

The Effects of Adult Education Programmes on Offenders: A Case Study of Thohoyandou Correctional Centre

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ABSTRAK

Program pendidikan orang dewasa di lembaga pemasyarakatan telah diakui secara luas sebagai sarana mendasar untuk mencapai tujuan utama rehabilitasi, reintegrasi, dan pengurangan residivisme. Namun, pertanyaan mengenai seberapa efektif program-program tersebut, serta pengalaman para warga binaan dalam mengikuti pembelajaran orang dewasa di fasilitas pemasyarakatan Afrika Selatan, masih menyisakan celah informasi yang perlu diisi. Studi kasus kualitatif ini mengkaji pengaruh Program Pendidikan Orang Dewasa terhadap warga binaan di Lembaga Pemasyarakatan Thohoyandou, Provinsi Limpopo. Penelitian yang didasarkan pada Teori Modal Manusia dan Teori Rehabilitasi ini menyoroti potensi pendidikan orang dewasa dalam membebaskan individu, perannya dalam pembentukan kembali identitas, serta dampak pendidikan terhadap masa depan warga binaan. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur, analisis dokumen, dan observasi lapangan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa AEP secara signifikan meningkatkan harga diri, peluang kerja, rasa tanggung jawab sosial, dan pertumbuhan pribadi warga binaan, meskipun mereka terus menghadapi berbagai tantangan seperti keterbatasan sumber daya, tenaga pengajar yang kurang berkualifikasi, kepadatan berlebih, serta ketidakteraturan dalam pelaksanaan program. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa penerapan AEP yang dirancang dengan baik dan didanai secara memadai berperan penting dalam rehabilitasi warga binaan, penurunan tingkat residivisme, dan reintegrasi ke dalam masyarakat. Untuk meningkatkan efisiensi program, disarankan agar pihak lembaga memberikan dukungan lebih besar, alokasi dana ditambah, dan program tersebut lebih didiversifikasi.

ABSTRACT

Correctional adult education programmes have been widely acknowledged as fundamental tools that lead to the ultimate goals of rehabilitation, reintegration, and recidivism reduction. However, the question of how effective they are, and the experiences of inmates in adult learning in South African correctional facilities, is still a vacuum that needs to be filled. This qualitative case study determined the influence of Adult Education Programmes (AEPs) on offenders at Thohoyandou Correctional Centre, Limpopo Province. The study, supported by Capital Human Theory and Rehabilitation Theory, looked at the liberating potential of adult education, its function in the rewriting of the identity, and the impact of education on the future of the offenders. Data were collected through the conduction of semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and field observations. According to the results, AEPs to a large extent, uplift the offenders' self-esteem, employment opportunities, sense of social responsibility, and personal growth even though they continuously face the challenges of limited resources, inadequately qualified teaching staff, overcrowding, and irregularity in programme delivery. The research finds that the introduction of well-designed and sufficiently funded AEPs is instrumental in the offenders' rehabilitation, the decrease in the rate of recidivism, and community reintegration. To improve program efficiency, it is suggested that the institution be more supportive, that more money be allocated, and that the program be further diversified.

1. Introduction

Worldwide, adult education in jails has become one of the most potent instruments for social change, empowerment, and reintegration. Research is showing more and more that when inmates have access to education, it not only skills them with what is relevant, but also brings to them a change in behavior, psychological stability, and better results after the release of the prison (Davis et al., 2019; Vacca, 2020). The Department of Correctional Services' (DCS) in South Africa regards education as a major component of its model of rehabilitation, which is in line with the Correctional Services Act 111 of 1998 that puts emphasis on social development, human rights, and preparation for reintegration.

Thohoyandou Correctional Centre, a top-rated and one of the most diverse correctional facilities in Limpopo Province, is a perfect place to investigate how adult education programs are implemented and what are their effects. As a matter of fact, while various educational programs like Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET), vocational skills training, and Further Education, and Training (FET) are provided, the actual impact of these programs on the lives of learners is still not enough to be documented, thus, there is a shortage of evidence for policy development.

