, and physical accessibility of teaching/learning spaces. Observation data served as referring context for interview data and helped the researcher have a more refined picture of the practice of inclusion (Patton, 2015). Document analysis consisted of examining institutional records, policy documents, and educational guidelines to see how the written policies and frameworks were interpreted

and implemented in the CLCs. The use of document analysis was intended to complement the primary data and to provide a framework for critically assessing the alignment of the institution with the provisions of national and international inclusive education mandates (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

4. 4 Data Analysis

The data were analysed through thematic analysis which is a method of identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher first immersed himself in the data by reading and re reading the interview transcripts, observation records, and documents, and reflection of the data helped to have a complete and clear picture of the participants experiences. When coding, the relevant parts of the text that were related to the issues of the accessibility, the use of pedagogical methods, the provision of accommodations, and the institutional support were highlighted. The codes were subsequently organised into broader categories reflecting similarities and differences across participants' experiences. These categories became the foundation for major themes through the process of reflecting and going over the data multiple times, with the researchers' full focus on ensuring that the themes not only made sense internally but also were directly relevant to the research questions. In the end, the themes accurately reflected the data patterns and kept to the participants original views and opinions. This method was effective in permitting the researcher to see the many sides, as well as the common points, in the adult learners' experiences at Community Learning Centres. The themes interpretation was facilitated by the usage of the study's theoretical framework whereby the emergent themes were associated with the social model of disability and inclusive education theory. The assembly of these theoretical frameworks to the results enabled the analysis to transcend description and offer critical insights into how the structural, pedagogical, and institutional provisions affect inclusive practices. The thorough and reflective attitude of the study has at the same time analytic depth, local rootedness, and the potential to influence policy and practice within the adult education sector. The familiarisation process started with the thorough engagement with the materials such as interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents by re reading them repeatedly to get a good grasp of the data and a first-hand understanding of the participants experiences.

The initial coding was done to locate significant passages from the data that were relevant to key points under study like accessibility, teaching methods, accommodation, institutional support, and learner experiences. After coding, the related codes were grouped into categories, thus facilitating the emergence of themes which represented both the research questions as well as the participants experiences. There was a continuous revisiting of themes, checking for consistency, coherence, and alignment with the original data. This repeating the circle of work themes helped the researcher to go deeper into the data and notice different patterns of inclusion and exclusion, understand the complexity of issues and capture the variety of experiences at different CLCs. The data interpretation process took place with the guidance of the theoretical underpinning which made it possible for the researcher to link the main themes with the social model of disability and inclusive education theory. This connection helps to avoid overly simplistic descriptions and to offer well-argued and insightful exposure of the systemic, pedagogic, and experiential aspects of inclusion in the adult education sector. Employing this all-encompassing method, the present study produced a very detailed and trustworthy understanding of the ways in which adult learners with disabilities at Capricorn District Community Learning Centres develop and experience inclusive classrooms. It entails the following steps: Familiarisation: Transcribing interviews verbatim and repeatedly reading transcripts to immerse in the data. Coding: Assigning initial codes to meaningful data segments related to accessibility, accommodation, pedagogy, institutional support, and learner experiences. Theme development: Identifying patterns and clustering codes into coherent themes that addressed the research objectives. Reviewing and refining: Checking for consistency, relevance, and interconnections among themes. Interpretation: Relating findings to the theoretical framework, literature review, and research questions to produce analytically robust and contextually grounded insights.

4. 5 Ethical Considerations

The conduct of this research followed ethical standards. Ethics clearance was obtained from the Turfloop Research Ethics Committee. Participants were given sufficient, clear information regarding the study's purpose, procedures, and voluntary participation. A written informed consent was taken from each person who took part in the study, and participants' confidentiality and anonymity were strictly ensured throughout the study. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants to conceal their identities, and data were kept confidential and in accordance with ethical norms (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Besides that, the research complied with the principles of respect, non-maleficence, and beneficence, guaranteeing that no harm was done to participants and that the findings could benefit the adult education community at large.

