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INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

Competency Development and Leadership Challenges Among Community Education and Training (CET) Centre Managers in KwaZulu-Natal

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Supervisor's Authorisation

I, Dr Lynette Lulama Mbatha, the candidate's supervisor, agree to the submission of this thesis for examination.



_____

Declaration

I, **Mhlumiseni R Mbatha,** declare that

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to Maria Masinenqindini MaNguni Gumede (uMntwanomkhulu wamaNzimela). Your legacy inspires me to pursue knowledge and excellence with dedication and purpose.

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Abstract

The effectiveness of community education and training (CET) centres in KwaZulu-Natal is fundamentally reliant on the leadership and operational capacity of their centre managers. Acknowledging a perceived gap in managerial competencies, this study aimed to investigate the core competencies essential for effective performance, assess current competency levels, identify specific skill gaps, and propose strategies for a tailored competency-based training (CBT) programme within the KwaZulu-Natal CET College system. Grounded in the principles of competency-based theory, the study employed a qualitative, multi-method case study approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with CET centre managers, focus group discussions with lecturers and institutional stakeholders, and a review of relevant policy and institutional documents. The study adopted a reflexive stance, utilising my insider position to enhance depth while meticulously mitigating bias through systematic data triangulation and self-reflexive journalling. The findings establish a contextualised framework of core competencies critical for centre management, organised into strategic, operational, and relational domains. The research revealed notable skill deficits, particularly in financial resource management, community partnership facilitation, and the integration of technology for educational delivery. Furthermore, the analysis highlighted a significant disconnect between the self-perceived competence of managers and the functional skill gaps identified by institutional stakeholders. The thesis concludes by proposing an evidence-based blueprint for a CBT programme tailored to the unique socio-economic landscape of KwaZulu-Natal. This framework emphasises experiential learning, mentorship, and continuous professional development tied to observable performance outcomes. The study contributes practical recommendations for the KwaZulu-Natal CET College leadership, offering a pathway to systematically enhance managerial capacity, improve centre efficiency, and strengthen the overall mandate of CET provision in the region.

Keywords: core competencies, competency-based training (CBT), CET centre managers, KwaZulu-Natal, skill gaps, leadership, capacity development

Acronyms

ABET	Adult Basic Education and Training
AE	Adult Education
AET	Adult Education and Training
AI	Artificial Intelligence
CBT	Competency-Based Training
CET	Community Education and Training
CETC	Community Education and Training College
CLC	Community Learning Centre
CM	Centre Manager
CoP	Community of Practice
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DOC	Document
FG	Focus Group
HR	Human Resources
HRM	Human Resource Management
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
INT	Interviews
IQMS	Integrated Quality Management Systems
IT	Information Technology
KSAO	Knowledge, Skills, Attitude, and Others
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
NDP	National Development Plan
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PM	Project Management
PMDS	Performance Management Development System
PSET	Post-School Education and Training
SAPS	South African Police Services
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

Community education and training (CET) colleges are crucial for providing accessible education and vocational training tailored to meet broader economic development needs, and the effectiveness of their learning centres is paramount to their success. These centres, the operational hubs of the CET colleges, rely heavily on effective management, encompassing not only administrative duties but increasingly strategic leadership and stakeholder engagement. Centre managers (CMs), in particular, occupy a pivotal position within this dynamic framework. This study sought to investigate the specific competencies required for these managers to navigate the growing complexities of their roles. By identifying existing competency gaps and addressing leadership challenges through targeted professional development strategies, this research aims to empower centre managers to lead their institutions towards enhanced efficiency and greater impact.

This chapter establishes the foundational context for the study. It begins by outlining the research objectives within the educational landscape of KwaZulu-Natal CET colleges. The chapter then traces the evolution of these colleges, highlighting the escalating demands placed upon CMs. Following this, it details the research problem, specifically the identified discrepancy between the necessary managerial skills and the current competencies observed. The chapter will further articulate the study's purpose and significance, demonstrating its potential influence on policy development and leadership practices. Subsequently, the research aims, objectives, and guiding research questions are presented. To provide a theoretical grounding, the chapter will briefly introduce the conceptual framework underpinning the investigation before concluding with an overview of the dissertation's structure, guiding the reader through the subsequent chapters.

1.2 Background and Context of the Study

South Africa enacted the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET], 2013) to address the three fundamental issues the country is currently facing: unemployment, inequality, and poverty. The policy statement

delineates its objectives, emphasising the intent “to furnish the workforce with the necessary skills for the job market and ensure that every individual is equipped to sustain themselves and contribute valuable capabilities to an expanding economy” (DHET, 2013, p. 8). Currently, nine CET colleges are distributed across the country, playing a crucial role in actualising the policy's objectives by providing accessible education and vocational training that support the policy's broader economic development goals. Implementing the Post-School Education and Training (PSET) model necessitated the government to institute structural and operational modifications to manage the adult education sector. As part of these reforms, the White Paper on Post-School Education and Training transferred authority for Adult Education and Training (AET) to fall under the auspices of the Minister of Higher Education and Training. This transition exemplifies the changes undertaken to facilitate a more cohesive and structured management of PSET, ensuring a better alignment of AET with the national strategy for post-school education. To realise this mandate, South Africa's National Development Plan (NDP) places community colleges and Technical Vocation Education and Training (TVET) colleges at the centre of its skilling strategy. The NDP proposes that colleges should be structured to respond optimally to the demands of the labour market. It sees the CET college sector playing a significant role in providing trades and occupations to produce the localised skills that South Africa's diverse economy requires (Land & Aitchison, 2017).

The organisational framework of the CET college system includes a hierarchy consisting of college management, CMs, and lecturers. Across South Africa, CET colleges play a critical role in addressing the developmental needs of local communities. They are tasked with promoting lifelong learning and fostering community engagement in collaboration with regional and district partners. Nationally, these colleges manage approximately 1,000 CET learning centres distributed across all nine provinces. CMs are responsible for navigating the complexities of managing these centres, building strong partnerships with stakeholders, and developing innovative strategies to improve the quality and reach of adult education. This study explored the competencies required for CMs to effectively manage these community learning centres (CLCs), thereby enhancing educational outcomes.

CMs play a crucial role in achieving the goals of lifelong learning and community development set out by the CET policy. They are responsible for leading curriculum implementation, administrative duties, financial responsibilities, ensuring quality provision and maintaining partnerships with stakeholders for community building and employment

opportunities. CMs are required to address multiple challenges involving inadequate resources, high dropout rates, and not enough skilled staff. In 2015, the reform process of the CET model demonstrated a shift towards promoting community development objectives, including greater community involvement, and entrenching South Africa's goal of providing accessible adult basic education and training, and lifelong learning. The role of the CM expanded, with expectations that managers are knowledgeable, experienced, and competent in leadership, strategic planning, resource mobilisation, service delivery, social facilitation, and community engagement (Rule & Land, 2017). It is evident that the CET centres are currently struggling to cope with these demands; many managers are ill-equipped to achieve their objectives effectively (Foley, 2020). Improving their competencies can improve educational outcomes and ensure that CET centres align with the South African government's vision of national economic and social development (DHET, 2013).

1.3 Problem Statement

CET centres are important with respect to giving second-chance learning opportunities to adults and out-of-school youth in South Africa especially in the communities that have been historically marginalised. These centres are set to provide educational, vocational, and developmental programmes that advance national priorities, including skills development, social integration, and economic integration. Yet, the operational performance of CET institutions remains inconsistent, and challenges persist in their governance, leadership efficiency, compliance, and service delivery. One of the key factors is the low management capacity at the centre level, where the Centre Managers are made to head complex organisations without proper preparation, well-structured support or clear competency models. Although the international literature has demonstrated that leadership competencies have a significant effect on organisational performance, it has not provided empirical, context-specific data on the competencies required for managing a CET centre in the South African post-school education and training field. Such lack of local grounded evidence poses a very serious gap in policy making as well as leadership development in the CET system.

Due to this gap, CET Centre Managers are frequently deployed and are expected to perform leadership, administrative, financial, and human resource roles without being clearly informed about the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and personal qualities they ought to exhibit to ensure successful performance. This has led to poor accountability mechanisms, resource

waste, and a lack of staff motivation and responsiveness to learners' needs. In the absence of a proven competency framework that addresses the realities of CET settings, managerial development programs would be disjointed, generic and ill-aligned with the operational needs. As a result, the risk of worsening underperformance at CET centres is increasing, negatively affecting their mandate to increase access to quality education and training among vulnerable populations. To solve this issue, thus, would necessitate a methodical investigation of the abilities of CET Centre Managers, grounded in evidence and underpinned by Competency-Based Theory, to stimulate more efficient leadership development, institutional backing, and policy intervention.

1.4 Rationale and the Significance of the Study

The Community Education and Training (CET) industry holds a strategically significant place in the system of post-school education and training in South Africa, specifically in the context of alleviating educational exclusion, adult illiteracy and skills gap among disadvantaged groups. CET centres have the requirement to promote lifelong learning, community growth, and employability, but there are still imbalanced institutional performances across the provinces and centres. The existing body of evidence suggests that the competence of leadership and management at the institutional level is one of the main factors that determine the quality of education, the effectiveness of employees, the retention rates of learners, and the accountability of organisations in the context of adult and community education (Aitchison and Land, 2019; Foley, 2020; DHET, 2013). In spite of that, CET Centre Managers (CMs) are often nominated without a consistent planning of the administrative, financial, pedagogical, and stakeholder management tasks they have to be performing. This poses an organizational ineffectiveness within the CET system which has direct influence on service delivery and policy implementation.

The justification of this study lies in the fact that the strategic demands made of CET Centre Managers are continuously not met with the available few institutional mechanisms to enhance leadership and management skills. Although the national policy frameworks like the White Paper on Post-School Education and Training (DHET, 2013) and the subsequent CET reforms are very emphatic in the aspects of quality assurance, accountability and responsiveness to community needs, there is a lack of empirical material to inform how these three should be operationalised at centre level. Of the research that has already been

conducted, curriculum design, adult learning, and institutional issues have been addressed in the CET sector (Youngman, 2018; Rule and Land, 2017; Foley, 2020), though limited studies have empirically explored the competency profile of the Centre Manager in the light of their more expansive post-2015 roles. This is a big gap in the scholarly literature as well as the actual design of the leadership development interventions.

The relevance of the current study is in its ability to yield empirically based knowledge regarding the skills needed to succeed in the field of leadership in CET centres. Through the use of Competency-Based Theory and KSAO framework, the research gives a constructive and theoretically informed foundation on the definition of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and personal qualities that influence the performance of the Centre Manager. This is especially critical due to the evidence that the current training programs on CET managers are insufficient, generic, and lack sensitivity to the working reality of their positions (Aitchison and Land, 2019; Mbatha, 2022). The research thus helps in enhancing the conceptual and practical implications of leadership development within the CET industry.

Policy wise, the results of this research will be of support to the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) as the results will be used to create evidence which can be used to design specific training, induction and performance management systems of Centre Managers. The study allows a better correspondence between national CET policy and institutional practice by elucidating the exact areas of competency domains that determine curriculum delivery, staff management, financial governance and learner support. This further increases the ability of CET centres to fulfill their mandate of access expansion and quality training and education, and increased community engagement and outcomes of the learners.

At the institutional level, the study can be of practical use as it establishes areas of competency shortage leading to inefficiency, conflict, and lack of accountability. Colleges and provincial offices of CET may make use of the findings to create more appropriate professional development programmes, mentoring programmes, and support structures of Centre Managers. Finally, enhancing competence at the managerial level can lead to improved stability of the organisation, morale of the staff, and quality of teaching and learning in CET centres. This way, the study directly contributes to the sustainability and effectiveness of the provision of adult and community education in South Africa.

1.5 Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity in Research Practice

This study was conducted by a researcher who occupies an insider position within the Community Education and Training (CET) system in KwaZulu-Natal. At the time of the study, I served in a leadership role within the CET college sector, with responsibilities in curriculum management, programme coordination, and institutional compliance. I worked directly with Centre Managers, lecturers, and academic leadership structures to implement adult and community education programmes. This professional location provided me with sustained exposure to the operational, administrative, and human challenges that characterise CET centres, including resource constraints, curriculum delivery pressures, and the leadership demands placed on Centre Managers.

My positionality matters because it shaped both my access to the research setting and my understanding of the phenomena under investigation. As an insider, I was able to interpret managerial practices, institutional processes, and participant accounts within their real organisational context rather than as abstract concepts. This allowed me to design interview and focus group questions that were grounded in the lived realities of CET Centre Managers, such as performance management, financial compliance, learner support, and reporting systems. However, this same proximity also carried the risk that my own professional experiences and normative expectations about "good leadership" could influence how I interpreted participant responses or framed emerging themes.

To address this, I adopted a reflexive research stance throughout the study. I systematically engaged in self-reflection to examine how my background in leadership practice and my role within the CET system could shape my assumptions, interactions, and analytical decisions. A reflexive journal was maintained throughout data collection and analysis to document moments of emotional response, professional judgement, or preconception that could potentially bias interpretation. For example, when participants described managerial avoidance of conflict or poor financial control, I reflected on how my own leadership training might predispose me to judge these practices more critically.

In addition, I consciously employed strategies to minimise the influence of my positionality on the credibility of the findings. These included allowing participants to speak freely without interruption, using open-ended questioning, and ensuring that their perspectives were represented in their own words through verbatim quotations. I also triangulated interview and

focus group data with documentary evidence and institutional records to avoid relying solely on subjective interpretation. This reflexive and transparent approach enhanced the trustworthiness of the study by ensuring that the findings reflect the participants' lived experiences rather than my own professional preferences or institutional loyalties.

By explicitly acknowledging my positionality, this study strengthens its methodological integrity. Rather than claiming neutrality, it recognises that knowledge is produced through situated engagement. My insider status provided valuable contextual understanding, while reflexive practice ensured that this position was managed responsibly and ethically throughout the research process.

1.6 Aims and Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to address the competency development and leadership challenges faced by the CET CMs in KwaZulu-Natal. To achieve this, the study pursued the following research objectives:

1. To identify the core competencies required for effective management of learning centres.
2. To link current CMs' competency levels with the identified core competencies.
3. To explore training and development programmes most effective in reskilling and upskilling CMs to meet the identified competency requirements.

To guide the investigation and ensure a targeted exploration of the research objectives, the corresponding research questions were developed as follows:

1. What are the core competencies required for effective management of learning centres?
2. How do current CMs' competency levels align with the identified core competencies?
3. Which training and development programmes are most effective in reskilling and upskilling CMs to meet the identified competency requirements?

1.7 Overview of Theoretical Framework

This study explored competency-based theory as the theoretical underpinning that guided the study. Competency-based theory involves identifying and leveraging specific skills, knowledge, and attitudes and other behaviours crucial for effective performance in a particular role (Agarwal et al., 2021). It focuses on developing these competencies through targeted training and assessment, aiming to produce measurable improvements in job proficiency and organisational outcomes. This theory has been widely used for developing frameworks that detail the competencies required for leadership roles and for creating learning outcomes that are closely tied to the specific needs of the job and the organisation.

For this study, adopting the competency-based theory was justified as it served as a guideline for determining the core competencies needed by CET CMs in KwaZulu-Natal. Identifying these leadership competencies makes it possible to tailor leadership development programmes to address the unique challenges and opportunities within CET. Furthermore, by evaluating the self-perceived competency levels and identifying skill gaps among CMs, the research aims to contribute to a systematic approach to enhancing leadership capacities, thereby improving managerial effectiveness and service delivery in these centres. A detailed exploration of this theory and its application to the research questions will be provided in more detail in Chapter 3.

1.8 Overview of the Methodology

Grounded in competency-based theory, this study adopted a qualitative case study approach guided by a pragmatic worldview. This allowed me to draw on both interpretive depth (to understand lived experience) and systematic structure (to develop a practical competency framework), which are necessary for effective policy intervention in the CET sector. Simultaneously, the incorporation of a behavioural perspective facilitated the examination of observable actions and practices that exemplify these competencies in real-world settings. Data-generation techniques, including semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, were employed to elicit rich insights into participants' experiences and the manifestations of relevant competencies. Document review and analysis further contributed by providing contextual evidence of required or demonstrated competencies. Thematic analysis served as the primary strategy to identify and categorise recurring patterns related to

the articulation and application of competencies, followed by inductive analysis to uncover emergent and context-specific competencies not explicitly anticipated by existing frameworks. The research methodology is detailed in Chapter 4.

1.9 Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

The study focused on only two districts (uMgungundlovu and eThekwini Metro) out of the 11 in KwaZulu-Natal. This narrow geographical scope may not have captured the diversity of experiences and perspectives of CMs across the entire region. Each province may have its own unique context and challenges, potentially limiting the transferability of the findings. This limitation should be considered when interpreting and generalising the study's findings to the broader population.

The study focused on a limited number of participants, specifically 14 CMs and 18 lecturers from two districts in KwaZulu-Natal, and one deputy principal academic. This sample size may not represent the entire population of 300 CMs in the KwaZulu-Natal CET college. Another delimitation is that the study focused on only the current state of leadership competencies and training at CET centres, with data generation occurring over a set period. It did not consider long-term historical trends or predict future developments beyond the scope of the study's timeframe.

1.10 Definition of Terms

Community Education and Training (CET) Learning Centres

CET learning centres are the backbone of institutions at which adult education, along with vocational training, is provided as per the contexts of their communities. As explained further by Mginywa (2021), the CET learning centres are critical in the development of lifelong learning; thus, they tend to contribute to socio-economic development within local communities. Therefore, these centres cater to a wider section of the population, including the beyond school-age individuals who still wish to further their educational or vocational skills. The importance of CET centres goes beyond just academic achievement; they advocate for socio-economic mobility by equipping people and enabling them to acquire the requisite skills for survival in a dynamic job market. These CET centres, while working with other local stakeholders such as industries and community organisations, ensure that their curricula are

aligned with the local labour market and broader national development goals, thus enhancing community empowerment and economic resilience (Akintolu et al., 2022).

Competency

As a multifaceted construct, competency is concerned with the integration of all the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes, and other characteristics (KSAO) into observable behaviours for executing specific roles. It encompasses the performance of tasks and the ability to navigate challenges within one's professional realm. Accordingly, Mhlongo et al. (2019) depict competence as a combination of these attributes, which underlie actions taken as far as one's current and future professional activities are concerned. Thus, competency goes beyond fundamental vocational skills to encompass knowledge, critical-thinking skills, problem-solving abilities, or interpersonal skills, which may empower an individual to contribute meaningfully toward achieving organisational goals and development in the community. Competency now marks a shift from what a candidate has been proven to possess in terms of qualification to a real measure of holistic robustness in assessing one's capacity for given roles. This massive comprehension upon which both training and development programmes are based, is a requisite to ensure that the workforce skills fit modern dynamic economies (Billett, 2024).

Centre Manager

The CM is the overall control manager of all the CET learning centres; these managers do not merely manage the operations and activities of the learning centres. According to Akintolu et al. (2022), their role involves a wide range of activities, from educational curriculum deployment to financial management and stakeholder partnership development. Therefore, CMs are crucial in determining the future success of CET centres, since they connect policy directives at the government level with execution at the ground level of the mandate of education by the centres. Their engagement involves strategic planning and the ability to navigate complex organisational structures, directing towards alignment of the centre's objectives with broader educational and community goals. Mginywa (2021) defines persuasive and effective communication skills as one of the qualities of successful management of a CET centre since visionary leadership with administrative acumen needs to be complemented by excellent motivational skills in interacting with the educators, learners, and community partners, which is essential for creating an environment conducive to lifelong learning and development.

Reskilling

Reskilling refers to the structured process of equipping individuals with new skills to prepare them for different roles or to help them adapt to new challenges within their existing positions. As emphasised by Leow et al. (2025), reskilling is essential in today's rapidly evolving economic landscape, where technological advancements continually reshape job requirements and sectoral needs. The process is not merely about acquiring new knowledge; it also involves developing competencies that allow individuals to pivot their career paths effectively. In the context of community training centres, reskilling initiatives are designed to address skills gaps that emerge due to shifts in industry demands, economic disruptions, or technological innovations. These programmes are critical for ensuring that the workforce remains relevant and competitive, providing individuals with the tools needed to transition into emerging roles and sustain employment in changing economic contexts (Sharma, 2019).

Upskilling

Upskilling is the intentional upscaling of existing abilities for efficiency-related purposes in a job performance enhancement context. Islahi (2019) backs the idea that upskilling is essential for maintaining workforce relevance and productivity in an increasingly complicated work environment. Unlike reskilling, which prepares someone for a different role, upskilling is concerned with strengthening the existing capabilities of individuals, enabling them to function better in the same roles using increasingly sophisticated current technologies and methods of working. For CET centres, upskilling initiatives are designed to elevate the professional capabilities of their clients to maximise their contribution towards the overall gain in organisational efficiency and innovative input. This is how it raises the employee more into personal career development, and so straight into higher competitiveness for the organisation itself, simply because it constantly aligns the skills of the workforce with ever-evolving industry standards and technological advancements (Chauke, 2019).

Pragmatism or Pragmatic Worldview

Pragmatism is a philosophical stance focused on the utility and practical consequences of research findings, allowing the integration of different paradigms to address complex real-world problems.

1.11 Outline of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 – Orientation to the Study

Chapter 1 introduces the study by presenting its background, problem statement, aims and objectives within the South African post-school education context. The research was located within policies of national concern, such as the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training and the National Development Plan. It defines certain terms, describes the theoretical and methodological frameworks and discusses the importance of investigating the competencies and leadership challenges of CET CMs. It closes with a description of how the dissertation is structured, enabling the reader to approach the literature review in the next chapter.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

Chapter 2 contains a comprehensive review of the literature on community education, adult learning, and management competency development. It also investigates theoretical discussions and empirical findings from both a global and a South African perspective. The growth of CET colleges, the role of the CM and the problems of competency development and training are explored. The shortcomings of existing research concerning management capacity within CET learning centres are also pointed out. In critically synthesising the studies, this chapter thereby establishes the groundwork for the actual investigation. It also justifies the decision to use competency-based theory as a framework.

Chapter 3 – Theoretical Framework

Chapter 3 deals with competency-based theory as the principal framework of reference in the study. It tracks the historical development of the theory to describe its categories (KSAO) and illustrate them in the context of leadership for CET centre management. The chapter shows the theory's implication for the identification of key competencies in management and the design of training programmes. It considers criticisms against competency-based approaches and contextualises the theory in the educational milieu of South Africa to create a theoretical framework supporting the link between leadership performance and measurable competencies.

Chapter 4 – Research Methodology

Chapter 4 describes the methodological framework and procedures followed to carry out the study. Grounded in a pragmatic worldview, the research utilised a qualitative case study design to capture the lived reality of CET CMs in KwaZulu-Natal. The chapter describes the area of research, sampling modalities, and data-generation procedures (interview and focus groups) as well as thematic analysis techniques. It also describes the processes undertaken to ensure trustworthiness, adherence to ethical procedures, and researcher reflexivity towards the findings. This methodology shows congruity between what is meant to be investigated, the theoretical framework, and observed reality to provide credible and contextually defined outcomes.