Even though there is a national mandate that education should be provided, the correctional centres are still subject to many challenges that restrain them from reaching their goals. Such problems consist of sporadic programme administration, poor facilities, lack of qualified teachers, and the double burden of security and rehabilitation (Khoabane, 2025). Under such circumstances, getting to know the experiences of incarcerated adult learners turns out to be not only a way of assessing the effectiveness of Adult Education Programmes (AEPs) but also an approach to shaping future interventions that will undoubtedly lead to less recidivism and safer communities.

The purpose of this research is to examine the impact of AEPs on offenders at Thohoyandou Correctional Centre. It is aimed at creating a deep, evidence-based insight into the influence of these programs on the personal, educational, and social tracts of the offenders as well as analyzing structural restrictions. The results of this research will have a say in the academic debates about the correctional education in South Africa and give a roadmap of practical solutions to be implemented for reforming the rehabilitation process.

Research Objectives

This study sought to investigate the effects of Adult Education Programmes on offenders at Thohoyandou Correctional Centre. Specifically, the study aimed to: examine how participation in

Adult Education Programmes influences offenders' personal development; explore the contribution of Adult Education Programmes to rehabilitation and social reintegration; identify institutional factors affecting programme implementation; and propose strategies for strengthening correctional education within South African correctional centres.

The study was guided by the following research questions: How do Adult Education Programmes influence offenders' personal development? In what ways do Adult Education Programmes contribute to rehabilitation and reintegration? What challenges affect the implementation of Adult Education Programmes at Thohoyandou Correctional Centre? What strategies can strengthen correctional education programmes?

The research on correctional education has shown that adult education programs are the main route through which prisons become rehabilitation centres, skill development hubs, and post-release reintegration facilitators. Modern research even goes further to argue that correctional education does not only equip offenders with basic and vocational skills but also changes their identity, agency, and eventually their long-term life (Davis et al, 2019; Makombe, 2025). It is worth noting that the past literature focused on literacy training and behavioural reform, however, recent publications highlight well-developed pedagogical, socio-structural and psychosocial aspects that affect offender learning outcomes (Mathebula et al, 2026). Adult Education as a vehicle for rehabilitation, in the literature, the research findings have increasingly pointed that adult education programs lead to reduction in recidivism, cognitive improvements, and initiation of prosocial behaviours. Through the meta-evaluation of structured correctional education in various states in the US, Davis et al (2013) have come to a conclusion that such participating leads to less reoffending by up to 30%. The same way Mbita (2024) confirm that rehabilitation-oriented adult learning triggers critical self-reflection thus enabling offenders to look at their past behaviors differently and also envision future socially constructive ones. This profound change potential is in line with Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory, which argues that this can lead to significant changes of the learner's identity and perspective of the world (Makombe, 2025). In South Africa, correctional education is highly dependent on national priorities around skills development and social justice. The recent assessment of Adult Education and Training (AET) programmes in South African prisons shows that the educational engagement is quite strongly linked to self-esteem enhancement, reduction of

disciplinary breaches, and preparation for reintegration improvement (Ngubane, 2023). These outcomes echo the DCS's statement that education is at the core of their rehabilitation mandate.

Even though it might have the power to transform, the literature draws attention to the difficulties that still persist in its implementation. The research findings reveal the existence of structural constraints, i.e., overcrowding of correctional facilities, poor state of infrastructure, lack of access to learning resources and qualified teachers, and the shortage of professional educators that limits the quality of education in such facilities (Dastile, 2021). The learning environment in African correctional institutions is heavily influenced by security measures, insufficiency of funds, and the priority that is given to different sectors of the institution which makes it difficult to create quality spaces for learning (Mbita, 2024). The latest empirical studies (2021-2024) reveal the existence of new obstacles that have an impact on the digital exclusion. Due to the educational reforms caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, digitalisation has accelerated all over the world, however, the inmates are still among the groups that have the least access to online learning platforms. Dlamini (2024) stresses that the digital divide in correctional centres is the main reason why the adult prisoners become less educated and at the same time the inequality among them in terms of education gets even stronger. Easton (2026) also point out that the lack of ICT access to the learners limits their chances for self-directed and blended learning, thus which in turn weakens programme effectiveness. Additionally, the recognition of pedagogical issues as being at the core of the matter has been growing. Adult inmates frequently have varying learning needs, disrupted educational backgrounds, and psychological vulnerabilities. Willis (2023) postulate that without trauma-informed teaching methodology, AET programs may not sufficiently confront issues such as anxiety, lack of motivation, and stigma, which are all barriers to learning engagement and among them, the most prevalent is probably stigma.