4. 6 Trustworthiness and Rigor

This research incorporated, in its qualitative aspect, certain features referred to as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as tools for achieving trustworthiness and rigor in research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The credibility of the findings was strengthened by the triangulation of data sources (interviews, observations, and documents). The detailed description of the context and participants facilitated the transferability of the results, while the documentation of data collection and analysis steps helped to establish both the dependability and the confirmability of the findings.

5. Results and Discussions

5.1 Structural and Physical Accessibility

It was found that adult learners with disabilities still face major physical and infrastructural barriers to their learning at Community Learning Centres (CLCs) in the Capricorn District. A small majority of the respondents even mentioned that the classrooms were not accessible because there was no ramp, the doors were too narrow, the floors were uneven and the toilets were not suitable. One participant said,

"I struggle to enter the classroom every day because there is no ramp, and I have to rely on others to help me."

Another learner mentioned,

"The toilet facilities are not designed for someone in a wheelchair, so I have to wait until I go home or go without."

Teaching staff also witnessed that such building features limited their capacity to use inclusive teaching methods in a real way. These findings are consistent with previous studies which pointed out that physically inaccessible environments are the biggest challenge for adult learners with disabilities to participate fully (Engelbrecht et al., 2017; Walton, 2018). The disability social model is very much applicable here, since these barriers demonstrate that people with disabilities have been ignored on a systemic level rather than limited individually.

5.2 Pedagogical Accommodations and Curriculum Flexibility

Teachers said that they used some informal ways to accommodate learners with disabilities, like peer support, modifying teaching materials, giving extra time for tasks, and doing different kinds of activities. However, these methods were not used systematically, and oftentimes they were based on the willingness of the individual teacher rather than on the existence of formal policies. One teacher even detailed,

"I try to give extra time and simplify instructions, but it depends on how busy the class is and how many learners I have."

Students showed their gratitude for such adaptations by saying that,

"Sometimes the teacher explains slowly and repeats instructions, which helps me understand, but not every teacher does this."

The results clearly indicate that there is a mismatch between the theory of inclusive education and its implementation on the ground whereby it is apparent that teachers recognize the wide range of learners' needs, but the system of support and the professional development structure are missing. That is why the integration of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and inclusive pedagogy is imperative if we are concerned about consistency and equality in the education of adults (Rao et al., 2014; McKay, 2016).

5.3 Educator Knowledge and Attitudes

Educators were largely favourable towards inclusive education and saw it as part of their moral and professional work obligations. Nonetheless, they confessed receiving very little training and preparation for in depth implementation of a range of inclusive strategies. One educator said,

"I want to help all learners, but I was not trained to teach learners with disabilities specifically, so I just attempt to support learners."

Students observed the same phenomena of very different teachers providing a very different quality of inclusion experiences. These results are consistent with those of studies showing that educator preparedness is a key factor in facilitating inclusion and that good teacher attitudes alone, without formal knowledge or adequate support, cannot bring about successful inclusive education (Florian & Black Hawkins, 2011; Engelbrecht et al., 2017). Professional development needs to be enhanced, and institutional frameworks made supportive if educators' positive attitude is to be turned into effective practices of inclusion.

5.4 Institutional Support and Policy Implementation

Managers of the centres believed they had difficulty implementing inclusive policies mainly due to scarce resources, lack of good assistive technologies, and weak systems of monitoring. A manager said,

"We have policies on inclusion, but there is little funding and no specialised support staff, so it is hard to make them work in practice."

Students confirmed these stories and added that the support from the institution was irregular and seemed to depend more on individual teacher initiative. The results here point to a lack of correspondence between what policies are intended to do and the way they are implemented especially in CLCs located in rural and poor resource areas. In his seminal work Slee (2018) thoroughly elucidates that, theoretically, inclusive education is a systemic responsibility and thus it cannot be left to individuals alone; it should instead be instituted via policy, training, and resource support. Ainscow (2020) further emphasises the importance of policy as a prerequisite to practice and a facilitator of change. The present research essentially found that for adult education to be truly inclusive, on the one hand, it must be enshrined in policy and, on the other hand, supported structurally and institutionally.