Chapter 5 – Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion

Chapter 5 presents and interprets the empirical findings derived from the interviews, focus groups and document analysis. This chapter starts with a demographic profile of the 33 participants, made up of a deputy principal, CET CMs and lecturers. It then presents the thematic analysis, which is structured around the key competencies, leadership challenges and development needs of the participants. A rich description of participant utterances, gestures and behaviour is made to illustrate the richness of their experience. The chapter discusses how these findings are integrated with the respective literature and theoretical constructs to highlight gaps, new emerging themes and contextual contributions of the data. The chapter closes with a proposed framework of competencies for CET CMs.

Chapter 6 – Conclusions and Recommendations

Chapter 6 synthesises the summary findings of the investigation with the research questions and theoretical framework. The competencies that are required for effective CET leadership are identified. A measurement is made of how current practice fits into what are the imperatives of policy. Some strategies are proposed for implementation for effective expansion of management capacity within the CET sector. Recommendations are offered to all stakeholders—policymakers, CET college leadership, and individual CET CMs. This will eventually allow for sustainable professional development within the CET sphere. The chapter concludes with the identification of future research strategies and the contribution this study makes in enhancing leadership and competency development in South Africa's CET sector.

1.12 Chapter Summary

The chapter introduced the research study by establishing the context and background, while explaining why the investigation should focus on the competencies and leadership challenges of CET CMs in KwaZulu-Natal. The chapter explained that CMs faced growing responsibilities that exceeded their present competencies; thereby supporting the research need through professional experience as well as literature gaps. The study established its aims and objectives alongside key research questions to direct its investigation. The chapter established the critical role of effective leadership for reaching PSET system objectives, particularly in the CET sector, while stressing the need for specific training programmes to enhance management skills. The upcoming chapter will examine pertinent literature that will position the research within established theoretical and empirical frameworks, thus establishing the conceptual groundwork for the investigation.

CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

Building upon the contextual background, aims, objectives, and methodological approach outlined in Chapter 1, this chapter presents a comprehensive review of the relevant literature underpinning this study. This chapter critically examines existing literature about the competencies and leadership challenges facing managers of CET centres in South Africa. The research study establishes its theoretical and empirical basis through an examination of both international and local sources that identify essential themes and discussions in adult and community education leadership. The literature review examines the development of CET centres alongside educational policy frameworks for post-school training and the evolving responsibilities of CMs, together with essential leadership skills for successful management. This chapter investigates present training methods designed to enhance management skills and assesses their effectiveness in addressing known competency deficiencies. This review intends to map out current knowledge while pointing out both shared understandings and debated issues and to reveal literature gaps that this study seeks to fill.

2.2 Understanding the Purpose of CET

According to Aitchison and Land (2019), CET centres serve two primary purposes: empowerment and instrumental progress. The empowerment purpose is rooted in the idea that adult education facilitates personal growth through learner-centred approaches, promoting self-actualisation and perspective transformation. This aligns with transformative learning theory, which emphasises the role of education in fostering critical thinking and personal development (Mezirow, 1997). Additionally, CETs contribute to establishing and maintaining a fair and democratic social order, encouraging creativity and innovation.

The second instrumental purpose highlights the role of CETs in driving dynamic societal change. As Aitchison and Land (2019) assert, rapid technological and social changes demand specialisation of knowledge, improved communication, and efficient management, which CETs help address through specialised training and development. This instrumental function is also connected to economic growth. CETs can increase productivity and economic progress

by equipping individuals with the skills to navigate evolving labour market demands (Merriam & Brockett, 2011). Thus, CETs play a dual role in fostering individual empowerment and broader societal and economic development, reinforcing their importance in adult and community education. Therefore, effective leadership is crucial in navigating these dual mandates, ensuring CET learning centres contribute meaningfully to both individual growth and societal advancement.

Understanding the dual purposes of CETs, both in empowering individuals and driving societal and economic progress, highlights the critical role of effective leadership in these centres. This study explored how leadership development for CET CMs can enhance their ability to fulfil these transformative and instrumental functions, ensuring that CETs meet their educational and broader societal mandates.

2.3 Adult Education as a Lifelong Learning Experience

Across the globe, adult education is described as one of the core components of lifelong learning and a means to ensure that learners have the skills, knowledge, and values to survive in an ever-changing social, economic, and technological world. On an individual level, Merriam and Bierema (2014, p. 33) describe lifelong learning as essential for learning in contexts connected "to both the world inside and outside." Furthermore, as Brookfield (2018) argues, on the international stage, adult education acts as a stepping stone for social equity, helping foster the behaviour and skills adults need to cultivate individual and community development. On a more local level, Youngman (2018) describes adult education as an essential form of education in Southern Africa, where it plays a vital role in countering and providing for those communities who have fallen behind due to (among other things) colonial oppression. In the South African context, Aitchison and Land (2019) dedicate a new anthology to adult education, highlighting how these forms of education contribute to overcoming inequalities inherited from the apartheid years and provide new pathways for social and economic upliftment.

In these international, regional, and local responses, adult education emerges as an essential part of the solution to lifelong learning and continuing education. It demonstrates the value of adult education as a lifelong endeavour and the key to adapting to modern life. Adult Education is a broad field that includes basic and continuing education, vocational and

technical education, higher education, and professional development offered through formal, non-formal and informal ways. AET aims to promote lifelong learning and individual development to enable adults to adapt successfully to the changing technology, economic, social, and political climate in South Africa (Aitchison & Land, 2019). This emphasis on the crucial role of adult education in fostering lifelong learning, social equity, and personal development directly highlights the critical need for effective leadership within CET learning centres, a need this study aimed to address by exploring leadership development strategies for CMs in KwaZulu-Natal.

2.4 Adult and Community Education Policy

While governments provide policies for adult education, these policies are often shaped by immediate political priorities and directed at specific groups, such as illiterates, immigrants, or the unemployed. For instance, the United States primarily focuses on adult literacy (Aitchison & Land, 2019). The limitation of targeting specific groups is that, while it addresses short-term needs, it may overlook the necessity of supporting the broader adult education system. In South Africa, structural challenges have historically hindered adult education, including negative attitudes and practices by line managers within government departments. These barriers have obstructed the enrolment and training of subordinates in Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET). Additionally, some supervisors have noted instances where learners claim to attend AET classes but do not, undermining the credibility of such initiatives (Aitchison & Land, 2019).

Globally, many countries recognise the importance of policies that address inequalities in adult learning participation (Aitchison & Land, 2019). Effective policies must address barriers preventing adults from accessing education and training. The presence of adult education policies signals a nation's recognition of adult education's role in promoting social, cultural, and economic development. It also reflects a political commitment to allocate resources to implement strategies that support adult education (Aitchison & Land, 2019). This study explored how leadership development for CET CMs can enhance the implementation of such policies, ensuring that these centres effectively address educational and social inequalities in South Africa. Therefore, the effectiveness of these policies in achieving their intended outcomes is heavily reliant on the competent leadership and management within CET learning centres.

2.5 Centre Management in CET Colleges

CMs are integral to the success of CET colleges in South Africa, overseeing around 1,000 learning centres nationwide under the umbrella of these colleges. Their responsibilities span curriculum implementation, administrative duties, financial management, and community engagement, which are essential for achieving each centre's educational and developmental objectives (Aitchison & Land, 2019). However, managing CET centres poses challenges, such as limited resources, inadequate funding, high dropout rates, and difficulties attracting and retaining qualified staff (Mbatha, 2022). These challenges require CMs to possess various competencies, including leadership, strategic planning, resource management, communication, and stakeholder engagement skills (Aitchison & Land, 2019). The effectiveness of a CET centre is closely tied to the competencies of its managers; those lacking critical skills may face difficulties in delivering the curriculum, maintaining operational efficiency, and fostering an inclusive learning environment, ultimately affecting the centre's performance and reputation (Youngman, 2018). Thus, improving the competencies of CMs is crucial to enhancing educational outcomes, ensuring the quality of adult education, and achieving CET colleges' broader objectives. Addressing these competency gaps can significantly contribute to the sustainability and success of CET centres, aligning with their mandate to promote lifelong learning and community development (Aitchison, 2003; DHET, 2013).

2.6 Meaning of Competency

The term *competency* encompasses a multifaceted concept crucial in various fields such as healthcare, education, psychology, and business. Competency is often associated with performing effectively in a specific role or situation. It involves knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviours that enable individuals to achieve desired outcomes (Fagbenro & Olasupo, 2020; Ratnasari et al., 2019). Competency-based frameworks establish these critical attributes, providing a systematic approach incorporating various proficiency levels. This stratification is crucial as it offers an objective lens through which individuals' competencies can be measured and developed.

Core competencies for effective centre management are multifaceted, requiring managers to exhibit aptitudes that range from strategic foresight and operational knowledge to interpersonal savvy and resilience. Central to this mix is the ability to engage with diverse stakeholders, drive educational initiatives forward, and foster an inclusive learning culture. Additionally, the unique combination of leadership abilities, critical thinking skills, and an intimate understanding of the adult education landscape allow CMs to adapt to and shape the ever-evolving dynamics of their centres. Identification and assessment of these competencies involve a delicate balance between typical daily performance and the nurturing of soft skills. Competency deficiencies vary but are often observed, including through direct observation, which often results in negative responses to performance tools that aim to capture a wide berth of managerial capabilities in terms of their performance.

However, challenges arise in this assessment process, stemming from the nuanced nature of behavioural competencies and the potential for subjective interpretation. The dynamic interplay between a manager's professional and personal growth further complicates the task, necessitating rigorous and adaptive assessment methods to ensure a comprehensive competency evaluation potentially leading to difficulties in accurately identifying and addressing competency gaps.

In addition to the core competencies that involve strategic foresight, operational knowledge, and critical thinking skills, softer competencies, such as value-related and relational competencies, play a pivotal role in effective centre management. Value-related competencies reflect the manager's commitment to ethical standards, integrity, and accountability, fostering a culture of trust and excellence within the organisation. These competencies are essential in creating environments that prioritise fairness, transparency, and alignment with institutional values.

Relational competencies, on the other hand, focus on building and nurturing relationships with diverse stakeholders, including staff, learners, community members, and external partners. They encompass effective communication, empathy, conflict resolution, and team-building skills, enabling CMs to foster a collaborative and inclusive learning environment. By demonstrating relational competencies, managers can enhance engagement, drive collective goals, and create a supportive atmosphere conducive to lifelong learning and community development.

Together, these softer competencies complement technical skills and ensure that managers are well-equipped to navigate complex social and organisational dynamics, adapt to changing demands, and inspire positive change within their centres. A comprehensive assessment of these competencies, alongside traditional performance measures, is critical to developing well-rounded and capable leaders in the CET sector.

2.7 Importance of a Supportive Learning Environment and Culture

Leadership is pivotal in promoting competency development through vision-setting, resource allocation, and the embodiment of the competencies sought within CET colleges. Stoller (2021) adds that leadership development programmes should enhance emotional intelligence, team building, change management, and coaching competencies. These programmes aim to cultivate skills and behaviours crucial for CET colleges' success and employee performance. Managers facilitate this growth by designing tailored training programmes and fostering a culture that values continuous learning. They must also recognise individual potential and provide opportunities for skill enhancement, aligning development initiatives with CET college objectives to ensure that competency elevation translates into tangible improvements in service delivery and operational efficiency.

CET college policies and practices are fundamental in bolstering reskilling and upskilling initiatives within the AET spectrum. Such interventions aim to foster lifelong learning and aid adults in staying abreast of rapid technological, economic, social, and political shifts (Aitchison & Land, 2019). A comprehensive policy in this realm targets immediate educational needs such as literacy and underpins the broader system by supporting individual development and the right to learn and conduct research. In South Africa, historical challenges have impeded training opportunities due to management practices (Aitchison & Land, 2019). Addressing these requires policies that extend beyond short-term targets to embrace systemic support for adult education in the CET space, ensuring that learning transcends the classroom and becomes an integral part of the community and professional growth.

A supportive learning environment and culture are critical for enabling adult learners to thrive. Such a milieu fosters engagement and motivation, facilitating acquiring new skills. Learners are more likely to embrace the risks inherent in developing new competencies in a setting that

values inquiry, exploration, and collaboration. This culture should be ingrained within CET college practices, promoting an atmosphere where continual learning is encouraged and celebrated. The reinforcement of competency development hinges on CET colleges to support the growth of CMs' leadership competencies, thus enhancing overall professional efficacy within the sector (Aitchison & Land, 2019).

2.8 Challenges and Barriers in Competency Development at a CET College

Competency development is central to a CET college's growth, yet it faces several obstacles during implementation. Common challenges in rolling out competency-based training (CBT) programmes are manifold and require insightful approaches to address effectively. The Performance Management Development System (PMDS) is currently used in various government and public sector organisations, including educational institutions in South Africa. It is primarily utilised by line managers and human resource departments to assess, monitor, and enhance employee performance through structured evaluations and developmental feedback. The PMDS aims to align individual performance with organisational goals by setting measurable objectives, conducting regular performance appraisals, and providing development plans to address competency gaps and improve employee effectiveness. In the context of CET centres, it may involve periodic assessments of CMs' roles and competencies to identify areas for development and enhance service delivery. The existing PMDS, while intended to identify competency gaps, is perceived by some as a tool for compliance rather than an effective mechanism for pinpointing developmental needs. One significant obstacle is aligning training with real-world job demands and ensuring relevance to diverse learning styles. Additionally, concerns arise regarding the cost of training and ensuring fairness and inclusion, especially concerning age, gender, and cultural diversity (Morandini et al., 2023). Moreover, the shift from traditional apprenticeship models to competency-based curricula can pose challenges, particularly with working hour restrictions and rapid technological advancements (Walker & Shah, 2021).

Barriers to effective reskilling and upskilling include resistance to change, resource constraints, and inadequate infrastructure. Employees may resist learning new skills due to fear of job loss or discomfort with change (Agarwal et al., 2021). Resource constraints, such as limited funding for training programmes, can hinder the implementation of effective

upskilling initiatives (OECD, 2023). Moreover, inadequate infrastructure, obsolete curricula, and staffing shortages can impede reskilling efforts (Ebekozien et a., 2022).

Strategies must be devised to overcome these challenges, such as actively engaging stakeholders in the development process to promote buy-in and customise learning pathways for individual needs. Additionally, organisations can address resistance by clearly communicating the benefits of development and supporting a culture that values learning as a continuous, strategic advantage. Offering financial support or incentives for training can also help mitigate financial constraints that prevent employees or managers from engaging in competency development programmes (OECD, 2023). Moreover, creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment can help overcome resistance to change and promote a culture of continuous learning (Morandini et al., 2023). Agarwal et al. (2021) have also suggested strategies to address resource constraints, including seeking external funding sources, partnering with educational institutions or government agencies, and leveraging technology for cost-effective training delivery

2.9 Effective Reskilling and Upskilling of CMs

Drawing from the literature that highlights the critical role of reskilling and upskilling (Foley, 2020; OECD, 2023), the effective reskilling and upskilling of CMs will be essential for the successful management of CET centres, directly addressing study purpose three, which aimed to identify effective training and development programmes to meet competency requirements. Reskilling refers to providing a CM with new skills to adapt to changing roles. It aims to address and replace deficient competencies or update current competencies to meet the challenges of a new role. Upskilling, on the other hand, focuses on enhancing the current competencies of a CM to enable better performance. CBT is necessary to equip managers towards managing the institution under various stressors, such as resource constraints and community engagement (Shet et al., 2019).

These scholars refer to contemporary educational environments with limited resources and a need to work with the community to manage current educational systems effectively. Reskilling and upskilling should focus on targeted, need-based training interventions to address identified skill gaps and improve leadership effectiveness (OECD, 2023). To ensure managerial effectiveness, training to reskill or upskill CMs should not miss out on critical

practical skills for CET centres. Foley (2020) states that these include learning to think strategically to support the curriculum plan and educational effectiveness, helping managers use resources to optimise their efficiency, and community engagement and partnerships. Avoiding vagueness and focusing on what needs to be done will encourage CMs to contribute to and enhance the quality-of-service delivery of CET centres and improve the educational outcomes of CET centres, contributing more broadly to lifelong learning and community development (Mbatha, 2023).

2.10 Future Trends in Competency Development

As organisations navigate the evolving landscape of competency development, several trends are shaping the future of skills management and workforce capabilities. One key trend is the increasing focus on sustainability competencies and environmental responsibility. CMs are developing responsible management competencies by interacting with CET college's capabilities to drive ecological sustainability initiatives (Dzhengiz & Niesten, 2019). This trend reflects a growing emphasis on integrating sustainability principles into competency frameworks to address global challenges.

Entrepreneurial orientation is another significant trend influencing competency development. Organisations recognise the importance of fostering competencies such as creativity, proactiveness, and autonomy among entrepreneurs to enhance micro-enterprise performance and drive socio-economic development (Mamun et al., 2018). This trend highlights the critical role of entrepreneurial competencies in driving innovation and business success.

Integrating artificial intelligence (AI) in skills management is a trend that is reshaping competency development practice. AI-supported systems facilitate the systematic management of competencies and skills within businesses and organisations (Meier & Seufert, 2022). This trend underscores the potential of technology to enhance skills development processes and optimise workforce capabilities.

These emerging trends in competency development, ranging from sustainability and entrepreneurial orientation to AI integration, underscore the evolving demands placed on organisational leaders, including CET CMs. As this study focused on leadership development for CET CMs, understanding these trends became critical for equipping managers with the

skills needed to navigate the complexities of modern education management. In particular, integrating sustainability and entrepreneurial competencies aligns with the broader role of CET centres in fostering socio-economic development and environmental responsibility. Additionally, the growing use of AI in skills management highlights the importance of adopting innovative technologies to optimise educational delivery, such as online and blended learning, which this study explored within the context of CET leadership development in KwaZulu-Natal.

2.11 Competency Based Training and Centre Managers

The practical implementation of CBT for CMs is a critical strategy for developing their leadership skills and sustaining CET colleges in line with the country's goals of community development and lifelong learning. This approach supports adult education (AE) to equip the workforce that leads the country socially and economically. The term *critical graduating gateways* refers to essential milestones or pivotal processes that facilitate and enable the development of leadership skills necessary for effective performance. In this context, it means that CBT serves as a crucial phase or step that CMs must complete to build and enhance their leadership capabilities, thereby ensuring they can lead CET colleges effectively in alignment with national goals of community development and lifelong learning.

This study aimed to explore the competencies of CMs and help them develop the skills required to lead CET centres through a progressive approach to curriculum delivery, effective community engagement, and better adult education outcomes. CBT is a recognised coaching strategy that focuses on developing specific, measurable competencies required for the effective performance of CMs, such as leadership, resource management, communication, and community partnership skills (Shet et al., 2019). Foley (2020) emphasises that CBT ensures that training programmes are directly aligned with the defined roles in an organisation and meet the expected requirements, skills, and competencies of educators, thereby helping the CMs tackle the day-to-day challenges of CET centres, such as limited budgets, high dropout rates, reaching out, and engaging with communities. This research is essential as the current gap between the delineated CET role and the identified competencies, as well as the training programmes available to CMs as highlighted in some of the previous studies (Mbatha, 2023; Shet et al., 2019) suggests that there are evident shortcomings in the induction and upskilling protocols for CMs, which need to be addressed. This research therefore aimed to

identify the competencies required to support CMs in appointment to their roles, leading to the development of more competent and effective CET CMs across the country, ultimately improving the outcomes of adult education, which is one of the critical goals of the current government in addressing the socio-economic development of the country.

CBT is an essential approach for enhancing the skills and capabilities of CMs in CET colleges. CBT focuses on developing competencies crucial for effective management, such as leadership, strategic planning, resource management, and communication skills (Shet et al., 2019). By aligning training programmes with the competencies required for the role, CBT ensures that CMs can meet their diverse challenges, including limited resources, high dropout rates, and community engagement (Morandini et al., 2023).

The implementation of CBT in CET colleges offers several advantages. It provides a structured framework for assessing and developing CMs' skills, promoting continuous professional development, and ensuring alignment with organisational goals (Meier & Seufert, 2022). However, challenges such as resistance to change, resource constraints, and limited access to tailored training programmes can hinder its effectiveness (Agarwal et al., 2021). Addressing these barriers through targeted interventions, such as incentivising participation and integrating technology, is critical for maximising the impact of CBT on CM performance (OECD, 2023). Consequently, enhancing the competencies of CMs through CBT is vital for achieving the broader objectives of CET colleges, including quality education delivery and lifelong learning promotion (Dzhengiz & Niesten, 2019).

2.12 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the literature review has meticulously examined the landscape of CET learning centres, with a specific focus on the competencies demanded of their managers and the multifaceted leadership challenges they encounter. The review illuminated the dual purpose of CETs in fostering both individual empowerment and instrumental societal advancement within the broader context of lifelong learning and socio-economic development. It traced the evolving responsibilities of CET CMs and underscored the potential of CBT as a crucial strategy for addressing identified skill gaps within South Africa's unique educational policy framework. Furthermore, the discussion highlighted the inherent challenges in effectively developing these competencies and explored future leadership expectations for the sector,

including the growing importance of sustainability, entrepreneurial orientation, and the integration of AI-driven skills management. Ultimately, the reviewed literature has revealed existing practice and research deficiencies, particularly concerning targeted leadership development programmes tailored to the specific contextual demands of CET centre management. This underscores the urgent and critical need for developing competent, adaptable, and forward-thinking leaders within this vital sector to effectively navigate its complexities and fulfil its crucial mandate in promoting lifelong learning and community development. The subsequent chapter presents the theoretical framework underpinning this study, detailing its influence on the research design and the subsequent analysis of the collected data.

CHAPTER 3
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 provided a comprehensive review of the existing literature concerning the competencies and leadership challenges within CET learning centres, particularly in the South African context. Building upon this foundation, the present chapter introduces the theoretical lens through which the analysis of these issues will be conducted. This chapter will articulate the core tenets of this theory, trace its evolution, and illustrate its applicability across diverse sectors, including education, healthcare, and business. By examining the fundamental knowledge, attributes, essential behaviours, and skills emphasised by competency-based theory, this chapter will establish a structured framework for understanding the complex demands placed upon CET CMs in KwaZulu-Natal. Furthermore, it will critically evaluate the theory's limitations before concluding with a clear justification for its appropriateness as the guiding perspective for this research. Ultimately, this theoretical foundation will provide a systematic approach for evaluating managerial and leadership competencies, informing potential training initiatives, and aiming to enhance leadership effectiveness within CET settings.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

Competency-based theory provides a particularly robust lens through which to understand the multifaceted roles and responsibilities of CET CMs. Competency-based theory involves identifying and leveraging specific skills, knowledge, and behaviours crucial for effective performance in a particular role (Agarwal et al., 2021). It focuses on developing these competencies through targeted training and assessment, aiming to produce measurable improvements in job proficiency and organisational outcomes.

Competency-based frameworks' historical development and evolution have been shaped significantly over various eras, reflecting changing organisational needs and understanding of employee performance. In the 1950s and 1960s, traditional models focused on job descriptions and employee traits, but this shifted due to changing workforce dynamics and organisational structures. By the 1970s, McClelland (1973) pioneered the shift towards

competency-based approaches, arguing that specific competencies were more predictive of success than traditional IQ tests. This shift highlighted the importance of identifying and cultivating distinct skills and attributes for job performance.

As companies faced global competition in the 1980s and 1990s, scholars like Lawler (1994) emphasised the importance of developing competencies aligned with strategic business objectives. During these decades, the focus expanded to include individual competencies and how they are integrated into teams and organisational capabilities. This emphasis on strategic alignment is particularly relevant for CET CMs who must navigate complex educational policies and community needs.