New literature has begun to focus on the connection between correctional education and successful reintegration. A long-term study conducted by Mahlangu (2024) shows that those offenders who have completed adult education programmes are more likely to be employed and experience less instability after their release. This is in line with the international evidence that education is a key to employability, increases one's resilience, and discourages reliance on criminal networks (Huerta et al, 2022). The study comparative of the Southern African Development

Community (SADC) regions points out that vocationally-aligned adult education programs like carpentry, agriculture, and business literacy have a big positive impact on the post-prison release return of livelihood prospects (Ngubane, 2023). The same research, however, warns that reintegration outcomes are unstable when there is a lack of interaction between correctional centres, community groups, and labor market institutions. Transformation of social identity is also instrumental in this regard. Participation in education, according to recent psychological studies, increases one's belief in one's capabilities, planning, and sense of personal dignity, among others, which together greatly lessen the chances of recidivism (Gluecker et al, 2022). In this way, adult education is more than just a means through which skills are handed down; it serves as a tool for psychosocial rehabilitation.

National research from the years 2021 to 2024 has yielded valuable insights that are very specific to South African correctional centres. Several studies have recorded progress in literacy and numeracy and, at the same time, pointed out that there are still gaps in resource provision, educator training, and the existing systems for monitoring (Dastile, 2021). Representatives of the research community, e.g., Maflika and Marongwe (2024), are of the opinion that most centres depend on teaching-materials that have been there for ages, hence the contemporary educational content is not very relevant. Recent assessments highlight the importance of up-to-date curricula that are in line with the demands of the labour market, such as digitization and entrepreneurship education (Dlamini, 2024). Besides this, support mechanisms for the time after a person's release from prison are still very underdeveloped. A concern pointed out by Mahlangu (2024) who, asserting that the lack of structured pathways for reintegration is what causes the short-term nature of the positive effects of correctional education, go even further.

To sum up, the research works agree that adult education programmes in correctional centres are the main instruments of offender rehabilitation and cannot be dispensed with. Programs lead to significant cognitive, behavioural and socio-economic changes and provide copious support for post-release reintegration. Yet, there are substantial hurdles, among them: (1) A dearth of empirical studies on program efficacy at specific local correctional centres like Thohoyandou; (2) Shallow knowledge of the real-life experiences that adult learners may have in the programs; (3) Neglected coupling of education, trauma, and identity transformation; (4) Uneven implementation of the ideas across different provinces, particularly in terms of digitization,

teacher training, and resources distribution. This research bridges these gaps through qualitative, qualitative, and context-specific study of the consequences of adult education programmes for the inmates at the Thohoyandou Correctional Centre, thereby integrating with and furthering the contemporary correctional education research literature.

Although previous studies consistently demonstrate that correctional education contributes positively to offender rehabilitation, employability and reduced recidivism, important gaps remain. Existing research is dominated by quantitative evaluations conducted in developed countries, with relatively few qualitative investigations exploring offenders' lived experiences within South African correctional centres. Furthermore, little empirical evidence exists regarding how Adult Education Programmes influence identity reconstruction, self-esteem and future aspirations within the Limpopo Province context. By focusing on Thohoyandou Correctional Centre, this study contributes context-specific evidence regarding the educational experiences of offenders and provides insights for improving rehabilitation policy and practice.