5.5 Synthesis and Interpretation

The results suggest that Community Learning Centres (CLCs) in Capricorn District have been successful in some respects but not others in creating an inclusive environment for adult learners with disabilities. The obstructing impact of structural barriers on consistency of pedagogical accommodations, inadequate educator preparedness, and institutional weaknesses exhibiting overall how exclusion is happening point to the harmony or disharmony of social and educational relations through which single sided or two-sided exclusion takes place, each one impeding the realization of inclusion. So, it is the voices of the participants which reveal the fact that, despite the lovely effort of an individual teacher, the whole system is limiting equity of learning experiences in an environment characterised mainly by scarcity of resources.

Applying the combined theoretical framework, the social model of disability illuminates the systemic nature of exclusion, whereas inclusive education theory provides insight into the necessary pedagogical and institutional interventions required to enhance participation. Both frameworks conceived together can bring about broad understanding which the study has extensively done and offering practical recommendations to gear up inclusion in adult education.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

This research shows that even though inclusive education in South Africa is supported by robust policy frameworks, there is still limit and inconsistency in the inculcation of these in practice within Community Learning Centres in Capricorn District hence, there remain challenges for adult learners with disabilities to access the facilities. Physical barriers such as inaccessible classrooms, inadequate sanitation facilities, and lack of assistive technologies continue to impede participation, while pedagogical accommodations, though occasionally provided by committed educators, are applied inconsistently and lack systemic support. Educators generally have positive attitudes toward inclusion, while commendable, are insufficient without formal training, structured professional development, and institutional guidance, resulting in variable experiences for learners across different centres. Centre managers further highlighted the challenges of translating inclusive policies into practice due to limited funding, insufficient monitoring, and scarce specialist support. Participants' accounts indicate that structural and institutional gaps significantly affect their learning experiences, highlighting that meaningful inclusion requires coordinated and sustained action across multiple levels of the adult education system. Employing the social model of disability and inclusive education theory as lenses helps to critically analyse these findings by showing that exclusion is both socially and institutionally constructed, and inclusion necessitates systemic change that incorporates physical accessibility, pedagogical innovation, educator preparedness, and institutional commitment. In essence, the study highlights that attaining truly inclusive adult learning environments calls for holistic, contextually sensitive strategies that acknowledge and empower adult learners with disabilities as essential stakeholders in shaping their educational journeys, thereby effectively bridging the gap between policy intention and actual practice.

6.2 Recommendations

According to the research results, the Community Learning Centres in Capricorn District should go for an all-around, multi-pronged, systemic approach towards creating inclusive adult learning environments. In this context, the priority should be to remove physical and infrastructural barriers in and around the classrooms, toilet facilities, and other community spaces, besides making available the right kinds of assistive technologies that can cater to an array of diverse learner needs. On the pedagogical front, it is highly recommended for CLCs to inculcate the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) concept to have a flexible curriculum, differentiated instruction, and diverse assessment methods that allow for different learning styles and disabilities to be accommodated consistently over the entire range of programmes. Strong emphasis should be put on enhancing professional development for teaching staff to cover such topics as inclusive pedagogy techniques, rights of people with disabilities, and how to use accommodations effectively. This must be done in the setting of ongoing support from peers and mentors as well as through participation in collaborative teacher learning communities. At the policy and governance layers,

the inclusion policies need to be translated into practice with the help of clear instructions, sufficient provision for resources, and establishment of tracking systems to guarantee the desired outcomes of inclusive education. Moreover, learners with disabilities in adult education should be considered as partners in the process of drafting, assessing, and revising inclusive practices, thus valuing their capabilities and experiential knowledge as the very core of the effort towards changing the educational settings into spaces of equal opportunity. All these recommendations put together, if implemented, would substantially help to close the circle between policy and practice, trigger the systemic change necessary, and guarantee that inclusion in adult education does not become a one-time affair or dependent on a single individual but rather an enduring practice that is both locally relevant and capable of empowering every learner, ensuring thus participation, achievement and empowerment of all students.

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