In the 2000s, there was further expansion of competency-based theory into various sectors, such as healthcare and education, with applications focused on practical skill development and decision-making. Leadership competencies became a focal point, influencing commitment to organisational change and effectiveness. For instance, Ten Brink et al. (2004) discussed teaching management accounting using a competencies-based approach, focusing on real-world problem-solving and skill development. This application demonstrates how competencies can be integrated into educational programmes to enhance practical skills and decision-making abilities. Duchessi and Chengalur-Smith (2008) further elaborate on the distinction between competencies and capabilities, emphasising competencies as specific activities that drive business performance.

More recently, from 2010 to the present, competency-based approaches have been consolidated as integral to employee performance assessments, training programmes, and leadership development initiatives, with an increasing emphasis on continuous learning and adaptability in rapidly changing workplace environments. Yuet (2017) further explores the relationship between leadership competencies and commitment to change, emphasising the importance of integrating various leadership theories to enhance organisational effectiveness. As highlighted by Pan et al. (2022), the theory has expanded to encompass the study of leadership behaviour effectiveness, mainly through the lens of leadership member exchange theory, which has become a key area of research in management psychology. This study aligned with this contemporary view, recognising the dynamic nature of leadership roles and the importance of a comprehensive set of competencies that can evolve to meet future challenges.

3.2.1 Competency-Based Theory Categories and Tenets

The main argument of competency-based theory is that individuals are most effective when they possess a comprehensive set of competencies that align with their job role's demands (Chappell et al., 2020; Shet et al., 2019; Škrinjarić, 2022). These competencies are often grouped into several broad categories. Knowledge refers to an area's theoretical or practical understanding (Aksoy & Algawiaz, 2014; An et al., 2013). This might include understanding the specific curriculum frameworks mandated by the DHET, awareness of local community needs, and knowledge of administrative processes in the context of CET CMs.

Skills are the ability to carry out tasks with know-how (Ghani & Suryani, 2020). They can be developed through practice, including developing strategic plans for community outreach and enrolment, communication, and conflict resolution. For CET CMs, this includes crafting educational strategies, liaising with community stakeholders, and managing centre operations smoothly. Abilities are the physical or mental capacities to perform tasks (Gibson, 2012). Abilities may include the capability to inspire and motivate others, as well as to synthesise complex information rapidly. CET CMs need the ability to inspire and motivate staff, synthesise educational data, and respond to community needs swiftly.

Personal characteristics are inherent traits such as integrity, reliability, and resilience, shaping how CET CMs face challenges and engage with staff and the community. These characteristics are critical as they influence how individuals confront challenges and interact with others. Behaviours are the observable actions through which individuals interact with their environment, tasks, and others (Brown, 2022; Henriques & Michalski, 2020). They often reflect underlying competencies and can include leadership styles, responses to stress, and approaches to team engagement. CET CMs' behaviours mayt include fostering a collaborative culture and leading by example.

When these elements align with the job demands, a synergistic effect can occur, enhancing job satisfaction, work quality, and productivity. The competency-based theory maintains that performance is not solely based on knowledge and skills but is a complex interplay of a broader range of attributes (Chang, 2022; Lu & Teng et al., 2022). By focusing on all these elements, CET colleges can develop comprehensive competency programmes or partner with

institutions to support designing programmes that accentuate strengths, address weaknesses, and ultimately drive CET colleges towards success.

In addition to the above categories, there are fundamental tenets essential for understanding and applying competency-based theory effectively:

- Measurable competencies provide specific, evaluable benchmarks for job performance. For CET CMs, this could involve quantifiable targets for student retention rates, community engagement activities, or successful grant applications.
- Observable behaviours representing competency mastery help identify where managers excel or need improvement. Behavioural indicators will guide the CET managers in KwaZulu-Natal in modelling effective leadership practices.
- Recognising competencies essential for roles ensures that CET CMs acquire skills directly relevant to their unique challenges and responsibilities.
- Targeted development and training are keys to enhancing competencies. This research explored extensive training methods suited to the professional growth of CET CMs.
- Encouraging continuous self-improvement ensures that CMs remain effective in changing environments, reflecting the dynamism of leadership roles in the study's context.

These tenets were essential to the study as they provided a clear and structured foundation for analysing and enhancing leadership development among CET CMs in KwaZulu-Natal. Within the framework of leadership development, competency-based theory is particularly pertinent. Modern organisations, particularly educational institutions like CET colleges, require leaders who not only have low-level expertise but also interpersonal and strategic competencies to manage and lead effectively (Cantarino & de Araujo, 2022; Olea, 2022; Suyunovich & Shakhriyorovich, 2022). This theory has been widely used for developing frameworks that detail the competencies required for leadership roles and for creating learning outcomes that are closely tied to the specific needs of the job and the organisation.

For this study, adopting the competency-based theory was justified as it served as a guideline for determining the core competencies needed by CET CMs in KwaZulu-Natal. Identifying these competencies makes it possible to tailor development programmes to address the unique

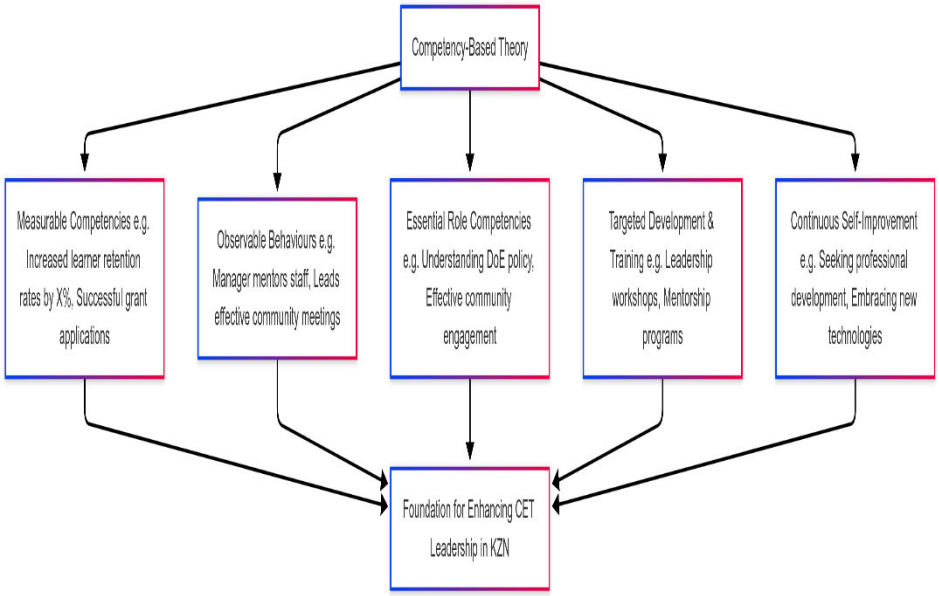
challenges and opportunities within CET. Furthermore, by evaluating the self-perceived competency levels and identifying skill gaps among CMs, the research aimed to contribute to a systematic approach to enhancing leadership capacity, thereby improving managerial effectiveness and service delivery in these centres.

Adopting competency-based theory was particularly justified given the literature review's identification of a lack of clarity on the specific competencies required for effective management in the unique context of South African CET learning centres. This framework provided a structured approach to define and address these gaps by breaking down the complex role of a CM into measurable and observable competencies, allowing for targeted investigation and development.

To further illustrate the guiding principles of competency-based theory in the context of this study, Figure 1 presents a diagram outlining its key tenets and providing examples relevant to CET CMs in KwaZulu-Natal.

Figure 1

Key Tenets of Competency-Based Theory



3.2.2 Operationalisation of Competency-Based Theory for this Study

Building upon the foundational tenets and categories of competency-based theory outlined above, this section details how this theoretical framework was specifically applied to investigate the competency development and leadership challenges faced by CET CMs in KwaZulu-Natal. This operationalisation provides a clear link between the abstract concepts of the theory and the concrete focus of this research.

3.2.2.1 Identification of Key Competency Domains for CET CMs

Drawing from the literature review in Chapter 2, which highlighted the multifaceted responsibilities and unique challenges within CET learning centres in South Africa, this study focused on the following key competency domains for CET CMs:

Strategic leadership: This domain encompasses the ability to develop and articulate a clear vision for the CET centre, align its activities with broader educational policies and community needs, and engage in effective strategic planning to achieve the centre's objectives (Aitchison

& Land, 2019; Mbatha, 2022). This aligns with the theoretical category of Skills (strategic planning) and Abilities (synthesising information).

Operational management: This domain focuses on the effective day-to-day management of the CET centre, including resource allocation (financial, human, and material), curriculum implementation oversight, administrative efficiency, and ensuring a conducive learning environment (Aitchison & Land, 2019). This draws upon Knowledge (administrative processes), Skills (resource management), and Behaviours (organisational skills).

Stakeholder engagement and community partnership: Given the community-centric nature of CET centres, this domain emphasises the ability to build and maintain effective relationships with diverse stakeholders, including learners, community members, local organisations, and government bodies (Foley, 2020; Mbatha, 2023). This relates to Skills (communication, stakeholder engagement) and Personal Characteristics (integrity, reliability).

Pedagogical leadership and support: This domain involves providing leadership and support for the educational activities within the centre, fostering a culture of continuous learning and improvement among staff, and ensuring quality curriculum delivery that meets the needs of adult learners (Youngman, 2018). This draws upon Knowledge (educational theory), Skills (communication, coaching), and Behaviours (fostering collaboration).

These domains are not mutually exclusive and often overlap in the complex reality of managing a CET learning centre. They provided a preliminary framework for examining the specific competencies required for effective performance in this context.

3.2.2.2 Initial Conceptual Framework

Based on the identified competency domains and the tenets of competency-based theory, an initial conceptual framework guiding this study posited that possessing a comprehensive and well-developed set of competencies across the identified domains (strategic leadership, operational management, stakeholder engagement, and pedagogical leadership) positively influences the effectiveness of CET CMs. Gaps or deficiencies in these key competency domains contribute to the leadership challenges experienced by CET CMs, potentially impacting centre performance and the achievement of educational and community

development objectives. Understanding the self-perceived competency levels and identifying existing training and development opportunities informed the development of targeted interventions to enhance managerial effectiveness. This framework was further refined and potentially expanded based on the empirical data gathered during the study.

3.2.2.3 Link to Competency-Based Theory to Research Questions

The application of competency-based theory, through the lens of these identified domains, directly addressed the research questions of this study:

Research Question 1 focused on identifying competencies. The theoretical framework provided a structured approach to identify the specific knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviours, and personal characteristics deemed essential for effective CET centre management within the KwaZulu-Natal context, categorised within the identified competency domains.

Research Question 2 focused on leadership challenges, and by examining the self-perceived competency levels of CMs within these domains, the study identified potential competency gaps that contributed to the leadership challenges they faced, as highlighted in the literature review (e.g., limited resources, high dropout rates).

Research Question 3 focused on training and development. Thus, the competency domains served as a basis for evaluating the alignment and effectiveness of existing training and development programmes in addressing the identified competency needs of CET CMs. The framework also provided recommendations for future targeted interventions.

3.2.3 Competency-Based Theory for CET Centres in KwaZulu-Natal

While competency-based theory provided a general framework for understanding effective performance, its application in the context of CET centres in KwaZulu-Natal necessitated consideration of the unique socio-economic, policy, and community dynamics that shape the roles and responsibilities of CMs. This section explores these contextual influences.

3.2.3.1 Contextual Influences on Competencies

The specific environment of CET learning centres in KwaZulu-Natal, characterised by socio-economic disparities, policy environment, community dynamics, and historical context, introduced several factors that necessitated a nuanced understanding of required competencies:

CMs often operate in communities facing significant socio-economic challenges, requiring competencies in community mobilisation, resourcefulness in limited settings, and an understanding of the social determinants of learning (Aitchison & Land, 2019). This elevates the importance of competencies within the stakeholder engagement and operational management domains.

National and provincial policies regarding adult and community education (as discussed in Chapter 2) directly influence the operational mandates and reporting requirements of CET centres, demanding competencies in navigating bureaucratic processes and aligning centre activities with policy directives. This impacts the strategic leadership and operational management domains.

The diverse cultural and social landscapes within KwaZulu-Natal require CMs to possess strong intercultural communication skills, the ability to build trust within local communities, and sensitivity to local needs and priorities, emphasising competencies within the stakeholder engagement domain.

The legacy of apartheid and its impact on educational access and equity in KwaZulu-Natal underscore the need for leaders who are committed to social justice and who possess the competencies to address historical disadvantages through inclusive and equitable educational practices. This influences all competency domains, particularly pedagogical leadership.

These contextual factors suggest that while general managerial and leadership competencies are important, their specific manifestation and prioritisation may differ in the unique setting of KwaZulu-Natal CET learning centres.

3.2.3.2 Cultural Considerations

KwaZulu-Natal is characterised by a rich and diverse cultural landscape. Understanding and navigating these cultural nuances is crucial for effective leadership within CET centres. This may influence communication styles, decision-making processes, and community engagement strategies.

Effective communication with learners, staff, and community members may require sensitivity to different cultural communication norms. Leadership approaches that are inclusive and respectful of local cultural values may be more effective in building consensus and fostering collaboration. Successful partnerships with local communities will depend on culturally appropriate engagement methods and an understanding of local customs and traditions.

These considerations highlight the importance of personal characteristics such as cultural sensitivity and skills such as intercultural communication within the competency framework for CET CMs in this province.

3.2.3.3 Policy Alignment

The competencies required of CET CMs must also align with the broader educational policies and strategic objectives of the South African government, particularly those related to post-school education and training (RSA, 2013). This includes understanding national qualifications frameworks, contributing to lifelong learning goals and adhering to reporting and accountability mechanisms.

CMs need to be competent in implementing curricula aligned with national standards. Their leadership should promote the broader national agenda of lifelong learning and skills development. Competencies in administrative management and compliance are essential for navigating the policy landscape. By explicitly considering these contextual factors, this study aimed to provide a more nuanced and relevant understanding of the competencies and leadership challenges within CET learning centres in KwaZulu-Natal, moving beyond a generic application of competency-based theory.

3.2.4 Application of Competency-Based Theory in Various Industries

Competency-based theory has been applied across various industries with varying findings, and its principles are particularly relevant in the educational sector due to the sector's emphasis on measurable learning outcomes and professional growth. For instance, in healthcare, competency-based frameworks have been used to ensure that professionals have the requisite skills and knowledge to deliver safe and efficient patient care (Okuyama et al., 2011; Storey et al., 2018). A competency-based approach in nursing education has led to curricula focusing on clinical competencies and improving patient outcomes (Tan et al., 2018).

Competency-based models have been used in the corporate sector to align employee development programmes with strategic business goals, enhancing performance, productivity, and competitive advantage (Kansal & Singhal, 2018; Shet et al., 2019). These models often incorporate detailed performance evaluations and leadership development initiatives.

In higher education, the competency-based approach often shifts towards skill-based training and real-world problem-solving (Açıkgöz & Babadoğan, 2021; Aithal & Maiya, 2023). For example, adopting competency-based curricular design in business education has emphasised developing students' critical thinking and practical skills required for the modern business environment (Cates et al., 2021; Olivares et al., 2018). At the K-12 educational level, competency-based learning models are increasingly being adopted. They allow for personalised instruction and progression when students demonstrate mastery of a subject rather than progressing based on time spent in class (Evans et al., 2020).

The findings in various industries, particularly education, suggest that when competencies are tailored to the context and needs of the specific sector and organisation, they can significantly improve job performance, lead to better organisational outcomes, and ensure individuals are equipped with the necessary skills to meet current and future challenges.

3.3 Critique of the Competency-Based Theory

Critique of competency-based theory often highlights its potential rigidity, which might stifle creativity, critical thinking and innovation by focusing too narrowly on pre-defined competencies (Azimov, 2022; Lee, 2023). Critics also argue that the theory can be too linear and fails to fully account for complex human behaviours and the influence of changing

contexts. Moreover, implementing a competency-based system can be resource-intensive, and there is a risk that competencies may become outdated if not regularly reviewed and adapted to evolving industry standards and job market demands (Kulik et al., 2020). Additionally, there can be too much emphasis on individual performance, potentially neglecting the importance of teamwork and collaborative skills (Bonesso et al., 2020; Oroszi, 2020).

To effectively address this study's critiques of competency-based theory, I emphasised flexibility in competency frameworks and incorporated creativity and critical thinking. Developing a competency framework that allows adaptability is crucial in today's fast-paced educational and professional environments. This approach recognises that competencies must evolve in response to changing industry standards and learner needs, thus ensuring that academic experience remains relevant and practical. By involving stakeholders such as educators and industry representatives in the development and regular review of competencies, the framework can better reflect the complexities of the job market and the diverse needs of learners.

While the study relied on competency-based theory's structured approach, the pragmatic orientation of the research methodology (detailed in Chapter 4) ensured that the resulting competency framework was not rigidly defined but was instead contextually responsive and developed from the lived realities of the CMs.

3.4 Chapter Summary

The chapter analysed how the competency-based theory served as the guiding framework to investigate leadership development and competency improvement among CET CMs. The text provided a historical account of competency theory development before detailing its core elements, which include knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviours, and personal characteristics, and explained how this framework connects job functions with quantifiable performance indicators. The chapter presented evidence of successful competency-based approach applications across multiple sectors, with a particular emphasis on education for enhancing professional development and organisational results. The theory has received criticism for its rigid structure and extensive resource requirements, while also gaining support for its flexible and inclusive methods of competency development that respond to changing educational needs. The competency-based theory served as a powerful foundation to determine and

remediate the competency requirements of CET CMs. The next chapter presents the research methodology used in this study, demonstrating how this theoretical framework was operationalised in the research design, data collection instruments, and analysis processes to investigate the competencies of CET CMs.

CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 provided a detailed exposition of the theoretical framework underpinning this study, namely competency-based theory. It explored the core tenets of this theory, its historical evolution, and its applicability across various sectors, culminating in a justification for its relevance to understanding the competency development and leadership challenges faced by CET CMs in KwaZulu-Natal.

Building upon this theoretical foundation, the present chapter details the research methodology employed to investigate these issues. This section will describe the research paradigm guiding the study, the chosen qualitative research approach and case study design, the geographical area where the research was conducted, the study population and sampling strategies, and the data generation techniques utilised. Furthermore, the instrument used for data collection, along with the methods implemented to ensure its trustworthiness, will be described.

4.2 Demographic Profile Participants

The research study was conducted with a total of 33 participants drawn from two districts of KwaZulu-Natal, namely the eThekwini Metro and uMgungundlovu district. The groups comprised 14 CMs, one deputy principal (academic), and three focus groups of six lecturers each, a total of 18 lecturers. These participants provided a comprehensive leadership and instructional perspective on the problem as it related to the CET system in higher education. The groups were chosen for their experience and roles, as well as for their management and direct involvement in the delivery of the CET programmes. A summary of the demographic distribution is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 33)

Category	Position/Role	Number of Participants	Gender Distribution	District Representation	Total
Management	CMs	14	10 Female / 4 Male	eThekwini (8), uMgungundlovu (6)	14
Academic Leadership	Deputy Principal (Academic)	1	1 Female	eThekwini	1
Lecturers (Focus Groups)	Focus Group 1 (6 participants)	6	4 Female / 2 Male	eThekwini	6
Lecturers (Focus Groups)	Focus Group 2 (6 participants)	6	5 Female / 1 Male	eThekwini	6
Lecturers (Focus Groups)	Focus Group 3 (6 participants)	6	4 Female / 2 Male	uMgungundlovu	6
Total Participants		33	24 Female / 9 Male	Both Districts Represented	33

The demographic show a well-balanced distribution of participants across the leadership and teaching strata, reflecting gender diversity as well as a combination of rural and urban educational contexts. The inclusion of males and females contributed to much greater understanding of the leadership patterns and leadership problems within various social and institutional settings. The CMs all had an average of 10 years of experience in Adult and Community Education, which contributed to the reliability of their perspectives regarding the nature of management theorists in the practical offering and development of educational courses proposed for varying requirements. The majority of the participants had received postgraduate qualifications in education, but none had any formal management training. This was one of the key findings of this study, namely, the ever deepening split between educational qualifications and the competence of the participants in management.

The single Deputy Principal (Academic) was purposively selected because this position is responsible for overseeing institutional management and curriculum implementation across the college and its affiliated centres. As a senior academic manager, the Deputy Principal provides strategic oversight of teaching, learning, and operational practices within the

institution, which places the office in a unique position to understand how institutional mandates are interpreted and implemented at centre level. The inclusion of only one Deputy Principal (Academic) was therefore intentional, as the position itself represents the highest level of academic leadership responsible for coordinating centre-level academic activities within the institution. Interviewing more than one individual in this role was not feasible because the college structure provides for only a single Deputy Principal responsible for the academic portfolio. The participant's insights therefore provided valuable perspectives on how institutional policies are translated into centre-level practices and how limitations in institutional capacity influence the ability of centres to respond effectively to the needs of local communities and diverse learner lifestyles.

The three focus groups, made up of six lecturers each, gave feedback on their collective teaching and administrative experience at various centres of learning. The participants consistently professed themselves keen about the undertaking on behalf of the lifelong learning concept, but they were ready to give feedback on systemic developments that are not conducive to learning, such as a dearth of resources, inconsistent communication with higher management, and an almost total lack of professional development opportunities for lecturers. The discussion found physical manifestations of narrow feeling when problems of concern were raised. These included movements like raising eyebrows, fast hand movements, or pauses in discussions. However, when positive aspects were highlighted, such as successful outcomes of learning realised in terms of original motivation, smiling and nodding reflected moments of extreme triumph and job satisfaction among the individuals involved in the teaching and learning programme.

Cumulatively, the demographic diversity of the participants and their professional experience enabled further investigation into the limited competencies perceived to be associated with CET which were found to be necessary across all their experiences. The combination of prescribed positions (management) and employees involved in the activities to be polled (lecturers) provided a broad understanding of leadership patterns presumed necessary for translating the management practices into effective action. This was further helped by demonstrating that the perspectives of this diverse demographic, as found in the subsequent chapters, represented different facets of the same leadership phenomena observed in this study. The demographic profile not only support the thematic conclusions presented in the

findings, in the latter part of the dissertation, but also shows how the methodology engages with the multiple voices that are prominent in the CET system.

4.3 Research Worldview: The Pragmatic Stance

Competency-Based Theory (CBT) is traditionally rooted in a positivist-functionalist paradigm, privileging measurable, observable competencies that can be systematically developed and assessed. In contrast, this study's qualitative methodology was grounded in interpretivism, which seeks to understand the subjective, complex realities of CET CMs within their specific contexts. These two paradigms, positivist and interpretivist, are often considered philosophically incommensurable, meaning they cannot be seamlessly integrated due to their divergent epistemological foundations.

Therefore, this research was guided by a specific worldview, or paradigm, which shaped the methodological choices. This study adopted a pragmatic worldview. This philosophy, unlike foundationalist approaches such as positivism or interpretivism, focuses on the practical consequences and utility of the research (Yin, 2020). Pragmatism was the most appropriate lens for this study because the aim was not merely to understand (interpretivism) or to establish universal laws (positivism), but to address a real-world problem and generate an actionable policy solution, a competency framework. The pragmatic worldview allowed me to use a qualitative approach (to gain rich, subjective accounts of challenges) while retaining the structural rigour necessary for developing a systematic and applied framework derived from competency-based theory. This stance overcame the incommensurability challenge often faced by mixed-paradigm studies by prioritising the research problem over a strict adherence to a single philosophical doctrine.