This research is supported by two complementary theoretical frameworks: First, Human Capital Theory. Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1993) argues that an expansion in education and skill areas of a person leads to his/her increased productivity, employability, and socio-economic mobility. The provision of such education in prisons becomes a part of the so-called "strategic investment" by which the offenders are equipped with the skills and the knowledge needed for legal and moral living after they are set at liberty. A number of studies reveal that the inmates who get engaged in educational programs are less likely to commit new crimes after their release and have better chances to be employed (Bozick et al., 2018). In addition, human capital growth for these incarcerated learners should involve more than just technical skills; it should also extend to the learners' cognitive, social, and behavioural aspects; for example, problem-solving, interpersonal communication, and resilience.

Second, Rehabilitation Theory. Rehabilitation Theory is mainly about the change of the offender's characters through the specially structured measures that are aimed at understanding their criminogenic needs, changing their behaviour, and helping them develop prosocial identities (Latessa et al, 2020). One of the ways that educational programs contribute to rehabilitation is by the facilitation of identity rebuilding, the promotion of the critical self-

reflection, and the provision of the opportunity to the offenders to figure out the existence of different kinds of futures for them. The theory of rehabilitation also points to the role of supportive institutional settings and at the same time stresses the absolute need for holistic programming that would provide integration of skills, counseling, and aftercare among other components. By integrating the two theories, a researcher gets a complete picture of how adult education can have an influence on the development and behavioural change of the offenders.

2. Materials and Methods

The research utilized a qualitative case study design to understand the impact of adult education programmes on offenders at the Thohoyandou Correctional Centre. A qualitative method is fitting when investigating the human side of the issue, social mechanisms, and deriving meanings in different settings. Creswell (2021) also supports this idea by saying that qualitative inquiry helps the researchers to grasp the depth, complexity, and subjectivities that are a part of real-life experiences. The study, however, instead of depending on the earlier scholars like Merriam and Tisdell, refers to the newest methodological experts who highlight the importance of ethically responsive, contextually grounded, and interpretive qualitative designs. Qualitative Case Study Justification A case study design provides an opportunity to interact with data exhaustively from a system with limits deeply - here, the AET programmes functioning in one correctional institution. Yin (2022) states that case studies are suitable when research tries to answer the questions "how" and "why" regarding the current phenomena over which the researcher has little control. This corresponds with the aim of this research, which intends to find out how adult education programmes lead to offender rehabilitation and why certain results come out in the environment of the institution of a correctional centre. The recent changes in the qualitative case study methodology signal further deep contextual immersion and layered analysis. Easton (2026), for instance, argues that the contemporary case study should integrate the institutional changes, the participant narratives, and the sociopolitical structures that govern the phenomenon, in the same manner, Fletcher et al (2022) point out that case studies in adult education need to consider the interaction of policy, pedagogy, and learner identity - a strategy implemented here. Philosophical Positioning This research comes under an interpretivist-constructivist paradigm that sees the reality as a social construct and the best way to understand it is through the meanings and interpretations of the participants.

Interpretivist researchers aim at understanding the phenomena from the perspective of those experiencing them (Schwandt, 2022). The paradigm correlates with the data collection goal of finding out how offenders perceive, assign value to, and make sense of adult education programmes in a tightly controlled environment of a correctional facility. Why Qualitative Inquiry Was Most Suitable Qualitative research's main strength is that it can bring to light detailed, nuanced, and well-rooted-in-their-settings accounts. Lately, O'Reilly and Kiyimba (2021) have pointed out that the use of qualitative methods in criminal justice settings helps uncover hitherto unexplored emotional, psychological, and identity-related aspects of incarceration. Correspondingly, Willis (2023) maintains that the investigation of prisoners' educational experiences calls for the issuance of methodologies that give priority to the voice, agency, and personal meaning- aspects not attainable through quantitative surveys. Considering that AET programmes are psychosocial processes at the core, which are motivation, resilience, identity transformation, and perceptions of reintegration, a qualitative design offers the most suitable analytical lens.