A research paradigm is a set of beliefs and practices that guide how researchers understand and interpret reality, frame their research questions, and choose their research methods (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It encompasses the philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality (ontology), the nature of knowledge (epistemology), and the values that underpin the research (axiology). This study employed a pragmatic worldview that integrated both interpretive and positivist perspectives to align with the focus on CBT for CMs. This integration allowed for a holistic understanding, where the interpretive data provided rich

context and meaning to the observable competencies and behaviours associated with effective centre management, as emphasised by the positivist perspective.

The interpretive paradigm was used to explore the subjective experiences, perspectives, and meanings that CMs attributed to their roles and competencies within the CET context. This approach acknowledges that the competencies required for effective leadership are influenced by unique social, cultural, and institutional factors. This paradigm facilitates the generation of rich, qualitative data, capturing the nuances of how managers perceive and navigate their competencies.

Simultaneously, the study incorporated aspects of the positivist paradigm, which is rooted in the belief that knowledge can be gained through systematic observation and analysis, which is central to the positivist philosophy (Cohen et al., 2018). By focusing on standardisation and empirical evidence, the behavioural approach fitted well within the framework of positivist research methodologies. It emphasised observable and measurable competencies within a structured framework. This approach aligns with the principles of CBT, which focus on developing and assessing specific, observable skills and behaviours that contribute to effective performance. This allowed for an analysis of both the internal understanding and the external manifestation of competencies. While the interpretive and positivist paradigms hold different epistemological assumptions, this study sought to bridge these perspectives by using the richness of qualitative data to inform our understanding of observable competencies and their impact within specific contexts. This acknowledged the complexity of human behaviour and the need for both in-depth understanding and the identification of effective practices.

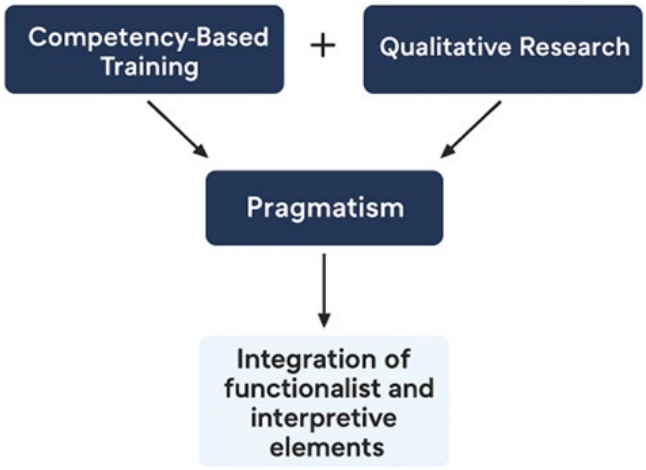
The qualitative data gathered through semi-structured interviews and focus groups aligned primarily with the interpretive paradigm, aiming to capture nuanced perspectives. However, the analysis of documents, such as performance appraisals and training records, incorporated more structured elements, reflecting a positivist interest in observable outcomes and standards. By integrating these paradigms, the study ensured a balanced examination of subjective experiences while also focusing on the practical and measurable outcomes of competency development.

4.4 Research Approach

In line with the pragmatic worldview, a qualitative research approach was selected to facilitate in-depth exploration of the complex, context-specific challenges. This choice provided the rich, descriptive data necessary to ground the practical solutions (Mohajan, 2018). Unlike quantitative research, which seeks to measure and quantify variables, qualitative research explores individuals' meanings, experiences, and perspectives within their specific contexts (Creswell, 2014).

Figure 2

Pragmatic Integration of Functionalist and Interpretive Paradigms in CET Leadership Research



Through this integration, the study successfully bridged the gap between “hard” competencies (e.g., digital and financial skills) and “soft” competencies (e.g., emotional intelligence and relational trust), producing a comprehensive framework that was both systematic and contextually relevant to the realities of CET centre management in KwaZulu-Natal. This methodological innovation demonstrated that the incommensurability between paradigms could be pragmatically resolved when the imperative guided the research to generate actionable, context-sensitive knowledge.

This approach was well-suited for examining CET CMs' experiences, challenges, and strategies in their natural settings (Mouton, 2001). It facilitated a nuanced exploration of essential competencies, how they were developed, and how they manifested in practice. Engaging directly with CMs provided insights into the experiences and perspectives and

factors influencing their leadership and management competencies, thus revealing the unique competencies needed to address the specific needs of communities in KwaZulu-Natal. This approach enabled a deeper understanding of the factors contributing to effective leadership within the CET environment (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

This approach was well-suited for examining CET CMs' experiences, challenges, and strategies in their natural settings (Mouton, 2001), allowing for a nuanced exploration of essential competencies and their contextual manifestation within KwaZulu-Natal, as highlighted by the importance of context within the application of CBT.

4.5 Research Design

The research design followed a case study approach, focusing on 12 CLCs in KwaZulu-Natal. Yin and Tan (2011) emphasise that case studies are valuable for in-depth exploration of contemporary issues in real-world settings. By examining a limited number of cases in detail, the study allowed for a nuanced understanding of the competencies required by CET CMs.

The case study design was appropriate for this study because it enabled me to investigate the complex, context-specific nature of CMs within the CET environment. Specifically, this study adopted an exploratory case study design, which sought to explore the competencies required by CET CMs and how these competencies influenced their ability to address the challenges of their roles. According to Cohen et al., (2011), case studies allow researchers to collect rich, detailed descriptions by examining phenomena in their natural context. This approach enabled me to explore the experiences, strategies, and challenges CET CMs face in managing these centres and the competencies needed to navigate these challenges effectively.

Maree (2016) further highlights that a case study approach facilitates a deep investigation, allowing for a thorough exploration of the experiences of and identification of the competencies most critical to leadership success in the specific contexts of the selected colleges and CLCs. Through interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis, the case study provided a comprehensive and clear understanding of the experiences of CMs, including what their jobs entailed, the effectiveness of the training programmes, and how different competencies manifested in practice and contributed to the effective operation of the centres.

4.6 Location of Research Site

The research was conducted at the KwaZulu-Natal CET college, explicitly focusing on the Umgungundlovu and eThekwini Metropolitan districts. The two districts offered a diverse and dynamic setting, encompassing both urban and semi-urban areas, which provide a range of challenges and opportunities for CLCs.

The Umgungundlovu district is located in the Midlands region of KwaZulu-Natal and includes a mix of urban centres, such as Pietermaritzburg, and surrounding rural communities. This diverse setting allowed the study to capture the unique challenges of leadership in managing CLCs that serve a population with varied socio-economic backgrounds and educational needs. The eThekwini metropolitan district, which includes Durban, is one of the most densely populated and economically active regions in South Africa. The district is characterised by rapid urbanisation, a diverse population, and varying levels of educational attainment. Conducting the study in this district allowed me to explore competencies in a highly dynamic, resource-constrained, and culturally diverse environment. With these two districts selected for this study, I examined competencies in varying contexts, offering insights into how CET CMs navigated both the challenges of rural and urban settings and how these factors impacted the implementation of adult and community education programmes.

4.7 Population and Sampling

The population for this study comprised nine CET colleges distributed across South Africa's nine provinces. These CET colleges serve as the primary hubs for delivering adult and community education, with each province operating its own set of CLCs. CLCs are smaller satellite institutions that fall under the jurisdiction of CET colleges. They provide localised access to adult education programmes aimed at improving literacy, vocational skills, and lifelong learning opportunities. In the context of the KwaZulu-Natal CET college, which was the focus of this study, there are 300 CLCs. This considerable number of centres reflects the province's extensive network of adult education initiatives and its diverse learner population. eThekwini has a population of nine CLCs, while Umgungundlovu has three.

4.7.1 Sampling Procedure

This study used convenience sampling to select districts. The districts were chosen based on accessibility (Obilor, 2023). Given the limited time and resources for the research, this method was practical, enabling me to focus on geographically close districts. According to Obilor (2023), convenience sampling does not guarantee a statistically random sample but is an effective strategy under practical constraints. It allows efficient data generation across a broad geographic area (Obilor, 2023). Two districts from the ten districts and one metro in KwaZulu-Natal were selected because of their proximity and ease of access.

With a total population of 300 centres across the province, 18 centres were purposively selected from the two chosen districts. Purposive sampling is a qualitative research technique where participants are chosen based on specific characteristics or criteria relevant to the research question. This method allowed me to focus on CMs with particular knowledge and experience that provided rich and detailed information (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A proportionate sample of 14 managers and 18 lecturers offered a diverse and comprehensive representation of the population while allowing for in-depth engagement with each participant (Hagaman & Wutich, 2016). Specifically, eight of the 14 CMs and 12 of the 18 lecturers were from the eThekwini district, and the remaining six CMs and six lecturers came from the uMgungundlovu district and deputy principal academic.

The inclusion criteria for selecting CMs and lecturers focused on their length of service, aiming to capture a range of experience levels, from those with less than five years in the role to those with over 15 years of experience. Additionally, I considered the size of the centres managed, with both small centres (fewer than 100 learners) and larger centres (more than 500 learners) represented. This inclusive approach also aimed for gender balance, ensuring that male and female CMs and lecturers were proportionately included to reflect the actual gender distribution among CMs in KwaZulu-Natal.

Managers of satellite centres, regardless of age, experience, or size of the centre, were excluded from the study. This exclusion was because satellite CMs typically have less decision-making power and autonomy, potentially limiting the scope of leadership competencies required, and making their experiences less directly relevant to the study's focus on broader leadership roles and competencies as framed by competency-based theory.

4.7.2 Sample Size

The study involved 33 participants, selected to provide a comprehensive, contextually rich understanding of leadership competencies within Community Education and Training (CET) centres in KwaZulu-Natal. The sample comprised 14 Centre Managers, 18 lecturers, and one Deputy Principal (Academic), all participating in three focus groups (six participants per group). This composition was deliberately designed to ensure representation of both management and instructional perspectives while remaining aligned with the research's qualitative case study approach.

The Centre Managers were included because they are the primary holders of leadership and operational responsibility at CET centres and are therefore the main unit of analysis in this study. Their experiences provided direct insight into the competencies required to manage curriculum delivery, staff, finances, and learner support. The lecturers were included through focus groups to capture collective perspectives on how Centre Managers' competencies are experienced in daily institutional practice, particularly in relation to communication, accountability, and support for teaching and learning. The use of focus groups allowed for interaction and shared reflection among lecturers, enabling the identification of common patterns and contrasting viewpoints.

The Deputy Principal (Academic) was interviewed as the only senior institutional representative because this role is directly responsible for academic leadership, quality assurance, and oversight of Centre Managers across the CET college. This position provided a strategic, system-level perspective on leadership competencies, performance expectations, and institutional challenges.

4.7.3 Recruitment Process of Participants

Participants for this study were sampled using purposive sampling, which is appropriate in qualitative research where participants are selected based on their direct involvement in, and knowledge of, the phenomenon under investigation. In this study, the phenomenon was the leadership competencies of Community Education and Training (CET) Centre Managers in

KwaZulu-Natal. Purposive sampling ensured that only individuals with relevant professional experience and insight into CET leadership and operations were included.
The Centre Managers were selected because they occupy the formal leadership position under investigation and are directly responsible for academic, administrative, and operational management at centre level. Managers were identified through the CET college structure and invited to participate based on their active service as Centre Managers during the period of data collection. The Deputy Principal (Academic) was recruited because this role provides institutional oversight of Centre Managers and is responsible for academic leadership, quality assurance, and performance monitoring across centres. This position was therefore best placed to offer a strategic and supervisory perspective on managerial competence, institutional expectations, and system-level challenges.

The focus group participants (lecturers) were selected from CET centres where participating Centre Managers were based. Lecturers were invited to participate because they interact daily with Centre Managers and are directly affected by managerial practices related to communication, curriculum delivery, staff support, and accountability. Participants were selected to ensure diversity in teaching experience, subject areas, and centre contexts, enabling a broad range of perspectives on leadership competence. The use of three focus groups, each consisting of six participants, allowed for interactive discussion and comparison of experiences across different centres.

These recruitment methods were appropriate because they ensured that all participants had first-hand experience of CET leadership and could provide rich, contextually grounded data relevant to the research questions. The combination of individual interviews and focus groups enabled triangulation, allowing the perspectives of Centre Managers, lecturers, and senior academic leadership to be compared and validated. This strengthened the credibility and depth of the findings while remaining aligned with the qualitative case study design and the objectives of the study.

4.8 Data Generation Techniques

The data for this study were generated using document analysis, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, which were grounded in the principles of qualitative inquiry and aligned with the interpretive paradigm of the research.

4.8.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews allowed flexibility in exploring the subjective experiences and perspectives of the CET CMs, providing an in-depth experience and understanding of their leadership competencies (Kvale, 2007). This method effectively elicited rich, detailed data because it combined open-ended questions with the ability to probe further based on participants' responses, facilitating a deeper exploration of complex phenomena (Merriam, 2009). An interview was conducted with the deputy principal: academic, whose data were particularly useful since this person supervised all CMs. This method was instrumental in eliciting rich data regarding CMs' experiences and perspectives on the key competency domains (which will be discussed in Chapter 5), such as core functional deficiencies, context-specific, contextual competency gaps, and systemic barriers.

4.8.2 Focus Group

A focus group is a qualitative research method involving a structured discussion with individuals with specific characteristics or experiences relevant to the research topic. The primary goal of a focus group is to gather in-depth insights through group interaction, allowing participants to explore and reflect on ideas collectively, often yielding rich, complex data that might not emerge from individual interviews (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). A total of three focus groups were conducted with lecturers in the respective centres: two in eThekwini and one in uMgungundlovu. Focus groups uncovered shared understandings and diverse viewpoints on the competencies required for effective leadership in CET settings.

The interviews and all focus group discussions were audio-recorded, with participants' consent, to ensure accurate data capture. The recordings were transcribed verbatim to maintain the integrity of participants' voices and allow for a thorough thematic analysis. I scheduled face-to-face interviews and focus groups at times convenient for the participants.

4.8.3 Document Analysis

Document analysis is a qualitative research method that systematically examines documents to extract meaningful information related to the research topic. This method is precious for

understanding historical, institutional, or policy contexts, as it provides insights into how issues have been approached and managed over time (Bowen, 2009). Policy reports, institutional records and performance appraisals can offer crucial data on leadership practices, resource management, and educational outcomes in educational research.

In this study, document analysis complemented other data generation methods by better understanding the leadership competencies required to manage CET centres effectively. I gathered contextual data on the existing leadership challenges and competencies in the CET sector by reviewing documents such as CMs' performance appraisals, training manuals, policy frameworks, and other official records. These documents helped identify gaps in leadership preparation and training and provided insights into the operational standards and expectations placed on CMs.

According to Bowen (2009), document analysis allows for triangulation, as it can corroborate findings from interviews and focus groups, ensuring that the research captures a comprehensive picture of the subject matter. This process also helps to clarify inconsistencies and provide a historical context for the research findings.

In this study, document analysis identified patterns and themes related to competencies, contributing to a well-rounded understanding of the landscape within the selected CET centres. Document analysis complemented the other data collection methods (semi-structured interviews and focus groups) by providing contextual data on the existing leadership challenges and competencies. It also revealed institutional expectations and performance indicators related to the competency domains outlined in the theoretical framework.

4.9 Data Analysis

This qualitative study used both inductive and deductive analysis.

4.9.1 Inductive Analysis

Thematic analysis is the primary data analysis strategy. Thematic analysis is a widely used method in qualitative research for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns or themes within data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). This method was particularly suited for this study, as it

allowed for a detailed and nuanced understanding of the experiences and competencies of CET CMs by examining their perspectives and challenges within their context. The thematic analysis followed the six-phase process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2012):

The first step involved immersing myself in the data collected through interviews and focus groups by reading and re-reading transcripts and making initial notes about potential themes (Creswell, 2014). This stage helped to gain a deeper understanding of the data and prepared for more systematic analysis. Once familiar with the data, the next step was systematically coding interesting features across the entire data set. Codes are short labels that identify meaningful data segments relevant to the research questions (Saldaña, 2016). After coding, the codes were collated into potential themes by grouping related codes under broader patterns or concepts. This process identified recurring patterns and shared experiences among the CMs (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The themes were then reviewed to ensure they were coherent and meaningfully reflected the data. This stage involved checking the themes against the coded data and the entire data set to ensure they accurately represented the study's key findings (Creswell, 2014). After reviewing the themes, each was refined, clearly defined, and given a concise, descriptive name. This process included determining the essence of each theme, ensuring that it captured essential elements of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

Finally, the themes were used to write up the findings. This phase provided a rich description of the themes, supported by direct quotes from the participants, to illustrate the data meaningfully (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach provided a structured yet flexible framework for analysing the data, allowing in-depth exploration of individual cases and identifying broader patterns across the participants.

4.9.2 Deductive Analysis

In addition to the inductive thematic analysis, this study also employed a deductive approach to data analysis. Deductive analysis involves applying a pre-established theoretical framework to the collected data to identify patterns and meanings (Patton, 2014). The primary framework guiding this deductive process was competency-based theory, specifically the key competency domains for centre managers in KwaZulu-Natal that were identified and discussed in Chapter 3.

The initial set of deductive codes for this study was directly derived from the four key competency domains operationalised in Chapter 3:

- Strategic leadership: This broad code encompassed data related to vision setting, strategic planning, policy alignment, and overall direction of the CET centre.
- Operational management: This code captured data concerning resource allocation, curriculum implementation oversight, administrative efficiency, and the creation of a conducive learning environment.
- Stakeholder engagement: Data pertaining to building and maintaining relationships with learners, community members, government bodies, and other stakeholders were coded here.
- Pedagogical leadership: This code included data related to supporting teaching and learning, fostering staff development, and ensuring quality curriculum delivery.

These domains were further refined with sub-codes based on the specific elements of CBT (e.g., under 'Strategic leadership', sub-codes included 'Strategic thinking skills' or 'Knowledge of educational policy').

The deductive coding process involved systematically reviewing each transcript and document. Using manual coding, relevant segments of text were tagged with the pre-defined codes. For instance, if a CM described developing a five-year plan for the centre, this excerpt was coded under 'Strategic leadership'. Similarly, discussions about managing the centre's budget were coded under 'Operational management.'

The deductive analysis complemented the inductive thematic analysis by providing a structured examination of the data through the lens of competency-based theory. While the inductive approach allowed for the emergence of themes directly from the participants' experiences, the deductive analysis enabled me to specifically identify and analyse instances related to the pre-defined competency domains. This dual approach ensured a rich and nuanced understanding, capturing both the expected competencies based on the theoretical framework and any unexpected or context-specific factors that emerged from the data itself (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

The findings from the deductive analysis directly contributed to answering the research questions. By coding the data according to the key competency domains, I was able to:

- Identify the extent to which CET CMs in KwaZulu-Natal demonstrated competencies within the theoretically defined domains (addressing Research Question 1).
- Analyse the challenges they faced in relation to potential deficits within these domains (informing Research Question 2) and assess whether existing training and development initiatives addressed the competencies identified within the theoretical framework (contributing to Research Question 3).

In summary, the deductive analysis, guided by competency-based theory and the identified competency domains, provided a structured and theoretically informed approach to understanding the competencies and challenges of CET CETs in KwaZulu-Natal. This complemented the inductive findings and contributed to a comprehensive analysis of the research questions.

4.10 Management and Storing of Data

All data collected during this research, including audio recordings, verbatim transcripts, field notes, and analysed documents, were managed and stored securely to ensure confidentiality and data integrity. Transcripts and other digital data were anonymised using pseudonyms and stored on a password-protected hard drive accessible only to me as the researcher. Any physical documents, such as consent forms and reviewed documents, have been stored in a locked filing cabinet. Data will be retained for five years as required by ethical guidelines and the university's research policy.

4.11 Ethical Considerations

Human participation in this research was made possible by attending to participants' well-being and safety throughout the study. These included providing a supportive and nonjudgmental space where participants felt heard and respected. To build trust, I listened carefully to the participants so their experiences could be heard without judgment. No ill was tolerated, including informed consent, anonymity of the participants, and their right to

withdraw at any point without penalty. I also ensured that I steered away from culturally sensitive conversations, questions, and discussions. I customised the research process to participants' needs and backgrounds, thus enabling participants to express themselves without fear. This approach was consistent with the values of respect, empathy, and compassionate research, and produced meaningful and accurate data.

4.12 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is the equivalent of validity and reliability in quantitative research. It refers to the research findings' accuracy, integrity, and credibility (Adler, 2022; Anney, 2014). Trustworthiness involves providing evidence that the research study's findings are robust, rigorous, and respectfully recounted, and that they are aligned with the truth of the participants' experiences (Adler, 2022).

There are four main components of trustworthiness (Kyngäs et al., 2020):

- **Credibility**: This involves establishing the congruence between the researcher's interpretations and the participants' actual experiences (Kyngäs et al., 2020). I ensured credibility through prolonged engagement with participants, persistent observation, and member-checking, where I asked participants to review and confirm the accuracy of my interpretations.
- **Transferability**. This refers to the extent to which the findings can be transferred to other contexts or settings with similar characteristics (Kyngäs et al., 2020). I ensured transferability by providing a thick, rich description of the research context and findings so that readers could determine the applicability of results to other contexts.
- **Dependability**: This ensures that the study would yield similar results if repeated in the same context with the same methods and participants (Kyngäs et al., 2020). To accomplish dependability, I maintained a reflexive journal. This journal detailed how the methodology was articulated, thereby allowing the process to be auditable by other researchers.
- **Confirmability**: This component pertains to the objectivity of the research findings, illustrating that the results are shaped by the participants and the data rather than researcher bias or personal motivations (Kyngäs et al., 2020). Confirmability was

achieved through triangulation, reflexivity, and peer debriefing, ensuring that multiple data sources and perspectives corroborated interpretations and that my potential biases were accounted for and minimised.

4.13 Reflexivity in Research Practice

Reflexivity is a crucial aspect of qualitative research, requiring the researcher to critically examine their own influence on the research process and the interpretation of findings (Finlay, 2002). As an insider researcher within the KwaZulu-Natal CET college system (as discussed in Chapter 1), I engaged in continuous and rigorous reflexive practice to mitigate potential biases stemming from my prior experiences and assumptions.

Throughout this research, I employed several specific reflexive strategies. My self-reflexive diary, initiated at the outset of the study and maintained throughout data collection and analysis, served as a key tool for tracking my evolving understanding and potential biases. For example, initial entries often reflected my assumptions about the importance of strategic planning competencies based on my own managerial experience. However, through subsequent interviews and focus groups, participants highlighted the critical role of community engagement in their specific contexts. This prompted me to revisit my initial framing and ensure that the analysis gave due weight to this emergent perspective.

Member checking provided another vital layer of reflexivity. Participants were given the opportunity to review interview transcripts and preliminary thematic findings. Their feedback often provided valuable nuances and corrections to my initial interpretations. For instance, in one instance, a centre manager clarified the specific cultural context influencing their approach to stakeholder communication, which led to a refinement of the "Stakeholder engagement" theme to reflect this local reality better.

Actively seeking diverse perspectives during interviews and focus groups was also a conscious, reflexive practice. I made a deliberate effort to probe for contrasting viewpoints and challenge my own assumptions. For example, when discussing training needs, I specifically asked participants who had experienced both positive and negative training experiences to elaborate on their perspectives, allowing for a more balanced understanding.

During the thematic analysis and deductive coding processes, I continually engaged in self-questioning regarding my interpretations. I asked: “Are there alternative ways to understand this data?”, “Am I giving undue weight to perspectives that align with my own experiences?”, and “How might my insider knowledge be both an asset and a potential blind spot?” Regular peer debriefing sessions with academic advisors provided an external lens, challenging my interpretations and helping to identify potential researcher bias that I might have overlooked. For example, a discussion with my advisor highlighted a potential overemphasis on formal management structures in my initial coding, prompting me to revisit the data for evidence of more informal leadership practices.

This ongoing process of reflexivity, involving self-monitoring, participant feedback, and external scrutiny, has been integral to ensuring the credibility and confirmability of the findings. By consciously examining my influence and actively seeking to understand the experiences of CET CMs from their own perspectives, I aimed to produce a transparent and accountable account of their lived realities and the competencies essential for their roles within the KwaZulu-Natal context.

4.14 Chapter Summary

The study's research methodology used to explore leadership competencies and development needs of CET CMs in KwaZulu-Natal was outlined in this chapter. The research methodology described the philosophical foundations and qualitative methods used in the study. It detailed the case study design, which allowed me to gain a deep understanding of the CMs' lived experiences. Through the selection of specific sampling procedures along with recruitment processes and data generation methods that encompassed interviews, focus groups, and document analysis, I aimed to collect rich and relevant data. The chapter outlined the thematic analysis method used for data interpretation, which employed both inductive and deductive approaches to explore emergent themes and examine them through the lens of competency-based theory. In addition, the approaches adopted to maintain trustworthiness and credibility were presented, incorporating reflexivity and compassionate research engagement. The study also disclosed its limitations and delimitations to maintain transparency, guide the interpretation of findings, and detail the procedures for the secure management and storage of collected data.

CHAPTER 5
DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the qualitative data, which are divided into two sections, subjected to rigorous thematic analysis, and discussed in relation to the reviewed literature and the study's competency-based theory framework, which was outlined in Chapter 3. Moving beyond mere data reporting, the discussion addresses the research objectives outlined in Chapter 1 by synthesising themes derived from interviews (INT), focus group discussions (FG), and document analysis. The data analysed herein were collected from the qualitative sample detailed in Chapter 4 (Methodology), comprising 33 participants from a single CET college in KwaZulu-Natal, comprising CMs, lecturers, and a deputy principal.

The entire analysis is structured by a pragmatic worldview, meaning the discussion is specifically aimed at achieving the study's core goal: the development of an evidence-based, context-specific competency framework for practical policy application (Yin, 2020). Aligned with this pragmatic goal, the analysis is systematically structured to address the study's three core objectives, first introduced in Chapter 1:

1. To identify the core competencies required of CET CMs.
2. To identify the key competency deficits and training needs experienced by CET CMs.
3. To develop an evidence-based competency framework for policy application in the CET sector.

The findings presented in the following sections serve as the empirical response to these objectives. To ensure a systematic and objective-driven analysis, the qualitative data were coded and grouped into the major analytical themes presented below. Accordingly, the findings presented in this chapter are organised and analysed using the Knowledge, Skills, Attitudes and Other characteristics (KSAO) framework, which structures the thematic discussion of Centre Managers' competencies in the sections that follow.

SECTION A

This section provides a structured overview of the analytical themes derived from the research on competence development for centre managers in KwaZulu-Natal. The following themes have been identified: core deficiency, contextual competency gaps, systematic & structural barriers and theoretical synthesis.

5.2 Overview of Key Research Themes

The table below illustrates the analytical themes identified in the study.

Table 2

Overview of Analytical Themes and Objective Alignment

Central Theme (Chapter Section)	Link to Research Objective	Data Focused On
I. Core Functional Deficiencies (Section 5.3)	Objectives 1 & 2 (Identify required competencies and deficits)	Deficits in ICT, Financial Management, Human Resources and Conflict Resolution. (Quantified in Table 3)
II. Contextual Competency Gaps (Section 5.5)	Objective 1 (Identify required competencies)	Need for Psychosocial Support and Emotional Resilience. (Unique KZN requirements)
III. Systemic & Structural Barriers (Section 5.6)	Objective 2 (Identify training needs/barriers)	Lack of Formal Induction and Absence of Performance Review **(Quantified in Table 4)**
IV. Theoretical Synthesis (Section 5.7)	Objective 3 (Develop framework)	Integration of CBT with Pragmatic Worldview

As demonstrated in Table 2, the analysis progressed logically, starting with the identification of measurable core functional deficiencies before moving to the context-specific and qualitative contextual competency gaps and systemic barriers. This thematic structure culminated in the theoretical synthesis, which used the pragmatic approach to build the final evidence-based framework that addressed Objective 3, thus fulfilling the entire purpose of the study.

5.3 Core Deficiencies and Alignment with Competency-Based Theory

The findings revealed a fundamental misalignment between the ideal, systematic structure of competency-based theory and the practical realities facing CET CMs. While competency-based theory emphasises the integration of KSAOs into observable behaviours that drive effective performance (Henriques & Michalski, 2020), the empirical evidence suggested a systemic failure to develop or apply these essential attributes.

5.3.1 The "Others" Dimension in the KSAO Framework

Within the competency-based theory and the KSAO framework, the "Others" component captures the inherent personal characteristics, emotional capacities, and psychological resources that enable sustained performance under complex and changing conditions. Unlike the other three dimensions, which focus on what a person *knows*, *can do*, and *believes*, the "Others" dimension reflects who the person *is* at the core of their professional identity. In the context of CET leadership, this dimension was particularly salient because CMs operate in high-stress, resource-constrained, and socially complex environments that demand not only technical competence but also emotional, moral, and psychological resilience.

As Shet et al. (2019) emphasise, the "Others" component encompasses the internal dispositions and personality-related traits that sustain effective behaviour beyond procedural compliance. These include emotional intelligence, professional ethics, adaptability, cultural awareness, and psychological capital, traits that define how leaders respond to uncertainty, engage with others, and embody institutional values. Within the CET context, these personal characteristics form the behavioural foundation that transforms technical competence into meaningful leadership. Without them, managerial knowledge and skills remain mechanical, reactive, and disconnected from the human realities of educational leadership.

5.3.1.1 Emotional Intelligence and Empathy

Emotional intelligence emerged as a central element of the "Others" domain during this study. CMs frequently navigate emotionally charged interactions with staff, learners, and communities facing poverty, unemployment, and trauma. Effective leadership in such contexts requires the capacity to recognise, regulate, and respond to emotions—both one's

own and those of others. However, the findings revealed that many managers lacked this capability, often avoiding confrontation or detaching emotionally when faced with crises. As one lecturer observed: "*Our manager just shuts down when problems arise; she doesn't want to talk about feelings or conflict"* (FG3: Participant). Her tone was empathetic but disappointed, and her downward gaze reflected emotional fatigue. This behaviour, while understandable in stressful environments, signals a deficiency in emotional regulation, a core component of emotional intelligence (Dzhengiz & Niesten, 2019).

In competency-based theory terms, emotional intelligence represents the bridge between attitudes and action. It transforms intention into behaviour by enabling self-awareness, empathy, and composure. Within CET management, emotionally intelligent leaders can balance assertiveness with compassion, making decisions that respect both policy and human dignity. The absence of this trait, by contrast, manifests as emotional disengagement, staff demoralisation, and inconsistent communication patterns observed in Section 5.4.3.

5.3.1.2 Professional Ethics and Integrity

Professional ethics and integrity constitute another crucial facet of the "Others" dimension. CET CMs are custodians of public trust, responsible for ensuring that resources, reporting, and teaching practices align with the principles of transparency and accountability. However, participants often described environments where ethical standards were inconsistently applied. Some managers overlooked lateness, misconduct, or reporting delays to avoid confrontation, while others allowed personal relationships to influence decision-making. One participant admitted candidly: "Sometimes we don't want to report a colleague because we are friends. It becomes personal" (INT: CM6). Her hesitant tone and averted gaze revealed discomfort, signalling awareness of ethical compromise.

Ethical leadership requires not only knowledge of policy but also moral courage and self-discipline attributes squarely within the "Others" domain. According to OECD (2023), ethical competence is the foundation of sustainable governance because it ensures that decision-making remains fair, transparent, and accountable, even in environments of ambiguity. In the CET sector, integrity determines whether managers act as enforcers of rules or custodians of educational justice. When absent, it undermines the moral fabric of the institution, leading to favouritism, distrust, and operational inconsistency.

5.3.1.3 Motivation, Adaptability, and Resilience

Motivation and adaptability emerged in this study as defining traits for managerial persistence amid adversity. Many CMs demonstrated a deep intrinsic motivation to serve communities despite minimal support and delayed remuneration. Yet, sustained exposure to structural inefficiencies and bureaucratic inertia eroded this motivation over time, leading to fatigue and resignation. One participant described the toll vividly: "You start with energy, but after years of fighting the same problems, you just do what's necessary to survive" (INT: CM3). Her flat tone and slouched posture conveyed emotional exhaustion, reflecting the depletion of psychological reserves known in leadership literature as *burnout*.

Within competency-based theory, motivation and adaptability are markers of performance sustainability. They determine whether knowledge and skills can be maintained under pressure. Shet et al. (2019) argue that these traits are critical to leadership effectiveness in dynamic environments because they regulate persistence, learning agility, and innovation. In the CET context, managers who adapt to new policies, embrace change, and remain motivated despite constraints embody the spirit of lifelong learning that the system itself promotes. Conversely, those who lack adaptability become immobilised by frustration, perpetuating operational stagnation.

5.3.1.4 Cultural Competence and Values Alignment

Cultural competence, defined as the ability to engage respectfully with diverse learners and communities, was also identified as a key "Other" attribute. CET centres often serve multilingual, multicultural, and multi-generational populations. Managers therefore require the sensitivity to navigate social diversity and align institutional practices with community norms. One lecturer noted approvingly: "Our manager understands the community. She knows how to talk to elders and young people alike" (FG2: Participant). The participant smiled warmly as she spoke, signalling appreciation for inclusive leadership. By contrast, other managers were described as "detached" or "out of touch," reflecting weak cultural empathy.

Values alignment complements cultural competence by ensuring that managerial behaviour reflects both institutional and community ethics. According to Dzhengiz and Niesten (2019**)**,

alignment between personal values and organisational mission enhances commitment, trust, and engagement. In the CET setting, this means that CMs who value inclusivity, equity, and community upliftment foster environments of mutual respect and motivation. When personal and institutional values diverge, however, managers tend to exhibit cynicism, perform tasks mechanically, and withdraw from community engagement.

5.3.1.5 Psychological Capital: Confidence, Optimism, and Resilience

Among the subcomponents of the "Others" domain, psychological capital emerged as the most integrative and transformational attribute. It encompasses four interrelated capacities—self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience—that collectively sustain managerial effectiveness under adversity. Within the CET system, where chronic underfunding, staff shortages, bureaucratic delays, and learner vulnerability are everyday realities, these attributes form the psychological infrastructure that determines whether leadership remains functional or collapses under pressure.

Psychological capital represents more than emotional endurance; it signifies a *positive psychological state of development* that enables leaders to confront challenges with confidence and persistence. According to Luthans and Broad (2020), individuals high in psychological capital exhibit proactive problem-solving, constructive optimism, and the ability to recover quickly from setbacks. These are qualities indispensable to CET CMs, who often operate without adequate administrative or emotional support. In this study, managers who demonstrated these characteristics not only managed institutional constraints effectively but also inspired resilience among staff and learners through their demeanour and communication style.

Participants' testimonies vividly illustrated how confidence and optimism translated into behavioural leadership. One CM expressed her conviction proudly: "Even if things are tough, I tell my team, 'We are here for the community.' We keep going" (INT: CM9). As she spoke, she sat upright, shoulders squared, with a firm, steady tone. Her posture conveyed determination—a non-verbal cue reflecting both confidence and composure. This behavioural alignment between verbal assurance and body language epitomises what CBT defines as *observable competence*: the visible demonstration of internal psychological strength. Her

statement symbolises the motivational power of psychological capital; her words acted as a stabilising message in a demoralised environment.

Other participants echoed similar sentiments, though often mixed with fatigue. One manager admitted: “There are days when I want to quit, but then I remind myself that my community needs me. That gives me strength” (INT: CM4). Her voice trembled slightly as she smiled faintly, suggesting both vulnerability and resolve. This emotional duality captures the lived reality of leadership resilience in under-resourced educational contexts where hope is not an abstract ideal but an act of daily endurance.

Focus group discussions revealed that managers with visible optimism became *anchors* for their teams, fostering morale even amid instability. One lecturer explained: “Our manager always says, ‘We’ll make a plan.’ It sounds small, but it gives us hope. You feel like, okay, we can handle this” (FG2: Participant). As she recounted this, she smiled broadly, nodding as others murmured in agreement. This affective contagion where the leader’s positivity diffuses through the group demonstrates the relational dimension of psychological capital. As OECD (2023) observes, emotionally resilient and optimistic leaders act as stabilising forces during institutional volatility, creating climates of psychological safety that encourage innovation and collective problem-solving.

Conversely, where managers lacked confidence and optimism, a culture of defeatism emerged. One participant described a disheartening dynamic: “When the manager is discouraged, it spreads. People start saying, ‘What’s the point?’ and then nothing moves” (FG1: Participant). Her tone was subdued, and she shook her head slowly, emphasising the contagion of negativity. This observation aligns with Shet et al. (2019), who argue that leadership emotions are contagious; confidence and optimism can elevate team morale, while cynicism and despair quickly demotivate subordinates. In CET contexts, where managers model institutional ethos through their daily interactions, the absence of psychological capital translates directly into organisational stagnation.

From a KSAO perspective, psychological capital intersects dynamically with all other competency dimensions.

- It strengthens Knowledge by fostering cognitive clarity and decision-making under pressure.
- It enhances Skills by sustaining persistence during learning or problem-solving processes.
- It fortifies Attitudes by reinforcing commitment, ethical discipline, and self-efficacy.
- As part of the "Others" domain, it provides the *emotional scaffolding* that stabilises leadership during crisis.

This interdependence illustrates why psychological capital must be viewed as a *multiplier competency;* it amplifies the effectiveness of all other capabilities.

The deputy principal (academic) contextualised this concept powerfully: "Some of our managers know the policies but still fail because they don't believe they can make a difference. Confidence is not arrogance; it's the conviction that effort matters." Her calm but assertive tone conveyed both empathy and insight. She clasped her hands firmly on the table as she spoke, underscoring her conviction that psychological confidence is foundational, not decorative. Her comment reinforces the competency-based theory principle that competence is inseparable from belief in one's own capacity to perform effectively under contextual constraints.

Documentary evidence and observations supported this interpretation. Centres led by confident and optimistic managers demonstrated higher attendance rates, more timely reporting, and better morale, even when facing the same external constraints as others. Emails from such managers, analysed during the data review, displayed positive framing and proactive problem-solving language ("We will adjust timelines accordingly," "Let's explore alternatives"). In contrast, communication from less resilient managers often contained defeatist language ("We are waiting for approval," "There's nothing we can do"), reinforcing passivity and dependency. This linguistic contrast reflects the behavioural expression of psychological capital where optimism translates into proactive leadership, and pessimism manifests as inertia.

Psychological capital also interacts closely with ethical resilience—the ability to uphold integrity under pressure. Managers who maintained composure during crises were better able to make ethically consistent decisions, avoiding the temptation to manipulate records, neglect

procedures, or conceal errors. As Dzhengiz and Niesten (2019) note, resilience functions as an ethical stabiliser, allowing leaders to balance institutional expectations with moral accountability. In CET settings, where resource shortages and policy ambiguity often tempt shortcuts, psychological resilience becomes the moral backbone of leadership.

However, the study also found that psychological capital was not evenly distributed. Managers who worked in isolation or lacked peer and institutional support displayed signs of emotional depletion. One manager confessed quietly: "I try to stay positive, but sometimes it feels like hope runs out. You can't keep encouraging others when you are empty" (INT: CM2). Her voice softened as she looked away, illustrating the emotional cost of sustained leadership without psychological replenishment. This highlights the need for institutional mechanisms such as peer mentoring, coaching, and wellness programmes to maintain leaders' emotional energy. As OECD (2023) recommends, building leadership resilience requires structural support, not individual heroism.

In the proposed CET competency model, psychological capital is positioned as the *integrating dimension* of the "Others" domain. It encompasses the inner resources that enable CMs to remain effective amid uncertainty, ambiguity, and scarcity. It includes:

- Self-efficacy: Confidence in one's ability to perform tasks effectively, even under constraint.
- Optimism: Expectation of positive outcomes despite challenges, shaping decision-making and motivation.
- Hope: Sustained focus on goals and pathways, even when obstacles persist.
- Resilience: The capacity to recover from setbacks and maintain ethical and emotional balance.

Together, these attributes sustain managerial performance in environments where external resources are limited, and institutional pressures are high.

In conclusion, psychological capital functions as the emotional and cognitive engine of competence within the CET leadership ecosystem. It transforms knowledge and skill into sustained, contextually responsive performance. In an environment characterised by chronic instability, resilient and optimistic managers do not merely survive, they model stability,

inspire commitment, and anchor institutional identity. As this study demonstrated, psychological capital is not an optional trait but a core competency for effective leadership in South Africa's CET sector. Embedding it into managerial training and evaluation frameworks will not only enhance individual well-being but also ensure institutional durability, enabling CET centres to embody the resilience they seek to cultivate in their communities.

5.3.1.6 Integrating "Others" into Competency-Based Theory

The "Others" dimension thus represents the behavioural and emotional backbone of the competency framework. While Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes can be taught, the "Others" must be cultivated through reflective practice, mentorship, and psychological support. Within the CET leadership context, this dimension differentiates mere compliance from authentic leadership. As Shet et al. (2019) argue, competency frameworks that overlook personality and emotional variables risk producing technically proficient but behaviourally ineffective leaders.

In the proposed CET competency model, the "Others" domain integrates six sub-dimensions: emotional intelligence, ethics and integrity, motivation, adaptability, cultural competence, and psychological capital, each linked to measurable outcomes such as team morale, learner retention, and operational consistency. Developing these attributes requires systemic investment in professional development programmes that balance technical training with emotional and ethical growth.

In conclusion, the "Others" component of the KSAO model extends beyond individual traits; it represents the inner infrastructure of competence. It encompasses the emotional, moral, and psychological capacities that enable leaders to apply knowledge and skills meaningfully in human-centred contexts. In South Africa's CET sector, where managers navigate poverty, policy reform, and organisational fragility, the "Others" dimension becomes not supplementary but *foundational* to leadership success. Embedding these attributes into training, assessment, and promotion criteria will ensure that CET leadership is not only technically competent but also emotionally intelligent, ethically grounded, and resilient in the pursuit of educational transformation.

The most frequently cited managerial deficits, which establish the primary thematic structure of this section, are quantified in Table 3 below. These data points provide the necessary empirical context to demonstrate the critical gaps in competence.

Table 3

Key Competency Deficits Identified by Participants

Competency Area	Frequency of Mention (N=33)	Data Source
ICT/Digital Literacy	27	INT, FG
Financial Management	23	INT, FG, DOC
HR/Conflict Resolution	21	INT, FG
Psychosocial Support	19	INT, FG

5.4.1 Digital Literacy and ICT Competencies

Deficits in digital literacy and ICT competencies emerged as the most prominent gap across all participant groups, significantly compromising institutional accountability and efficiency. This deficiency spanned all dimensions of the KSAO framework: a lack of Knowledge (limited awareness of digital systems and reporting platforms), Skills (inability to navigate online tools or utilise ICT resources effectively), Attitudes (resistance to adopting new technologies), and Others (low adaptability and confidence). As indicated in Table 3, this theme was mentioned 27 times out of 25 coded references, making it the most recurrent competency challenge among CET CMs.

During the interviews, the absence of digital proficiency was repeatedly described as a barrier to effective communication, reporting, and performance monitoring. Participants openly acknowledged struggling with basic digital tasks, which in turn affected workflow and institutional compliance. One CM confessed candidly: "We are supposed to send weekly reports online, but some managers still rely on WhatsApp because they do not know how to format emails or attach files." As she spoke, she looked down and tapped her pen nervously

on the table a subtle gesture of embarrassment that illustrated the discomfort many felt when discussing their digital weaknesses.

Another participant echoed similar frustrations: “Our manager did not know how to use Zoom or Google Meet, so meetings were delayed or cancelled.” This statement was accompanied by laughter from several focus group members, but it quickly shifted to a tone of concern as they discussed how such gaps in ICT skills limited collaboration and access to departmental updates. The laughter, in this context, reflected discomfort rather than mockery, a collective recognition of a widespread institutional problem.

The deputy principal (academic) confirmed these challenges, noting that digital transformation had outpaced the readiness of many CMs: “The Department expects everything to move online procurement, reporting, and attendance—but our managers were never trained for that. They were appointed for their teaching experience, not their ICT skills.” Her tone was reflective and sympathetic, revealing both awareness and frustration at the policy–practice gap. She further explained that the lack of structured digital training perpetuated dependency on manual processes, often delaying institutional reporting deadlines and compromising the accuracy of data submitted to the DHET.

The focus groups revealed the same trend among lecturers. Many lecturers expressed that their managers’ limited ICT competence hindered innovation and adaptability at centre level. One lecturer remarked: “We want to use PowerPoint and e-learning platforms, but our manager insists on printed worksheets because she doesn’t trust technology. It’s demotivating.” He shrugged as he spoke, conveying resignation rather than anger, while other participants nodded in agreement. This sentiment underscored the link between managerial ICT deficits and staff morale, confirming the notion that technological leadership directly affects teaching culture.

The institutional records supported these perspectives. A review of operational reports across six learning centres revealed that only two had successfully submitted electronic reports consistently over a six-month period. The remaining centres either missed deadlines or submitted handwritten summaries later transcribed by district officers. This operational inefficiency correlates strongly with Shet et al.’s (2019) argument that ineffective ICT utilisation undermines institutional performance and reduces accountability. The data also

align with the DHET (2019) review on CET performance, which found that 68% of centres lacked functional ICT infrastructure or training support for managers.

More critically, this study identified a behavioural pattern of avoidance, where some managers consciously refrained from engaging with digital systems despite their availability. Several participants admitted to preferring manual record-keeping and face-to-face reporting because they perceived technology as "unreliable" or "complicated." A CM explained: "I don't trust online systems; once data disappears, you cannot recover it. At least with paper, you have proof." She spoke firmly, folding her arms across her chest, illustrating defensive body language. This posture captured the deeper psychological resistance to technological change observed throughout the study.

Such avoidance behaviours suggest that digital illiteracy within CET institutions is not merely a technical problem, but a cultural and psychological phenomenon rooted in fear of error, lack of confidence, and absence of institutional support. Focus group participants reinforced this observation, noting that some managers would delegate digital tasks to administrative assistants or younger lecturers instead of developing the competencies themselves. As one lecturer humorously noted: "Whenever there's an email to send or an online form to fill, our manager calls us 'the IT department' but we're teachers, not technicians." The group laughed, but the humour masked a serious issue of role ambiguity and competency avoidance, reinforcing the need for formal digital capacity development programmes.