Population and Sampling

The target group was offenders enrolled in AEPs, facilitators of the programme, and education coordinators at Thohoyandou Correctional Centre from 2021 to 2025. Purposive sampling was implemented to extract such participants who had firsthand experiences in the programmes. The sample consisted of 20 offender-learners, 3 educators, and 1 education coordinator. Purposive sampling fits qualitative research because it focuses on those participants who have the richest and most relevant insights (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Data Collection Methods

The data for this research were obtained through semi-structured, in-depth interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis giving room for thorough triangulation and a deeper understanding of how adult education programmes influence offenders within the Thohoyandou Correctional Centre. Employing multiple data sources goes hand in hand with the latest qualitative research, which states that complex institutional settings—like correctional facilities—need layered data to reveal individual experiences, organisational practices, and policy enactment (O'Reilly & Kiyimba, 2021; Mathebula, 2020).

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were the main data source as they give the opportunity to the

researchers to get the deep, reflective narratives from the interviewees and to have enough structure to make sure that they cover the key themes. According to Creswell (2021) interviews are core in the studies of the lived experiences, especially in socially and emotionally sensitive environments. The interview guide was meant to uncover the offenders' view of the AET programmes, their motivation for enrolment, educational benefits perceived, challenges faced, and their thoughts on rehabilitation and reintegration. In order to ensure confidentiality and security from institutional interference, the interviews took place in secured, private rooms within the correctional education block. Each interview was around 45 to 70 minutes long, thus, following good practice for qualitative case studies where depth and participant comfort are prioritized (Fletcher et al, 2022). Such stories were instrumental in bringing out the emotional, motivational and identity-related aspects of correctional education - aspects that could not have been sufficiently brought out using structured questionnaires or a rigid interview format.

Non-Participant Observations

Non-participant observations were done in the classrooms, workshops, and common learning areas to check up on what was said in the interviews. With an observation, one can learn the setting in which teaching, learner engagement, and correctional routines happen and the interactions of these daily. Easton (2026) writes that observational data can supplement the analyses in institutional case studies by showing the behaviours, interactions, and learning conditions which the participants may not talk about directly.

Document Analysis

Document analysis was employed as a complementary data collection method to provide contextual and institutional evidence regarding the implementation of AEPs at Thohoyandou Correctional Centre. The analysis focused on official documents, including DCS education policies, AET curriculum guidelines, learner attendance registers, assessment records, programme reports, institutional progress reports, and rehabilitation policy documents. These documents provided valuable insights into the objectives, implementation processes, monitoring mechanisms, and educational outcomes of correctional education programmes.

Document analysis served two important purposes. First, it enabled the researcher to corroborate evidence obtained from interviews and non-participant observations, thereby strengthening the credibility and trustworthiness

of the findings through methodological triangulation. Second, it provided an understanding of how institutional policies and administrative practices shape the delivery of adult education within the correctional environment. According to Bowen (2009), document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing and interpreting documents to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge. Similarly, Yin (2022) argues that documentary evidence enhances case study research by providing stable, unobtrusive, and context-rich information that complements participants' accounts.

The document analysis followed a systematic process. Relevant documents were first identified and obtained with permission from correctional authorities. Each document was then read repeatedly to gain familiarity with its content before being coded according to issues related to programme implementation, learner participation, resource availability, curriculum delivery, assessment practices, rehabilitation outcomes, and institutional challenges. Emerging patterns identified in the documents were compared with evidence obtained through interviews and observations to identify areas of convergence and divergence. This iterative process enabled the researcher to develop a comprehensive understanding of how Adult Education Programmes operate within the correctional setting while reducing the potential influence of single-source bias.

The inclusion of document analysis enhanced the overall quality of the study by providing an objective institutional perspective that complemented participants' lived experiences. It also strengthened the study's credibility, dependability, and confirmability by allowing multiple sources of evidence to be integrated into the interpretation of findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Consequently, document analysis contributed significantly to developing a rich, contextualised understanding of the effects of Adult Education Programmes on offenders at Thohoyandou Correctional Centre.

Data Analysis

The data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-step thematic analysis approach. Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and read repeatedly to achieve familiarity with the data. Initial codes were generated from meaningful units of text before being organised into broader categories. Similar categories were merged into themes reflecting participants' shared experiences. Themes were reviewed against the complete dataset to ensure consistency before being defined and named.

Findings from interviews were triangulated with observation notes and documentary evidence to enhance credibility and provide a comprehensive interpretation of offenders' educational experiences.

3. Result and Discussion

Theme 1: Adult Education Programmes Promote Personal Transformation and Positive Identity Reconstruction

The findings revealed that participation in Adult Education Programmes significantly contributed to offenders' personal transformation and the reconstruction of positive identities. Participants consistently described education as a turning point that enabled them to reflect critically on their past behaviour, regain self-confidence, and develop optimism about their future. Many offender-learners indicated that acquiring literacy, numeracy and vocational competencies restored their sense of dignity and encouraged them to view themselves as productive members of society rather than offenders. One participant remarked:

"Before joining the classes, I believed my life had ended. Education reminded me that I can still become someone useful after serving my sentence." (Participant 7)

Another participant explained:

"Learning changed the way I think. I now make better decisions because education taught me to think before acting." (Participant 12)

Educators similarly observed noticeable improvements in learners' confidence, classroom participation and willingness to support one another. Classroom observations further revealed high learner engagement, respectful interactions and enthusiasm during lessons despite the restrictive correctional environment. Documentary evidence, including attendance registers, showed consistently high attendance among learners enrolled in Adult Education Programmes, reflecting sustained commitment to learning.

These findings support Rehabilitation Theory, which argues that rehabilitation involves changing offenders' attitudes, behaviours and identities through structured interventions (Latessa et al, 2020). They also corroborate Transformative Learning Theory, which suggests that adult education facilitates critical reflection leading to meaningful behavioural and cognitive transformation (Mezirow, 2018). Similar findings have been reported by Davis et al (2019), who found that correctional education enhances offenders' self-esteem, motivation and readiness for successful reintegration into society. The present study extends these findings by demonstrating that personal transformation

remains a central outcome of Adult Education Programmes within the South African correctional context.

Theme 2: Adult Education Improves Employability and Reintegration Prospects

Participants overwhelmingly believed that Adult Education Programmes increased their chances of securing employment after release. Offenders reported that obtaining educational qualifications and vocational skills enhanced their confidence to seek lawful employment and establish sustainable livelihoods. One participant stated:

"When I leave here, I want to start my own business because of the skills I have learned."
(Participant 5)

Another explained:

"Without education I would probably return to crime because I would have no opportunities."
(Participant 16)

Educators emphasised that learners frequently expressed aspirations to pursue further education at Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges or universities upon release. Programme records also indicated successful completion of several accredited learning programmes, demonstrating the institution's commitment to offender education.

These findings reinforce Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1993), which maintains that education increases individuals' productive capacities and employability. They also align with international evidence demonstrating that correctional education improves employment outcomes while reducing recidivism (Bozick et al., 2018; Davis et al., 2019). Within the South African context, the findings suggest that Adult Education Programmes represent an important investment in social and economic reintegration, although stronger partnerships with employers and post-release support agencies remain necessary.

Theme 3: Institutional Constraints Limit Programme Effectiveness

Although participants acknowledged the value of Adult Education Programmes, they identified numerous institutional barriers affecting programme implementation. The most frequently reported challenges included shortages of learning materials, inadequate classroom space, insufficient numbers of qualified educators, security-related interruptions and overcrowding. One participant observed:

"Sometimes classes are cancelled because of security operations, and that affects our learning." (Participant 9)

An educator commented:

"We are committed to teaching, but limited resources and overcrowded classrooms reduce the quality of instruction." (Educator 2)

Observational data confirmed that teaching sessions were occasionally interrupted by routine security procedures, while document analysis highlighted resource constraints affecting programme delivery.

These findings are consistent with studies by Khoabane (2025) as well as Mafilika and Marongwe (2024), who reported that inadequate resources and institutional constraints continue to undermine correctional education in South Africa. While education remains central to rehabilitation, the effectiveness of programmes depends on adequate investment in infrastructure, teaching personnel and learning resources.