The findings thus extend the work of Shet et al. (2019) by identifying cultural inertia as a compounding factor. In this study, the preference for manual over digital processes was not only a reflection of low skill levels but also an indication of institutional identity. Many managers associated digitalisation with bureaucratic intrusion rather than empowerment. This sentiment resonates with the literature on adult education leadership, where leaders often prioritise community relationships and personal contact over technology-mediated communication (Foley, 2020; Rule & Land, 2017).

The deputy principal's reflections also illuminated a generational divide. She observed that older managers, particularly those with more than 15 years in adult education, struggled more with digital adaptation than younger colleagues. "You can see the fear in their faces when you mention spreadsheets or online attendance. They would rather send a handwritten note than

log into an online portal." Her statement was accompanied by a light chuckle, but she quickly added that this issue should not be dismissed as incompetence but understood as a training gap in an evolving digital era.

To address this challenge, the study's proposed competency model integrates *Digital Literacy* as a cross-cutting competency underpinning all four KSAO domains:

- Knowledge: Understanding digital systems, online data management, and policy requirements for e-reporting.
- Skills: Proficiency in using ICT tools such as email, spreadsheets, virtual meeting platforms, and learning management systems.
- Attitude: Openness to technology, willingness to learn, and confidence to experiment with new systems.
- Others: Adaptability, self-efficacy, and the emotional resilience to overcome frustration when navigating digital environments.

This integrated model positions digital literacy not as a peripheral skill but as a core leadership competency essential for effective CET governance. The model also aligns with the OECD (2023) framework on educational leadership, which highlights digital competence and adaptability as critical 21st-century managerial attributes.

The study's qualitative evidence further suggested that enhancing digital literacy among CMs would produce secondary benefits, including improved communication flow, reduced duplication of administrative tasks, and greater data integrity. Focus group discussions indicated that once managers mastered basic ICT tools, they could better monitor attendance, communicate deadlines, and engage with learners through blended methods.

In summary, the digital literacy gap represents both a technological and cultural constraint within CET colleges. While infrastructure limitations contribute to the problem, the dominant issue lies in managers' low confidence and resistance to change. Building digital competency therefore requires more than technical training; it demands a cultural shift that normalises continuous learning, mentorship, and peer collaboration. This study thus recommends the institutionalisation of targeted digital upskilling programmes, mentoring systems pairing tech-savvy staff with managers, and recognition incentives for digital innovation at centre level.

Bridging this gap will not only improve administrative efficiency but also position CET colleges as adaptive, accountable, and digitally resilient institutions capable of fulfilling their developmental mandate in the post-school education landscape.

5.4.2 Human Resources and Financial Management Deficits

Human resources (HR) and financial management skills, core functional competencies in any managerial role, were found to be critically weak, directly violating the structured and measurable performance expected by competency-based theory. Data analysis showed that deficiencies prevalent in centre management functions included procurement errors, late reports, a lack of staff meeting minutes, with their frequency ranging between 21 and 23, as shown in Figure 5.5

A: Human Resources Management

The absence of structured human-resource systems emerged as a major leadership and management weakness across all CET centres examined. Participants consistently described environments characterised by poor accountability, unclear performance expectations, and a lack of constructive supervision. This theme intersected every dimension of the KSAO model. From a Knowledge perspective, most managers lacked familiarity with formal HR policies, performance-appraisal procedures, and conflict-resolution frameworks. In terms of Skills, many demonstrated limited capacity to conduct evaluations, provide feedback, or facilitate team cohesion. Attitudinally, there appeared to be avoidance of confrontation, while under "Others," low emotional intelligence and weak ethical assertiveness inhibited effective people management.

Participants' testimonies confirmed these deficits. One lecturer stated, with visible disappointment: "I have taught for three years and never had a formal performance review or classroom observation." She folded her arms and glanced away, signalling disengagement and disbelief. Another lecturer from a different centre recalled: "There was a fight between staff over teaching materials, and our manager did not intervene." His tone grew tense as he recounted the incident, revealing lingering frustration. A third participant added: "People come late or leave early without consequence. There's no culture of accountability because the manager avoids confrontation." This statement, accompanied by murmurs of agreement

within the focus group, encapsulated the widespread perception of managerial reluctance to enforce standards.

These views were reinforced by institutional documentation. A review of personnel files and administrative records showed no consistent evidence of signed performance-review forms, disciplinary-hearing minutes, or mentoring logs. Staff attendance registers revealed irregular monitoring, and handwritten notes substituted for formal evaluations. This finding corroborates the observations of Cantarino and de Araujo (2022), who emphasise that leadership competence rests on integrating technical HR knowledge with interpersonal skills to achieve organisational alignment. The simultaneous absence of both within CET centres thus reflects a profound breach of the competency-based theory principles that guide effective management practice.

During interviews, several CMs openly admitted discomfort with performance management (PM). One manager explained with an uneasy laugh: “It’s hard to tell someone they are underperforming when you see them every day. We are a small team; if I criticise them, the atmosphere changes.” Her nervous smile and fidgeting fingers revealed anxiety toward potential conflict.

Another manager rationalised non-intervention: “Our lecturers are adults. They know what they must do; I can’t treat them like schoolchildren.” This response exposes a misinterpretation of adult professionalism confusing autonomy with absence of accountability. It also demonstrates a misunderstanding of the Knowledge domain of human resource management (HRM), where managerial responsibility includes providing structured feedback and developmental support rather than passive oversight.

The deputy principal (academic) confirmed this systemic weakness, noting that most CMs were appointed from teaching backgrounds without prior management training: “They were excellent educators, but no one prepared them for supervision, performance appraisals, or labour relations. They often learn by crisis.” Her calm tone carried empathy but also disappointment. She added that the college had received repeated audit queries concerning missing HR records, indicating how micro-level competency gaps could escalate into institutional-level compliance failures.

Focus-group discussions with lecturers provided complementary insights. Many staff members expressed feeling undervalued and uncertain about performance expectations. One participant remarked: “Without feedback, you don’t know if you are improving or failing. You just keep working until someone complains.” Another nodded vigorously, adding: “Sometimes the only evaluation we get is when learners complain about marks. That’s when the manager reacts.” These comments demonstrate a reactive rather than proactive HR culture, where supervision occurs only in response to crises.

Thematic analysis further revealed that ineffective HR management had secondary consequences: diminished teamwork, eroded morale, and reduced learner support. In one centre, staff described how the absence of performance monitoring allowed chronic absenteeism to go unaddressed. A lecturer recalled: “One colleague was absent for weeks, and instead of addressing it, the manager just reshuffled classes.” Her raised eyebrows and incredulous tone captured the sense of injustice and frustration among peers. This aligns with the Skill and Attitude dimensions of the KSAO framework, specifically the inability to exercise assertiveness and fairness.

The findings also highlighted a misalignment between leadership attitude and institutional accountability. Many managers viewed HR procedures as bureaucratic burdens rather than strategic tools for professional development. Their reluctance stemmed partly from low self-efficacy, the psychological element under “Others.” Managers doubted their ability to handle confrontation effectively, often choosing avoidance as a coping strategy. This avoidance reinforced a culture of permissiveness, eroding trust and undermining collective responsibility. As one lecturer summarised poignantly: “We work in fear of gossip, not in confidence of guidance.”

From a competency-based perspective, this pattern demonstrates fragmentation across the KSAO dimensions. Knowledge gaps (lack of HR policy understanding) prevent accurate appraisal; Skill deficiencies (poor communication and documentation) inhibit corrective action; negative Attitudes (fear and avoidance) stifle accountability; and weak personal attributes under “Others” (low emotional resilience and ethical courage) perpetuate dysfunction. The result is a cycle of managerial paralysis that directly affects institutional performance and learner outcomes.

The study's proposed competency model therefore positions human resource management as an integrated competency domain requiring alignment of all four KSAO elements:

- Knowledge: Familiarity with HR policies, performance-management systems, labour-relations legislation, and organisational ethics.
- Skills: Capacity to conduct evaluations, manage conflict, document feedback, and coach staff constructively.
- Attitudes: Commitment to fairness, openness, and continuous improvement, rejecting avoidance behaviour.
- Others: Emotional intelligence, empathy, and moral courage to address underperformance while maintaining dignity and respect.

When these elements coexist, HRM becomes a developmental process rather than a punitive exercise. Conversely, their absence results in what this study observed as reactive leadership, inconsistent discipline, and declining motivation.

The deputy principal's reflection further illuminated the implications: "Without accountability, excellence is accidental. Managers must see HR as part of teaching leadership, not an administrative add-on." Her observation underscores the theoretical link between human-resource competence and organisational learning. In the CET context, effective HRM extends beyond paperwork to shaping professional culture and modelling ethical behaviour for both staff and learners.

To strengthen this area, the study recommends targeted capacity-building interventions focusing on performance-management training, coaching skills, and emotional-intelligence development. Integrating HR modules into the DHET's professional-development framework could equip CMs with both procedural and interpersonal competence. Regular peer-review sessions, mentorship by senior leaders, and workshops on conflict management would institutionalise accountability while supporting relational harmony.

In conclusion, the human-resource deficiencies documented in this research reflect a systemic rather than individual failure. Managers lack structured training, tools, and psychological preparedness to handle people-management responsibilities. The resulting vacuum undermines strategic alignment, performance culture, and organisational credibility. Aligning

HRM practices with the KSAO-based competency framework can transform CET centres from loosely coordinated teaching sites into cohesive, accountable learning communities that embody the professional standards envisaged by the DHET and the broader Post-School Education and Training system.

B: Financial Management

Deficiencies in financial management were among the most consistent findings across the centres and extended far beyond mere transactional errors. The evidence pointed to a more profound failure of strategic fiscal governance, reflecting managerial weaknesses in planning, oversight, and accountability. From a KSAO perspective, this deficiency encapsulated limited Knowledge of financial systems and regulations, weak Skills in budget management, poor Attitudes toward fiscal discipline, and inadequate "Other" attributes, including accountability and attention to detail. The result was a reactive financial culture where procurement delays, poor reporting, and misaligned spending undermined the effectiveness of the learning centres.

During interviews and focus groups, participants described these failures with visible frustration. One lecturer explained with a deep sigh and an exasperated tone: "We get our stationery late every year. This is because our centre never submits the procurement list on time." As she spoke, she threw her hands up slightly, shaking her head as if reliving the repeated cycle of disappointment. Her reaction conveyed not only annoyance but also helplessness in an environment where systemic inefficiency had become normalised.

Another participant added with visible concern: "Assessment was postponed because there were no exam pads. Learners waited two weeks for new stock." He frowned and leaned forward as he spoke, his voice rising in disbelief. His body language illustrated the direct impact of fiscal mismanagement on teaching and learning continuity. The delay of assessments, a seemingly minor administrative failure, had tangible emotional consequences for both educators and learners, eroding their motivation and confidence in institutional leadership.

These experiences were corroborated by documentary evidence. Budget review documents revealed glaring inconsistencies between planned allocations and actual expenditure, while several financial reports were either submitted late or missing entirely. In some cases,

expenditure was recorded without accompanying requisition forms or supporting documentation, highlighting weak internal controls. Such evidence confirmed a reactive financial culture, where actions were often taken to remedy crises rather than prevent them through strategic planning.

The inability of CMs to "engage with the budget" emerged as a critical pattern. As one manager admitted during the interviews: "We receive the budget summary from head office, but honestly, I don't understand how to interpret those spreadsheets. I just focus on keeping classes running." Her voice was hesitant, and she clasped her hands tightly together, reflecting discomfort and insecurity about her financial responsibilities. This admission captured the Knowledge and Skill deficiencies central to the theme. Many managers lacked financial literacy and therefore deferred critical decisions to administrative staff or ignored them altogether.

The deputy principal (academic) provided further insight into this issue, acknowledging that while financial accountability was expected of CMs, training on financial procedures had been minimal: "They are accountable on paper, but in reality, they were never trained in budgeting or reporting. So when mistakes happen, they feel paralysed rather than empowered." Her tone was empathetic but firm, underlining a systemic failure in leadership development rather than individual negligence.

Focus group discussions among lecturers revealed the human impact of financial mismanagement. Many participants expressed feelings of demotivation and embarrassment in front of learners when essential teaching materials were unavailable. One lecturer said, with visible frustration: "Learners start asking why we don't have chalk or why exams are delayed, and we have no answers. It makes us look unprofessional." She paused, her eyes downcast, before adding softly: "Sometimes I buy my own materials because I can't keep explaining excuses." This statement reflected a deeper moral and emotional burden, with educators internalising the consequences of managerial inefficiency in order to preserve their dignity and commitment to learners.

The emotional responses captured during these discussions—frustration, resignation, embarrassment, and fatigue—reveal that financial mismanagement is not an isolated administrative failure but a leadership crisis affecting morale and institutional credibility.

Such reactions correspond with the Attitude and "Others" dimensions of the KSAO framework. The prevailing attitude among managers was often passive or defensive, while personal attributes such as confidence, assertiveness, and conscientiousness were inconsistently demonstrated.

One CM attempted to rationalise the delays, saying with a strained smile: "The procurement process takes too long; sometimes we just wait for months. It's beyond my control." However, her shrug and dismissive tone suggested avoidance rather than proactive engagement. This echoes what Morandini et al. (2023) describe as "fiscal fatalism"—a behavioural tendency among public-sector managers to disengage from financial planning due to perceived systemic constraints. In this study, such disengagement led to reactive spending, missed deadlines, and poor audit outcomes.

Institutional documents further supported this pattern. A cross-analysis of procurement registers and financial statements from the six participating centres revealed inconsistent reconciliation between budget allocations and actual expenditures. In two cases, funds earmarked for infrastructure maintenance were reallocated to consumables without documented justification. This practice, although often rationalised as "addressing immediate needs," violates basic public finance management principles and erodes transparency.

These findings reinforce Morandini et al. (2023), who argue that the absence of strategic financial competence cripples an institution's ability to sustain operations and innovate. Without fiscal discipline and forward planning, CET centres remain trapped in cycles of crisis management, perpetually responding to shortages rather than anticipating them. The Knowledge and Skill components of financial competence, such as understanding budgets, interpreting reports, and forecasting needs, were consistently weak across participants. Equally concerning was the lack of Attitudinal ownership, where managers failed to see financial management as a strategic leadership function rather than an administrative burden.

From a competency-based theory perspective, effective financial management requires both technical knowledge and behavioural attributes, precisely the combination absent in most centres studied. The KSAO analysis applied to this theme highlights that:

- Knowledge involves understanding budgeting frameworks, financial policy, and reporting obligations under DHET guidelines.
- Skills involve the practical ability to interpret budget statements, forecast expenditures, and implement financial controls.
- Attitudes include commitment to transparency, fiscal prudence, and ethical stewardship.
- Others encompass personal accountability, attention to detail, and resilience in managing limited resources.

The deputy principal emphasised the importance of integrating these dimensions, remarking: "Finance is not about numbers, it's about trust. When managers delay reports or overspend, it sends a message that they are not in control. That's when confidence collapses." Her tone was serious, and she leaned forward as she spoke, underscoring the emotional weight of fiscal mismanagement on institutional credibility.

In several centres, financial weakness also created ripple effects across other operational areas. Procurement delays disrupted teaching schedules; unspent funds led to audit queries; and a lack of financial planning hindered the introduction of new learning programmes. Managers described feeling "overwhelmed" and "helpless," expressions that reflected both emotional exhaustion and cognitive overload. These reactions correspond with the "Others" element of the KSAO model, where emotional resilience and adaptability are required to navigate bureaucratic and fiscal complexity.

In conclusion, the financial management deficiencies identified in this study reveal more than technical errors; they signify a breakdown of strategic leadership rooted in gaps across all KSAO dimensions. The lack of financial literacy (Knowledge), budgeting proficiency (Skill), accountability orientation (Attitude), and ethical resilience (Others) collectively undermines CET centre effectiveness. The study's proposed competency model therefore positions financial governance as a non-negotiable core leadership competency, demanding targeted training in budgeting, procurement, and reporting. Building this capacity will not only strengthen institutional compliance but also restore confidence among lecturers and learners, enabling CET centres to fulfil their developmental mandate with transparency, foresight, and professional integrity.

5.4.3 Communication and Conflict Resolution Breakdowns

Breakdowns in communication and ineffective conflict management emerged as recurring impediments to the effective functioning of CET centres. These failures extended beyond logistical inefficiency; they eroded trust, delayed operations, and diminished staff morale. The findings point to a systemic lack of timeliness, transparency, and assertiveness in leadership communication. In the context of the competency-based theory, this pattern reflects observable gaps in both Skills (interpersonal communication and coordination) and Abilities/Attitudes (assertiveness, empathy, and accountability). The result is a working environment where confusion and avoidance replace clarity and collaboration.

Participants consistently described situations in which critical information reached them too late or not at all. One lecturer expressed irritation as she recounted: “Sometimes we get information about workshops after the date has passed. Communication from the manager is not always timely.” She exhaled sharply and shook her head; eyes widened in disbelief. The gesture reflected frustration mixed with resignation a sense that such failures had become routine rather than exceptional. Another lecturer added: “We were told about a community outreach two days before. There was no time to mobilise learners or prepare.” As he spoke, he threw up his hands and leaned back, signalling both disbelief and helplessness. The rest of the focus-group participants murmured in agreement, illustrating how the problem had affected multiple centres simultaneously.

The documentary analysis corroborated these accounts. The notice for the April 2023 regional training, intended for CMs, arrived at some centres only a day before the scheduled session. Email logs also revealed that messages circulated through inconsistent channels, sometimes through WhatsApp, sometimes verbally, and occasionally through paper memos. This disorganised communication structure created uncertainty about the authenticity and urgency of information. According to Škrinjarić (2022), leadership competence requires measurable, consistent behaviour; inconsistent communication therefore undermines both performance and accountability benchmarks central to competency-based theory.

The deputy principal (academic) highlighted this dysfunction as one of the most serious barriers to operational coordination. During the interview, she sighed audibly before remarking: “Our biggest weakness is not resources, it’s communication. Sometimes

information is available at college level, but it dies in transit to the centres. By the time we follow up, deadlines have passed." Her expression was weary but firm, conveying both frustration and awareness of the systemic nature of the issue. She explained that the communication gap often led to duplication of tasks, missed opportunities for staff development, and confusion during monitoring visits.

The study also revealed an emotional dimension to these breakdowns. Focus-group participants frequently used words such as *"ignored," "excluded,"* and *"left out"* when describing how poor communication affected them. One lecturer's voice trembled slightly as she said: "We only find out about decisions after they are implemented. It makes you feel invisible." Her eyes glistened with emotion, and the group fell silent, illustrating the deep psychological impact of exclusion from decision-making processes. Such experiences resonate with the Attitude and Others domains of the KSAO framework, where communication is not merely a skill but also a manifestation of respect, inclusion, and emotional intelligence.

Equally concerning was the consistent avoidance of conflict resolution by some CMs. Many participants described a culture of silence when disputes arose among staff. A lecturer recalled a vivid example: "There was a misunderstanding about teaching timetables. Two lecturers argued for days, and the manager just walked past them, pretending nothing was happening." She rolled her eyes and crossed her arms, her tone both incredulous and disappointed. Another lecturer echoed: "The manager says, 'You are adults, sort it out yourselves.' But sometimes we need mediation." These testimonies highlight a deficit in the Ability and Skill components of computer-based theory, specifically in assertiveness, empathy, and mediation competence.

The deputy principal confirmed these observations, noting that several grievance cases escalated unnecessarily due to delayed intervention: "Conflicts that could be resolved in a ten-minute conversation end up in formal complaints because no one addresses them early." Her tone was firm, and she gestured with her hands as if cutting across an imaginary barrier symbolising how poor communication had created divides within teams. She emphasised that this avoidance behaviour stemmed from limited managerial training in interpersonal communication and conflict management, leaving CMs ill-equipped to handle the relational demands of leadership.

Non-verbal observations during interviews reinforced this interpretation. Managers often displayed tense body language when discussing staff disputes—crossed arms, downward gazes, or nervous laughter. One manager admitted softly: "I don't like confrontation. I'd rather let things cool down than make them worse." She smiled faintly, but her eyes darted away, indicating discomfort. This avoidance attitude illustrates a defensive emotional pattern rather than strategic conflict management. While intended to preserve harmony, such behaviour inadvertently normalised dysfunction and bred resentment.

This leadership style contradicts the competency-based theory principle that competence must be *observable, repeatable,* and *outcome-driven*. Avoidance and inconsistency, being neither measurable nor constructive, weaken the organisation's behavioural standards. Cantarino and de Araujo (2022) argue that effective leadership competence requires the integration of technical knowledge with interpersonal skill. In this study, managers who possessed policy knowledge but lacked interpersonal acumen failed to translate awareness into practice—a clear example of fragmented competency.

The effects of communication and conflict-resolution breakdowns extended beyond staff relationships to directly influence learner outcomes. Several lecturers recounted instances of confusion about timetables, late distribution of assessment materials, and poorly coordinated community-outreach events. One participant described how such issues damaged the centre's reputation: "Learners start saying, 'These people don't know what they are doing.' It's embarrassing." He smiled awkwardly, attempting humour, but the bitterness in his tone revealed deeper disappointment. Others noted that learners occasionally missed important deadlines for registration or examinations due to poor information flow.

From a KSAO perspective, these findings illustrate interconnected weaknesses across all four domains:

- Knowledge: Lack of awareness of effective communication strategies, organisational hierarchy, and conflict-resolution protocols.
- Skills: Poor verbal, written, and digital communication; inability to mediate or facilitate dialogue among staff.
- Attitudes: Avoidance of confrontation, defensiveness, and limited empathy toward staff frustrations.

- Others: Low emotional intelligence, stress tolerance, and assertive confidence necessary to navigate interpersonal complexity.

The focus group discussions revealed that when communication improved, even temporarily, staff morale and collaboration immediately strengthened. One lecturer recalled a period when a newly appointed acting manager adopted an open-door policy: “For those few months, we felt part of something. Emails came on time, meetings were regular, and everyone knew what was happening.” She smiled broadly as she spoke, leaning forward enthusiastically. This positive shift demonstrates the transformative power of transparent communication, underscoring that relational competencies are as critical as technical ones in sustaining institutional performance.

The analysis also indicated that communication breakdowns are symptomatic of broader organisational challenges, hierarchical bureaucracy, unclear reporting lines, and over-centralised decision-making. Managers frequently reported uncertainty about which authority to contact for different issues. One manager explained: “Sometimes I wait for instruction from the district, but by the time it comes, it’s too late. Then they say I’m disorganised.” His tone was defensive, and he gestured with open palms, signalling exasperation. This reflects a systemic rather than purely individual failure, suggesting that leadership development must address both structural and interpersonal layers of competence.

In line with competency-based theory and the study’s proposed competency model, communication and conflict-resolution capabilities must be strengthened as core leadership competencies within CET management. The model positions these capabilities within all KSAO domains, linking policy awareness with emotional and behavioural execution. Training should therefore combine formal instruction in interpersonal communication and mediation with reflective practice that builds empathy, self-awareness, and confidence.

The findings also highlighted the importance of a feedback culture. Where communication channels were open, staff reported feeling valued and motivated; where silence prevailed, resentment and disengagement grew. Establishing a consistent communication rhythm, with weekly briefings, digital updates, and transparent follow-ups, could prevent the recurrence of delays and misunderstandings that currently hinder operational effectiveness.