Theme 4: Adult Education Encourages Positive Behaviour and Reduces the Risk of Reoffending

Participants consistently associated participation in Adult Education Programmes with improved behaviour, increased self-discipline and stronger commitment to lawful living after release. Many offenders explained that education had helped them appreciate the consequences of criminal behaviour and motivated them to pursue legitimate opportunities. One participant explained:

"Education gave me hope and something positive to focus on instead of thinking about crime." (Participant 18)

The education coordinator reported that offenders actively participating in educational activities generally displayed improved discipline, better interpersonal relationships and fewer behavioural incidents within the correctional centre. Observation data similarly indicated respectful classroom conduct and cooperative learning practices.

These findings support Rehabilitation Theory by demonstrating that educational participation contributes to behavioural change through cognitive development, personal responsibility and future orientation. They also correspond with previous research indicating that educational participation reduces institutional misconduct and contributes to lower rates of recidivism (Wilson et al., 2020). The findings therefore reinforce the strategic importance of Adult Education Programmes as a cornerstone of offender rehabilitation within South African correctional centres.

Implications of the Study

The findings of this study have important theoretical, policy, practical, and research

implications for correctional education and offender rehabilitation in South Africa. The evidence demonstrates that AEPs contribute meaningfully to offenders' personal transformation, skills development, employability, and preparation for successful reintegration into society. However, the findings also reveal institutional constraints that require strategic interventions to maximise the rehabilitative potential of correctional education.

Theoretical Implications

The study reinforces the explanatory value of Human Capital Theory and Rehabilitation Theory in understanding the role of adult education within correctional settings. The findings demonstrate that investment in offenders' education enhances not only their knowledge and vocational competencies but also their self-esteem, critical thinking, personal responsibility, and readiness for lawful participation in society. These outcomes support Human Capital Theory by illustrating that educational investment generates social and economic returns through improved employability and reduced recidivism. Similarly, the findings affirm Rehabilitation Theory by demonstrating that structured educational interventions facilitate behavioural change, identity reconstruction, and the development of prosocial values. Beyond confirming these theories, the study extends their application to the South African correctional context by showing that rehabilitation is influenced not only by educational participation but also by institutional conditions such as resource availability, educator capacity, and organisational support. Consequently, the study contributes context-specific empirical evidence to the growing body of literature on correctional education in developing countries.

Policy Implications

The findings have significant implications for correctional education policy and the implementation of rehabilitation programmes within the DCS. Although education is recognised as a cornerstone of offender rehabilitation, the study demonstrates that programme effectiveness remains constrained by shortages of qualified educators, inadequate infrastructure, insufficient learning resources, overcrowding, and security-related interruptions. Policymakers should therefore prioritise increased investment in correctional education by strengthening funding mechanisms, improving educational infrastructure, modernising learning resources, and expanding access to accredited vocational and digital skills programmes that respond to labour market demands. Furthermore, correctional education policies should strengthen collaboration

between correctional centres, TVET colleges, higher education institutions, employers, and community organisations to ensure continuity of learning and facilitate successful post-release reintegration. Strengthening monitoring and evaluation systems would also enable policymakers to assess programme effectiveness, learner progression, rehabilitation outcomes, and long-term reductions in recidivism using reliable empirical evidence.

Practical Implications

The study provides practical guidance for correctional centre managers, educators, programme coordinators, and rehabilitation practitioners responsible for delivering Adult Education Programmes. The findings suggest that creating supportive learning environments characterised by adequate teaching resources, learner-centred instructional approaches, and stable programme delivery can substantially improve educational outcomes. Correctional educators should receive ongoing professional development in adult learning principles, trauma-informed pedagogy, inclusive education, vocational instruction, and learner motivation to respond effectively to the diverse educational needs of incarcerated adults. In addition, educational programmes should be integrated with counselling, psychosocial support, career guidance, mentoring, and entrepreneurship initiatives to promote holistic rehabilitation rather than focusing exclusively on academic achievement. Institutional managers should also minimise unnecessary disruptions to teaching caused by operational routines while ensuring that educational activities remain a recognised priority within rehabilitation programmes. Such interventions would strengthen learner engagement, improve programme completion rates, and enhance offenders' preparedness for productive participation in society following their release.

Implications for Future Research

The study also identifies several areas requiring further scholarly investigation. As this research was conducted within a single correctional centre using a qualitative case study design, caution should be exercised when generalising the findings to other correctional settings. Future studies should employ longitudinal designs to examine the long-term effects of Adult Education Programmes on post-release employment, social reintegration, and recidivism reduction. Comparative studies across multiple correctional centres and provinces would provide broader insights into regional variations in programme implementation and rehabilitation outcomes. Mixed-methods research could further

quantify the impact of educational participation while preserving the rich contextual understanding provided by qualitative inquiry. Additional research should also explore the integration of digital learning technologies, entrepreneurship education, restorative justice approaches, and community-based reintegration programmes to determine how these innovations can strengthen correctional education and improve long-term rehabilitation outcomes within South Africa.

Overall, the implications of this study demonstrate that Adult Education Programmes should be recognised not merely as educational interventions but as strategic investments in offender rehabilitation, social reintegration, public safety, and national socio-economic development. Strengthening correctional education through evidence-informed policy, adequate resource allocation, institutional commitment, and collaborative partnerships has the potential to reduce recidivism, improve post-release outcomes, and contribute to safer and more inclusive communities.

4. Conclusion and Suggestions

This study investigated the effects of AEPs on offenders at Thohoyandou Correctional Centre and found that participation in these programmes contributes significantly to offender rehabilitation, personal transformation, employability, and preparation for successful community reintegration. The findings demonstrate that adult education extends beyond the acquisition of literacy and vocational skills by fostering self-esteem, critical self-reflection, hope, and a renewed sense of purpose, all of which are essential for reducing recidivism and promoting positive behavioural change. At the same time, the study identified persistent institutional barriers, including inadequate educational resources, shortages of qualified educators, overcrowding, security-related disruptions, and limited access to modern learning technologies, which constrain the effectiveness and sustainability of programme delivery. The study further confirms the relevance of Human Capital Theory and Rehabilitation Theory in explaining how educational investment enhances offenders' capabilities while supporting behavioural transformation and social reintegration. By providing qualitative evidence from a South African correctional context, this research contributes to the limited body of literature on offenders' lived educational experiences and highlights the importance of strengthening correctional education as a central component of rehabilitation policy. The study concludes that well-resourced, learner-centred and rehabilitation-oriented adult education

programmes are indispensable for achieving the Department of Correctional Services' rehabilitation mandate, reducing repeat offending, improving post-release employment prospects, and fostering safer, more inclusive communities. Future research should extend this work through longitudinal and multi-site studies to examine the long-term impact of correctional education programmes on post-release outcomes across diverse correctional centres in South Africa.

The findings of this study underscore the need for the DCS to strengthen AEPs by increasing investment in educational infrastructure, modern learning resources, and digital technologies that support quality teaching and learning within correctional centres. The DCS should recruit and retain adequately qualified adult educators while providing continuous professional development in andragogy, trauma-informed pedagogy, inclusive education, and vocational instruction to improve programme quality and learner outcomes. Correctional centres should diversify programme offerings to include accredited vocational, entrepreneurial, digital literacy, and life skills courses that are aligned with labour market demands and national skills development priorities, thereby enhancing offenders' employability after release. Educational programmes should be integrated with psychosocial support services, including counselling, mentoring, and career guidance, to address the emotional, motivational, and psychological barriers that often hinder successful learning and rehabilitation. Strong partnerships between correctional centres, TVET colleges, higher education institutions, employers, non-governmental organisations, and community-based organisations should be established to ensure continuity of education, employment opportunities, and structured reintegration support following offenders' release. Furthermore, the DCS should develop comprehensive monitoring and evaluation systems that regularly assess programme implementation, learner progression, educational outcomes, and post-release reintegration to inform evidence-based policy improvements and resource allocation.

Finally, policymakers should continue positioning correctional education as a strategic investment in public safety and social development by ensuring that rehabilitation programmes receive sustained funding and institutional support, while future research should employ longitudinal and multi-centre studies to evaluate the long-term impact of Adult Education Programmes on rehabilitation, recidivism reduction, employment, and successful community reintegration across diverse correctional settings in South Africa.

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