In conclusion, the study found that communication breakdowns and avoidance of conflict resolution constitute a pervasive challenge undermining leadership effectiveness and institutional stability in CET centres. These issues manifest across all dimensions of the KSAO model, indicating that communication is not merely a technical function but a behavioural competency that sustains organisational trust. Unless CMs develop both the knowledge and emotional intelligence to communicate with clarity, consistency, and empathy, CET institutions will continue to experience avoidable disruptions, low morale, and weakened accountability. Strengthening communication competence is therefore central to restoring confidence, collaboration, and credibility within South Africa's community education system.

5.4.4 Section Summary

The study's demographic profile revealed a balanced, diverse participant cohort—CMs with an average of 10 years in adult education, predominantly postgraduate-qualified in teaching yet untrained in management, alongside lecturers and a deputy principal. This composition, spanning rural and urban KwaZulu-Natal contexts, exposed a widening chasm between educational credentials and managerial competence, validated through interviews, focus groups, and documentary analysis. Four interlocking themes, aligned with the research objectives, structured the findings. First, *Core Functional Deficiencies* dominated: digital literacy (cited 27 times), financial management (23), and human-resource/conflict resolution (21) undermined accountability and efficiency. Managers struggled with online reporting, budget forecasting, and performance reviews, often defaulting to manual processes or avoidance. Second, *Contextual Competency Gaps* highlighted the need for psychosocial support and emotional resilience in trauma-affected communities. Third, *Systemic Barriers,* such as absent induction, performance appraisal, and professional development, perpetuated reactive leadership. Finally, *Theoretical Synthesis* integrated these into a pragmatic competency-based theory framework using the KSAO model.

The "Others" dimension proved pivotal. Emotional intelligence, ethical integrity, adaptability, cultural competence, and psychological capital (self-efficacy, optimism, hope, resilience) transformed technical knowledge into sustained performance. The proposed CET competency model embeds digital, financial, and relational skills within the KSAO framework, prioritising "Others" cultivation through mentorship, wellness programmes, and

targeted training. Only by bridging this competency split can CET leadership translate lifelong-learning ideals into equitable, resilient practice, fulfilling South Africa's post-school mandate.

SECTION B

5.5 Contextual Competency Gaps: Psychosocial Support and Emotional Resilience

This section shifts the analysis from generic functional deficits (Section 5.4) to explore competencies unique to the challenging social and structural environment of the KwaZulu-Natal CET sector, revealing that the manager's role requires a critical competency in social responsiveness. This prioritisation of emotional and relational competence marks a significant academic divergence from earlier research (e.g., Aitchison & Land, 2019; Foley, 2020), which focused predominantly on structural deficits. The data revealed that the manager's role extends beyond administrative and technical tasks, requiring a critical competency in social responsiveness and the underlying psychological attributes necessary to sustain it.

A: Psychosocial and Learner Support Needs

The findings revealed that CMs in the CET sector function at the intersection of educational leadership and pervasive socio-economic adversity. Their role demands not only administrative oversight but also emotional intelligence and sensitivity to the psychosocial realities faced by learners. Yet, the study found a consistent inability to provide meaningful learner support, indicating a disconnection from the holistic dimensions of the competency-based theory, particularly the *Abilities* and *Other characteristics* components of the KSAO framework. These components include empathy, emotional resilience, adaptability, and crisis-response competence (Gibson, 2012; Henriques & Michalski, 2020). Their absence undermines both the humanistic ethos of CET and the practical effectiveness of the centres.

Participants vividly illustrated the extent of psychosocial challenges within learning environments and the managerial inadequacies in responding to them. One CM shared, with visible discomfort: "There are students who are hungry, stressed, or have dropped out due to pregnancy or abuse. The manager doesn't know how to respond to those things" (INT: CM9). As she spoke, she looked down and clasped her hands, her voice dropping to a near whisper,

conveying emotional exhaustion and helplessness. This moment captured the moral weight of operating within an education system where managerial training does not equip leaders to handle learners' emotional crises.

A similar sentiment emerged during focus-group discussions. One lecturer recounted: "One learner opened up about depression that caused by the abuse and suicidal thoughts. Our centre manager said we must refer such things to SAPS [the South African Police Service]" (FG3: Participant). The group collectively gasped, some shaking their heads, others looking down in silence. The tension in the room was palpable—a shared sense of disbelief that a learner's mental health crisis had been reduced to a policing issue. This incident underscores not only the absence of institutional referral protocols but also the broader deficit in psychosocial literacy among managers.

Document analysis supported these observations: none of the centres reviewed had formal learner-support policies, counsellor contact lists, or partnerships with social-service organisations. Minutes of management meetings rarely reflected discussions about learner welfare. This gap in governance demonstrates a profound neglect of the Knowledge and Ability elements of the KSAO framework, specifically knowledge of psychosocial referral procedures and the ability to offer empathetic initial responses when learners disclose distress.

The deputy principal (academic) acknowledged these limitations with visible concern: "Our managers are trained to manage timetables and budgets, not trauma. Yet, they deal daily with learners who come to class hungry or emotionally broken. The system expects them to perform miracles with no psychological training." Her tone was grave and reflective, her brow furrowed as she spoke. She highlighted the emotional toll this neglect places not only on learners but also on staff who feel ill-equipped to help. Her insight confirmed that psychosocial support is treated as peripheral rather than integral to CET leadership, even though it directly influences attendance, motivation, and learner retention.

The study observed that managers often resorted to avoidance behaviour, deflecting responsibility to external agencies such as the South African Police Service or social workers. This behaviour, while seemingly procedural, reflects a deeper emotional distancing, a coping mechanism for leaders overwhelmed by systemic poverty and limited resources. As one manager admitted candidly: "Sometimes we just don't know what to do. You hear a story

about abuse or hunger, and you feel powerless. I wish there was someone we could call for help." Her eyes watered slightly as she spoke, and her voice trembled. The emotional vulnerability in her statement illustrates that the deficit is not purely cognitive (lack of knowledge) but also psychological (lack of resilience and support).

From the lens of competency-based theory, this pattern violates the principle that competence must be *observable, consistent, and outcome-oriented*. Effective leadership in education requires the ability to demonstrate compassion and responsiveness in measurable ways through timely interventions, referrals, and follow-ups. Instead, the findings revealed a reactive and fragmented approach, where learners' psychosocial challenges were treated as peripheral disruptions rather than central educational concerns.

The KSAO analysis further clarifies these deficiencies:

- Knowledge: Managers lack understanding of counselling principles, mental-health indicators, and social-support networks. Few were familiar with referral systems or community partnerships that could provide assistance.
- Skills: There is minimal capacity to conduct empathetic conversations, de-escalate emotional crises, or provide guidance to distressed learners.
- Attitudes: Many managers adopt avoidance or procedural detachment, perceiving psychosocial issues as "not their job." This defensive stance stems from low confidence and fear of emotional overload.
- Others: Deficits in empathy, resilience, and emotional intelligence reduce the manager's capacity to foster an inclusive and caring institutional culture.

Focus-group data revealed that lecturers often became informal counsellors out of necessity. One lecturer shared, with tears welling up: "We sometimes buy food for learners or let them rest in class when they look exhausted. But it's draining because we also have our own struggles." Her emotional tone and the slight tremor in her voice underscored the compassion fatigue that educators face when systemic support is absent. The burden of care falls on individuals rather than institutional systems. Another lecturer added softly: "If learners cry, we comfort them, but there's no follow-up. It's like putting a plaster on a deep wound." The metaphor poignantly captured the futility of isolated acts of kindness in the absence of structured psychosocial frameworks.

The implications of this gap are severe. Learners dealing with trauma, poverty, or mental-health challenges are more likely to withdraw from education when they perceive that the institution is indifferent or incapable of providing support. Brookfield (2018) emphasises that adult learners' persistence depends as much on emotional safety as on academic facilitation. The absence of psychosocial interventions therefore contradicts the CET's mandate to provide inclusive, community-oriented education.

In the proposed competency model, psychosocial and learner-support competencies are positioned under both the Attitude and Others dimensions of KSAO. Managers must exhibit not only procedural knowledge of referral processes but also emotional literacy and relational sensitivity. These competencies ensure that leadership behaviour aligns with competency-based theory's emphasis on holistic, observable competence that integrates both technical and behavioural elements. Incorporating Social Literacy—the ability to understand and respond appropriately to learners' socio-economic and emotional contexts—becomes imperative.

The deputy principal articulated this need succinctly: "We talk about performance and policy, but we forget we're dealing with human beings. Leadership here must mean compassion with competence." Her statement captures the essence of transformative leadership in community education, one that merges operational efficiency with moral empathy.

Moving forward, the study recommends integrating psychosocial and learner-support training into managerial professional-development programmes. This could include basic counselling-skills workshops, crisis-intervention simulations, and partnerships with the Department of Social Development and local non-governmental organisations. Such measures would strengthen the *Knowledge* and *Skills* dimensions while fostering positive *Attitudes* and *Other characteristics* such as empathy, patience, and moral courage.

In conclusion, the absence of psychosocial support within CET centres represents a serious gap in managerial competence that transcends technical incapacity. It reflects a systemic disconnection from the human conditions underpinning education in disadvantaged communities. Managers' inability to engage with learners' emotional and social realities not only contravenes computer-based theory principles but also undermines the ethos of community-based learning. Embedding psychosocial literacy within the KSAO framework is

therefore essential to restoring compassion, dignity, and inclusivity in South Africa's CET sector, ensuring that leadership is defined not merely by administrative efficiency but by humanity and care.

B: The Competency of Emotional Resilience

The data revealed that emotional resilience is a critical yet underdeveloped competency among CET CMs, particularly given the intersection of structural inefficiencies, socio-economic hardship, and psychosocial complexity that define their work environment. Operating within such contexts requires more than administrative proficiency; it demands sustained psychological endurance, empathy, and the capacity to remain composed amidst chronic uncertainty. Within the KSAO framework, these characteristics fall under the "Other" domain, encompassing traits such as self-regulation, perseverance, adaptability, and emotional balance. From the lens of competency-based theory, emotional resilience must be understood not as a personality trait but as a measurable, context-specific behavioural competency essential for consistent performance under pressure.

The study found that emotional exhaustion and psychological strain were common among managers. Many participants described feeling overwhelmed by competing demands, limited resources, constant policy changes, learner crises, and staff conflicts, all without adequate institutional support. One CM sighed deeply as she admitted: "Sometimes I go home and cry because I feel like I've failed everyone—the learners, the staff, even myself" (INT: CM4). Her eyes filled with tears as she spoke, her shoulders slumping forward in visible fatigue. This statement reveals an internalised sense of inadequacy resulting from systemic pressures rather than personal incapacity. It also reflects what Gibson (2012) defines as *compassion fatigue,* a gradual depletion of emotional energy that compromises professional judgment and decision-making.

Other participants expressed similar emotional strain. One lecturer described how a manager's emotional breakdown affected the morale of the entire centre: "When the manager is stressed, everyone feels it. If she shouts or isolates herself, the staff start avoiding her. It becomes a tense environment" (FG2: Participant). As he spoke, his tone softened, and he clasped his hands together, suggesting empathy for the manager's visible distress. This statement illustrates how a leader's emotional regulation, or lack thereof, directly influences

organisational climate, echoing Henriques and Michalski's (2020) observation that emotionally unstable leadership environments breed anxiety and disengagement among subordinates.

These findings confirm that emotional resilience operates as a mediating competency, the foundation upon which knowledge, skills, and attitudes function effectively. Without resilience, technical or cognitive competence becomes unsustainable under stress. The study's earlier findings on HR management and conflict avoidance (Section 5.5) revealed that avoidance behaviours often stemmed not from ignorance of policy but from emotional fatigue and fear of confrontation. One manager admitted softly: "I know I'm supposed to call people out when they don't perform, but I just don't have the strength anymore. It feels easier to ignore it" (INT: CM6). Her tone was defeated, and she stared at the table, avoiding eye contact. This reaction reflects emotional depletion, not simply managerial negligence. The same emotional withdrawal observed in staff management was mirrored in the handling of learner trauma, where CMs deflected responsibility to external agencies (Section 5.4). This consistent behavioural pattern across domains demonstrates how low emotional resilience undermines accountability, communication, and leadership efficacy.

From a KSAO perspective, emotional competence and assertiveness emerged as key subcomponents of emotional resilience. Emotional competence refers to the ability to maintain composure, demonstrate empathy, and respond adaptively without internalising distress. Assertiveness, on the other hand, entails the capacity to enforce standards and policies firmly yet sensitively. The data indicated that both were lacking across the majority of participants. Managers oscillated between emotional detachment and over-identification with stressors, unable to maintain equilibrium. This imbalance resulted in reactive decision-making, inconsistent enforcement of rules, and deteriorating workplace relationships.

The deputy principal (academic) provided a broader interpretation of these patterns: "Our managers are emotionally burnt out. They deal with hunger, absenteeism, abuse, and deadlines, but they have no support system. Over time, even good people become numb." Her voice was calm but tinged with sadness, and she paused frequently, as though reflecting on colleagues she had seen deteriorate emotionally. Her insight reinforces the argument that emotional resilience is not merely an individual strength but a *systemic necessity,* a

competency that must be cultivated through institutional support mechanisms such as counselling, mentoring, and wellness programmes.

Non-verbal cues recorded during interviews also illuminated the emotional toll of leadership in CET contexts. Many managers spoke in subdued tones, avoided eye contact, or used nervous laughter when discussing emotionally charged situations. Some rubbed their temples or clasped their hands tightly, signalling stress and self-restraint. These embodied expressions of anxiety corroborated the verbal data, highlighting the psychosomatic manifestations of chronic occupational strain. They also affirmed what Morandini et al. (2023) describe as the *psychophysiological dimension of leadership competence*, where emotional regulation under adversity determines both performance quality and longevity in the role.

The implications of low emotional resilience are profound. When managers become emotionally overwhelmed, they often disengage from decision-making processes, leading to institutional paralysis. This phenomenon was evident in several centres where delayed communication, neglected learner-support initiatives, and unaddressed staff grievances coincided with visible emotional fatigue among leaders. One lecturer remarked: “Sometimes it feels like our manager has given up. She doesn’t call meetings anymore, and when she does, she looks tired and distracted” (FG1: Participant). The participant’s tone was sympathetic rather than critical, acknowledging that emotional depletion, not incompetence, was the underlying issue. Such fatigue not only compromises leadership effectiveness but also risks cascading into collective burnout, where entire teams adopt a culture of resignation.

In response, the study’s proposed competency model recognises *emotional resilience* as a core, non-negotiable managerial competency within the CET environment. It is positioned under the “Other” domain of the KSAO framework but intersects all other domains functionally. Specifically, resilience underpins:

- Knowledge, by enabling cognitive clarity and problem-solving under pressure.
- Skills, by maintaining interpersonal sensitivity during conflict.
- Attitudes, by preserving optimism, ethical integrity, and perseverance.
- Others, by sustaining emotional balance and modelling composure for staff and learners.

The study therefore supports the conclusion that emotional resilience is not a secondary attribute but a context-specific leadership competency. It determines whether knowledge and skills can be effectively applied in a resource-constrained, emotionally demanding environment. Moreover, resilience safeguards against professional burnout, a growing concern among managers who shoulder both educational and social burdens without structured psychological support.

The deputy principal further emphasised the need for institutional reform: “We invest in training people to manage systems, but we forget to train them to manage themselves.” Her reflective tone underscored the paradox of leadership in public education where cognitive capacity is prioritised over emotional endurance. Incorporating resilience-building into professional development is therefore not an optional enhancement but a strategic imperative.

Practical interventions could include wellness workshops, peer-support circles, and leadership coaching focusing on self-care, mindfulness, and stress management. Embedding reflective supervision, where managers discuss emotional challenges with mentors would help normalise emotional literacy and resilience as dimensions of professional competence. These measures would align with competency-based theory’s emphasis on developing *observable and sustainable* competencies.

In conclusion, the study demonstrated that emotional resilience functions as the psychological infrastructure of managerial competence in CET centres. Without it, knowledge and skills deteriorate under pressure, resulting in avoidance, inconsistency, and burnout. Conversely, emotionally resilient managers can navigate systemic adversity with composure, empathy, and ethical conviction—qualities essential for leading in contexts of scarcity and social vulnerability. Therefore, emotional resilience must be institutionalised as a measurable competency within the KSAO framework, ensuring that future CET leaders are not only technically capable but also emotionally equipped to sustain their vision in the face of persistent challenges.

5.6 Systematic and Structural Barriers

The analysis further highlighted unique competency gaps that reflected the challenging social and structural context of the KwaZulu-Natal CET sector, moving beyond generic

management theory. The data presented in Table 4 provide empirical evidence for the systemic critique of CBT by quantifying the institutional deficiencies.

Table 4

Systemic Barriers to Competency Development

Systemic Barrier	Frequency of Mention (N=33)	Data Source	Impact on Competency-Based Theory's Applicability
Lack of Formal Induction	27	INT, FG	Undermines the competency-based theory's assumption of systematic training.
Absence of Performance Review	23	FG	Prevents measurable tracking of competency growth.
Resource Scarcity	25	INT, FG, DOC	Limits the practical application of new competencies.
Informal Appointment/Duty	10	INT, FG	Creates role ambiguity, challenging competence definition.

The data presented in Table 4, particularly the near-unanimous reporting of a Lack of Formal Induction (N=33), provides empirical evidence for the systemic critique of competency-based theory. As argued in Chapter 3, competency-based theory is a developmental theory that presupposes a functional human resource development system (Meier & Seufert, 2022). This structural deficit creates a cycle of managerial unpreparedness and informal, 'ad-hoc' learning The competency deficits discussed are often the direct consequence of systematic and structural barriers within the CET sector. These institutional failures fundamentally undermine the effective development and application of the KSAOs required by competency-based theory.

5.6.1 Lack of Formal Induction: The Foundational Barrier

Among the most prominent structural weaknesses identified across the CET centres was the complete absence of a formal, structured induction programme for newly appointed CMs.

This institutional gap emerged as both a practical and psychological barrier to managerial competence. Most managers reported being thrust into leadership roles without preparation, mentorship, or access to orientation materials. The absence of induction violates the competency-based theory principle that effective performance depends on clear developmental pathways and observable learning processes (Meier & Seufert, 2022). Without a structured foundation, managers are forced to navigate their responsibilities through *trial and error*, perpetuating cycles of inconsistency and institutional memory loss.

Participants described their entry into managerial roles as abrupt and unsupported. One manager recalled with visible disbelief: "I was given the keys and told, 'You are the manager now.' There was no handover, no manual, no information about the budget or reporting systems" (INT: CM1). She leaned back in her chair, shook her head slowly, and laughed nervously, a gesture that combined irony with frustration. Her tone carried both humour and helplessness, revealing the absurdity of being entrusted with leadership responsibilities without orientation.

Another participant echoed this sentiment; his voice tinged with bitterness: "I was just told to report to the centre on Monday. There was no training or guideline on what to do" (INT: CM3). As he spoke, his brows furrowed, and he tapped his pen repeatedly on the table, a subtle sign of agitation. This statement reflected not only the absence of procedural knowledge but also the emotional unease that accompanies being placed in a position of authority without institutional scaffolding.

The sense of neglect was further reinforced by a lecturer in one of the focus groups, who stated with visible concern: "Up to today, I have never received a formal letter of appointment. I am just assuming the duties because there is no one else" (FG2: Participant). Her voice quivered slightly as she looked downward, her tone oscillating between resignation and disbelief. This account highlights not only administrative dysfunction but also the erosion of professional identity. Without documentation, legitimacy, or guidance, managers operate in an ambiguous professional space, technically in charge but psychologically uncertain.

These narratives collectively reveal how the absence of structured induction undermines both the *Knowledge* and *Ability* domains of the KSAO model. The managers lacked foundational knowledge about institutional systems such as budgeting, procurement, recordkeeping, and

reporting procedures. At the same time, the lack of induction deprived them of the ability to perform managerial tasks confidently and consistently. According to Dzhengiz and Niesten (2019), institutional induction is not merely an administrative formality, it is a mechanism for transferring organisational culture, expectations, and strategic intent. Its absence leads to fragmented practices and diminished accountability.

Document analysis confirmed these accounts. There were no standardised induction manuals, orientation checklists, or structured mentorship programmes for newly appointed managers in any of the participating centres. Furthermore, internal correspondence showed that even regional offices lacked guidelines for transitional leadership. As a result, new CMs inherited incomplete records, missing assets, and undocumented handovers. The deputy principal (academic) acknowledged this shortcoming candidly: "When a manager leaves, they take their knowledge with them. The next person starts from scratch. It's a cycle we can't seem to break." Her tone was calm yet weary, and she leaned forward slightly as if emphasising the gravity of the problem. This comment underscores how the lack of induction contributes to institutional amnesia, where each leadership change resets operational knowledge.

From a competency-based theory standpoint, the absence of structured induction represents a fundamental violation of the theory's developmental logic. Competency-based theory assumes a *progressive competence trajectory* that is, individuals acquire, refine, and demonstrate knowledge and skills through structured exposure and feedback. However, in the CET context, managers are not oriented to institutional norms or given opportunities for guided practice. Consequently, they begin their tenure in a reactive mode, learning only through errors and crises. This trial-and-error model erodes confidence, fosters inconsistency, and widens the gap between policy and practice.

Several participants described how this unstructured beginning affected their daily operations. One manager recounted: "In my first few months, I didn't even know where to submit reports or who to contact for financial queries. I just copied what the previous person did" (INT: CM5). She smiled faintly, then sighed a gesture of weary acceptance. Another admitted: "Every manager runs the centre differently because there's no standard way. We make our own rules" (FG1: Participant). This admission reveals the systemic consequence of absent induction *institutional inconsistency*. Without clear onboarding processes, each centre

develops its own informal operational culture, leading to discrepancies in reporting, accountability, and service delivery across districts.

The consequences of this deficiency extend beyond individual frustration to systemic dysfunction. The absence of induction compromises performance evaluation, as expectations are unclear. It weakens accountability structures, as managers cannot be held to standards they were never trained to meet. It also limits succession planning, as the lack of documented processes perpetuates dependence on individual memory rather than institutional systems. These outcomes confirm OECD (2023) findings that public-sector institutions without structured induction experience higher rates of leadership turnover, inconsistent compliance, and reduced organisational learning.

From a KSAO perspective, induction is foundational for building *Knowledge* (understanding institutional policies and systems), *Skills* (applying management procedures), *Attitudes* (developing professional confidence and responsibility), and *Other characteristics* (adaptability, problem-solving, and initiative). The current absence of induction deprives managers of the very foundation upon which competency-based theory presumes competencies to be built. Meier and Seufert (2022) argue that competency-based theory's prescriptive power depends on structured competence-development pathways; without these, competency frameworks remain theoretical and fail to guide performance.

Participants' emotional responses during interviews illustrated the psychological toll of this institutional neglect. Many spoke with frustration, fatigue, and even embarrassment when recalling their early days as managers. One participant described how she felt "like an impostor" because she lacked clarity about her role. Another stated with visible distress: "For months, I was scared of making mistakes. I kept asking myself, 'What if I'm doing this wrong?'" Her voice cracked as she recounted this, underscoring the emotional strain of leadership without orientation. These testimonies demonstrate that induction is not only an administrative requirement but also a psychosocial necessity; a process that provides reassurance, legitimacy, and belonging in new professional roles.

The lack of induction also perpetuated inequality between long-serving managers and newly appointed ones. Veterans relied on accumulated experience and informal networks, while newcomers struggled in isolation. This disparity undermines team cohesion and reinforces a

hierarchical culture of guarded knowledge. The deputy principal reflected on this challenge: "We expect managers to perform uniformly, but we don't give them the same starting point. Some learn from mentors; others are just thrown into the deep end." Her statement captures the institutional inconsistency that erodes fairness and professional development within the CET system.

The findings align with Mbatha (2023), who observed that CET CMs are often ill-prepared for the multifaceted responsibilities of leadership, particularly regarding examinations, budgeting, and asset management. The absence of induction thus acts as a *foundational barrier*—it prevents competence from being cultivated systematically and amplifies downstream failures in communication, HR management, and learner support. Without structured orientation, even capable managers operate reactively, perpetuating the very inefficiencies they are expected to resolve.

In conclusion, the absence of a formal induction programme represents one of the most critical structural barriers undermining CET leadership. It compromises every domain of the KSAO framework, from cognitive understanding to emotional confidence. It also renders the competency-based theory framework ineffective, stripping it of its prescriptive and developmental purpose. Establishing a mandatory, standardised induction process is therefore essential not only to familiarise new managers with administrative systems but also to embed a culture of learning, accountability, and professional confidence from the outset. Without this foundational step, the CET sector will continue to struggle with fragmented practices, role ambiguity, and the cyclical reproduction of managerial inadequacy.

5.6.2 Absence of Formal Accountability Mechanisms

While Section 5.7 addressed the managerial failure to execute a performance review (the behavioural deficit), this section focuses on the structural failure, the absence of the policy mechanism itself. Because the institutional structure does not formally demand and record PM, it removes the necessity for managers to acquire the required Skills in appraisal and feedback. The structural barrier lies in the lack of an officially mandated, measurable PM framework that is consistently applied. Because the institutional structure does not formally demand and record PM, it removes the necessity for managers to acquire the required skills

in appraisal and feedback or display the necessary ability (assertiveness) to enforce accountability.

As Škrinjarić (2022) notes, competency frameworks are intrinsically linked to measurable behaviours. By failing to institutionalise the tool for measurement, the system structurally prohibits the practical assessment and development of managerial competence, thereby undermining the core philosophy of competency-based theory..

5.6.3 Resource Accessibility and Training Constraints

Structural inequities in access to resources and professional development emerged as one of the most persistent barriers to competency development across CET centres. Participants consistently cited financial limitations, geographic isolation, and poor institutional coordination as significant obstacles to attending workshops, training sessions, and regional forums. These constraints render continuous professional learning inequitable and fragmented, with those in rural or remote locations being disproportionately disadvantaged. This systemic disparity undermines the Knowledge and Skill components of the KSAO model, where access to developmental opportunities is a prerequisite for competence acquisition. The findings confirm that structural neglect, rather than individual inability, largely accounts for the recurring managerial deficits observed throughout this study.

Several participants described their experiences of exclusion from training opportunities due to logistical and financial barriers. One manager from a remote centre explained, with visible frustration: “Every time there is training, it’s in Durban or Pietermaritzburg. For us, that means paying for transport, food, and sometimes accommodation. Most of us can’t afford that” (INT: CM8). Her tone was weary, and she gestured with both hands, as if measuring distance, conveying the emotional weight of recurring exclusion. Another manager from a rural area added: “We are always told about workshops, but they are scheduled during the week when we are teaching. No substitute is provided, so we just stay behind” (INT: CM2). He leaned forward, his brow furrowed, and tapped the table lightly to emphasise each word. These testimonies illustrate how the absence of logistical planning and equitable funding mechanisms systematically marginalises certain managers, depriving them of professional growth.

These accounts align with Walker and Shah (2021), who argue that fragmented and inequitable funding models for professional development compromise the credibility and inclusivity of public-sector leadership programmes. The same principle applies within the CET context, where training initiatives are inconsistently implemented and often centralised in urban areas. This urban bias not only limits participation but also perpetuates a skill divide between managers in well-resourced and under-resourced centres. Over time, this inequity creates a two-tiered management culture—one equipped with the necessary competencies and another reliant on improvisation and peer dependency.

The deputy principal (academic) acknowledged these disparities, noting that regional funding allocations rarely account for transport or accommodation costs: "The assumption is that everyone can attend, but in reality, rural managers are left out. Some try to join virtually, but the connectivity is poor." Her tone carried a mixture of empathy and resignation. She clasped her hands as she spoke, suggesting the emotional fatigue of repeatedly confronting systemic obstacles that remain unaddressed. This observation points to a structural flaw in the CET system's approach to capacity building: it assumes equal access to training without addressing the material realities of inequality.

Document analysis corroborated these accounts. Attendance registers for DHET workshops revealed low participation from centres located in peripheral districts. Similarly, budget reports showed no designated line items for training-related travel, subsistence, or digital access subsidies. As a result, managers either bore personal costs or opted out entirely. This structural exclusion violates the competency-based theory premise that professional competence develops through structured, supported learning experiences. Without equitable access to training, the system essentially withholds the very mechanisms required to develop and sustain competence.

In the absence of consistent formal training, participants described a heavy reliance on informal peer learning as their primary mode of professional development. One manager admitted with a self-deprecating smile: "Most of what I know, I learned from calling other managers and asking, 'How do you do this?'" (INT: CM5). Her laughter masked the underlying frustration of improvising through uncertainty. Another participant added: "We share templates and notes on WhatsApp groups. That's how we survive" (FG2: Participant). The group chuckled lightly, but the mood quickly shifted to seriousness as one lecturer

interjected: “That’s the problem; we’re surviving, not developing.” Her tone was sharp and reflective, encapsulating the paradox of dependence on informal learning; it provides immediate support but cannot substitute structured CBT.

This reliance on peer support demonstrated adaptive resilience but also exposed systemic neglect. From a KSAO perspective, informal learning may strengthen interpersonal Skills and foster collaboration under the “Others” domain (adaptability, initiative, and social intelligence). However, it fails to build the technical Knowledge required for policy compliance, budgeting, ICT integration, or data reporting. Consequently, management practices become reactive and inconsistent, driven by shared experience rather than institutional standards. As a result, decision-making becomes localised and idiosyncratic, with each centre developing its own informal norms rather than adhering to unified national procedures.

The deputy principal confirmed this pattern, noting that many managers were compelled to “self-train” through observation and repetition: “They learn by watching others or copying documents. It’s functional but not developmental. There’s no structured path from novice to expert.” Her tone was contemplative, and she sighed before continuing: “Without a clear progression framework, you cannot talk about competence, it’s just survival.” This statement reinforces the argument that competency development cannot occur in a vacuum; it requires sustained institutional investment, mentorship, and assessment mechanisms to ensure standardisation and accountability.

Non-verbal cues observed during focus-group discussions further highlighted the emotional consequences of this systemic neglect. Participants often expressed fatigue through long pauses, downward gazes, or sighs when discussing missed training opportunities. One participant rubbed her forehead repeatedly while explaining that she had applied for a professional development programme three times without response. Another shook his head slowly and muttered, “We are forgotten.” These gestures of resignation reveal the psychological dimension of structural exclusion—feelings of abandonment and professional stagnation that erode motivation and morale.

The cumulative effect of these barriers is the erosion of the developmental integrity of the CET system. The competency-based theory presupposes the existence of a functional human

resource development) system that supports continuous learning through structured opportunities, feedback, and evaluation. However, in this study, the absence of systemic support rendered competency-based theory's prescriptive value theoretical rather than practical. As managers lack equitable access to training, they also lack exposure to evolving policies, technologies, and pedagogical innovations. This stagnation perpetuates outdated practices, particularly in areas like financial management, digital reporting, and learner-support interventions—competencies that require formal instruction and reinforcement.

Participants repeatedly linked their inability to meet performance expectations to structural barriers rather than individual shortcomings. One manager summarised the situation poignantly: "You can't expect the same output when the inputs are different. Some of us are trying, but without training, you're bound to make mistakes" (INT: CM3). His tone was calm yet resolute, conveying both awareness and frustration. This perspective challenges deficit narratives that blame underperformance on personal incompetence. Instead, it situates managerial deficiencies within broader systemic inequities, an interpretation consistent with the OECD (2023) and Walker and Shah's (2021) findings on institutional capacity gaps in decentralised education systems.

From a theoretical standpoint, these findings affirm that structural inequities—financial, geographic, and technological—constitute macro-level inhibitors to the operationalisation of both competency-based theory and the KSAO framework. Without equitable access to training, the developmental loop between Knowledge acquisition, Skill application, Attitude refinement, and behavioural reinforcement remains incomplete. Moreover, the lack of consistent exposure to updated regulations and best practices prevents the CET system from achieving standardisation or institutional learning across centres.

In response, the proposed competency model calls for the institutionalisation of equitable, decentralised, and hybrid professional development systems. This model envisions digital training platforms complemented by regional workshops and mentorship networks to overcome distance and cost barriers. Subsidising data access, transport, and accommodation for rural managers would promote fairness and ensure that competency development is not contingent on geography. Furthermore, embedding mentorship as a structured component of leadership development could formalise the peer-support culture already present, transforming it from survival-based adaptation into an intentional learning strategy.

In conclusion, the persistent lack of resource accessibility and equitable training opportunities constitutes a structural failure that undermines the professionalisation of CET management. These barriers not only limit individual growth but also compromise institutional consistency and performance across regions. By addressing the geographic, financial, and technological inequalities that restrict training access, the CET system can actualise the competency-based theory's full potential, creating an environment where every manager, regardless of location, has the opportunity to develop, demonstrate, and sustain the KSAOs necessary for effective leadership and institutional excellence.

5.7 Theoretical and Empirical Contributions (Synthesis)

The collective findings necessitate formal engagement with the methodological tension between the chosen theoretical framework (CBT) and the real-world data, leading directly to theoretical and empirical contributions.

A: Adaptation of CBT through Pragmatism

CBT is traditionally rooted in a positivist-functionalist paradigm. This study addressed the tension between CBT and the complex, interpretive reality of CETs by adopting a pragmatic worldview. Pragmatism shifted the focus away from philosophical purity toward the utility and practical consequences of the research.

This approach allowed for a synthesis: CBT was used as a structural tool to classify required competencies (functionalist element), while qualitative data provided the interpretive depth to define the urgency and contextual relevance of less tangible competencies, such as emotional resilience (interpretive element). This demonstrates how a pragmatic worldview can bridge the gap between "hard" competencies (digital/financial skills) and "soft" competencies (emotional intelligence/relational trust).

B: Empirical Critique and New Knowledge

The study makes several empirical contributions by uncovering previously undocumented patterns and validating assumptions with systematic evidence.

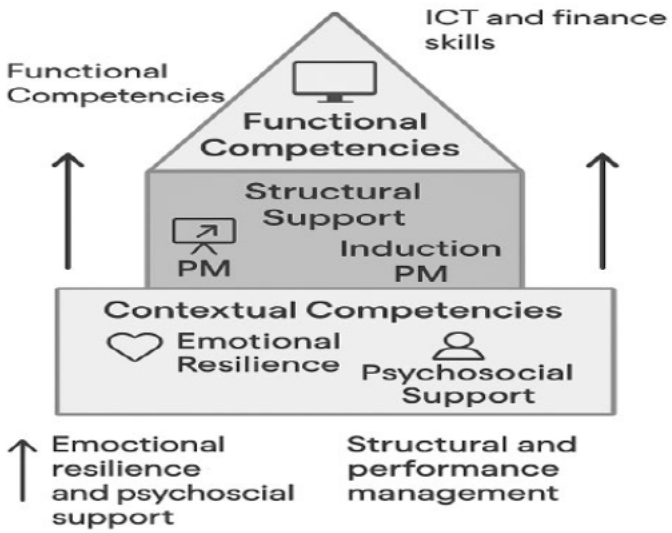
- Quantified prioritisation: The research empirically confirmed that digital literacy is the most frequently reported deficit among CET managers.
- Behavioural digital avoidance: The study identified a novel behavioural pattern: avoidance of digital systems despite their availability. This extends the literature by showing that resistance is not just a resource deficit but a deeper cultural/psychological barrier.
- Contextual competencies: The research established emotional resilience and psychosocial responsiveness as empirically validated, context-specific competencies essential for CET managers in KwaZulu-Natal. This underscores the need for a more holistic framework that integrates emotional intelligence and care-based leadership into the core competency profile.

Furthermore, the data supported critiques (e.g., Azimov, 2022; Foley, 2020) that CBT is often too rigid. In the context of resource-poor CETs, competencies may be identifiable, but without the necessary supportive conditions (Chapter 2: literature on supportive environment), their systematic development is impossible. The findings suggested that CBT must be adapted in contexts of neglect to acknowledge systemic barriers and focus on contextual competencies before developmental ones.

Below is Figure 3, the proposed context-specific competency model, which shows functional competencies (ICT, finance) at the base, protected by structural support (induction, PM), all resting on contextual competencies (emotional resilience, psychosocial support).

Figure 3

Proposed Context-Specific Competency Model



This model can be implemented through a staged development roadmap for CMs, following a bottom-up approach. It begins with building emotional resilience and establishing structural foundations. Subsequent stages focus on developing contextual competencies, providing structural support, and culminating in the mastery of functional competencies.

Table 5

The Implementation Stages of Competencies

Stage	Layer/Focus	Key Components	Development Activities	Expected Outcomes
1: Build Foundations (Emotional & Psychosocial Base)	Emotional Resilience and Psychosocial Support	- Personal emotional regulation - Building support networks	- Workshops on mindfulness, stress management, and resilience training (e.g., via apps like group sessions) - Peer mentoring circles or counselling access to foster psychosocial support - Self-assessments (e.g., emotional intelligence quizzes)	- Enhanced self-awareness and coping mechanisms - Reduced burnout risk; stronger team empathy
2: Establish Context (Interpersonal Layer)	Contextual Competencies	- Emotional Resilience - Psychosocial Support	- Role-playing scenarios for handling team conflicts or crises - Training in active listening and inclusive communication	- Improved interpersonal dynamics in the centre - Ability to create a supportive

Stage	Layer/Focus	Key Components	Development Activities	Expected Outcomes
			- Integration of stage 1 tools into daily routines (e.g., weekly check-ins)	environment for staff and clients
3: Provide Structure (Organisational Layer)	Structural Support Induction	- Induction processes - Project Management (PM)	- Onboarding simulations and PM agreements (e.g., basic PMDS - Mapping centre workflows with tools like Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) - Mentored projects to apply induction best practices	- Streamlined operations and smoother team integrations - Efficient resource allocation and timeline management
4: Achieve Proficiency (Technical Apex)	Functional Competencies	- ICT Skills (e.g., digital tools, data management) - Finance Skills (e.g., budgeting, reporting)	- Hands-on training in software (e.g., Microsoft Office 365, QuickBooks) - Case studies on financial planning for centres - Capstone projects combining all prior stages (e.g., a tech-enabled budget overhaul)	- Mastery of core operational tools. - Data-driven decision-making; sustainable centres' performance

The table above outlines a proposed implementation plan to enhance the competencies of CMs. Each phase builds upon the previous one, incorporating recommended activities, timelines, and expected outcomes. The progression is designed to ensure CMs first develop self-awareness and establish support systems before advancing to more complex operational skills. This table serves as a structured guide for competency development.

5.8 Section Summary

In KwaZulu-Natal CET college, CET managers face socio-economic adversity requiring social responsiveness, emotional, and relational skills to address learners' psychosocial crises (poverty, abuse, mental health). Using CBT and the KSAO framework, the findings exposed gaps in referral knowledge, empathetic skills, engagement attitudes, and resilience/empathy

traits. Managers deflected traumas while lecturers provided informal support, amid absent policies and compassion fatigue, undermining retention.

Emotional resilience is foundational yet lacking, causing burnout and avoidance amid resource scarcity. Systemic barriers, such as no induction, performance reviews, or equitable training, foster unpreparedness and inconsistency. Pragmatically adapting CBT, a layered model prioritises contextual competencies (resilience, support), structural aids (induction, reviews), and functional skills (ICT, finance) via staged training that progresses from mindfulness to technical mastery.

5.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter successfully moved from the presentation of raw data to its interpretation within the framework of CBT, extant literature, and the study's pragmatic worldview. The analysis revealed significant misalignments across core functional competencies (ICT, financial, HR) and identified critical contextual gaps related to psychosocial support. The chapter demonstrated that while CBT offers a strong tool for identifying competency gaps, its developmental assumptions are undermined by the resource-poor and structurally neglected CET environment. The literature comparison verified systemic issues, but through the data, identified new, critical areas of academic contribution related to emotional intelligence and behavioural digital avoidance. These findings directly addressed the research questions, providing the empirical foundation for actionable, contextually relevant recommendations. The study's methodological contribution lies in validating the qualitative-pragmatic design as a robust framework for research in structurally complex environments.

CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction and Synthesis Overview

This final chapter formally concludes the study on the competency development and leadership challenges facing CET CMs in KwaZulu-Natal. Drawing on the empirical data and analysis presented in Chapter 5, this chapter systematically synthesises the main findings to answer the research questions first posed in Chapter 1. The chapter then presents practical, actionable recommendations for the DHET and CET College management. It concludes by discussing the study's limitations and proposing avenues for future research.

6.2 Synthesis of Findings

This section provides conclusive answers to the study's core research questions by synthesising evidence from the qualitative data and the competency-based theory framework.

6.2.1 *Research Question 1: What are the core competencies required for effective management of learning centres?*

The study conclusively identified five foundational competencies as essential for the effective management of CET learning centres. These competencies were not only empirically validated through the data but also aligned with the whole domain of KSAOs—Knowledge, Skills, Abilities, and Other characteristics central to the CBT framework.

ICT literacy emerged as a critical requirement, underpinning digital reporting, communication, and accountability within contemporary administrative systems. The absence of this competency often led to the delegation of digital tasks and reliance on manual processes, compromising both efficiency and data integrity.

Communication was identified as a multidimensional competency, encompassing both technical writing skills and behavioural attributes. Effective communication in this context requires timely, transparent, and non-selective information sharing, which is vital for fostering trust and coherence within the centre.

Human resource management represented another core competency, involving structured staff evaluation, performance monitoring, and conflict resolution. The study revealed that deficits in this area were often behavioural rather than technical, with avoidance tendencies undermining staff accountability and morale.

Financial literacy was indispensable for navigating the complexities of budgeting, procurement, and resource allocation. Managers must possess not only the requisite knowledge but also the adaptive skills to apply financial principles strategically in resource-constrained environments.

Finally, psychosocial and pedagogical support was identified as a foundational competency, requiring emotional intelligence and the capacity to respond to the multifaceted needs of learners, many of whom faced challenges such as poverty, abuse, and mental health concerns. This competency is essential for cultivating inclusive and supportive learning environments.

These competencies, confirmed through qualitative data, served as the benchmark against which current managerial performance was assessed. Their absence or partial development contributed to the systemic misalignment between institutional expectations and managerial practice, reinforcing the need for targeted, competency-based interventions.

6.2.2 *Research Question 2: How do current CMs' competencies align with these requirements?*

The evidence presented in this study revealed a significant and systemic misalignment between the competencies required of CET CMs and the capabilities they currently exhibited. This misalignment manifested across functional, behavioural, and relational domains, each contributing to a broader pattern of reactive rather than strategic leadership.

Functionally, managers demonstrated critical deficits in ICT literacy, HRM, and financial planning. As detailed in Chapter 5 (Table 3), digital literacy emerged as the most frequently cited weakness. This gap often resulted in the delegation of digital tasks to others and a continued reliance on manual, outdated systems and practices that compromised both operational efficiency and data integrity.

Behaviourally, the study identified a pattern of avoidance in areas related to HRM and conflict resolution. These were not merely gaps in technical knowledge but reflected deeper psychosocial challenges. Managers often failed to translate policy knowledge into consistent, observable behaviours, particularly in situations requiring assertiveness or accountability. This behavioural misalignment undermined staff morale and institutional coherence, highlighting a disconnect between formal expectations and lived managerial practice.

Despite these challenges, the study also uncovered notable relational strengths. Many managers demonstrated strong community engagement and peer support capabilities, which served as informal buffers against technical and structural shortcomings. However, while these relational competencies are valuable, they cannot substitute for formal managerial proficiency. Their effectiveness is limited when not embedded within a broader framework of institutional competence and accountability.

In conclusion, the current competency profile of many CET CMs remains incomplete and misaligned with institutional expectations. This leaves managers equipped to respond to challenges reactively rather than strategically, thereby constraining the transformative potential of the CET sector. Addressing this misalignment requires not only targeted training interventions but also systemic reforms that align managerial development with the complex realities of the CET environment.

6.2.3 *Research Question 3: Which training and development programmes are most effective?*

The study concluded that practical training for CET CMs must be multi-faceted and contextually responsive, addressing both foundational skills deficits and the structural barriers inherent in the CET environment. To achieve meaningful and sustainable professional development, training programmes should be designed with several critical components.

Foremost among these is the implementation of a mandatory structured induction programme, which serves to establish clear expectations, introduce institutional systems, and mitigate the current reliance on informal, trial-and-error learning approaches. As evidenced in Chapter 5

(Table 4), the absence of such induction contributes significantly to managerial uncertainty and inefficiency.

In addition, CBT modules should be developed to target specific areas of need, particularly ICT and digital literacy, as well as financial governance. These modules must be measurable and practice-oriented, focusing on the progressive acquisition of observable skills rather than abstract theoretical knowledge.

Equally vital is the inclusion of emotional intelligence leadership development, which addresses the psychosocial dimensions of management. Training in assertiveness, conflict mediation, and emotional labour is essential to equip managers with the behavioural confidence required to navigate complex interpersonal dynamics involving both staff and learners.

Finally, the formalisation of mentorship and peer learning clusters is recommended. These structures would institutionalise the informal support networks that managers already rely upon, transforming them into cost-effective, continuous mechanisms for professional growth and collaborative problem-solving. By embedding these elements into a coherent training strategy, the CET sector can begin to cultivate a cadre of managers who are not only technically competent but also emotionally resilient and contextually attuned.

6.3 Recommendations

The following recommendations are derived directly from the empirical findings of this study, aiming to close the identified competency gaps and structural barriers.

6.3.1 Recommendations for Policymakers (DHET and Government)

Table 6

Recommendations for Policymakers (DHET and Government)

Area	Recommendation	Justification (Based on Chapter 5 Findings)
I. Formal Induction	**Mandate and fund a standardised, structured**	The near-unanimous lack of induction (**Table 4**) was the primary cause of role ambiguity and

	induction programme for all newly appointed CET CMs.	dysfunctional 'trial-and-error' leadership, compromising foundational CBT development.
II. CBT	**Develop and implement sectoral CBT modules** focused on ICT, HRM, and Financial Governance, with clear, measurable performance indicators.	The evidence showed generic training failed to address the specific, quantified deficits in **ICT Literacy** and **Financial Planning** (**Table 3**), which are central to CBT's KSAO model.
III. Access and Equity	**Ring-fence funding for training accessibility**, specifically covering travel and accommodation costs for managers in rural locations.	Findings indicated that distance and cost were significant barriers preventing managers in rural centres from accessing professional development opportunities, perpetuating inequity.

6.3.2 Recommendations for CET College Management

Table 7

Recommendations for CET College Management

Area	Recommendation	Justification (Based on Chapter 5 Findings)
I. Digital Transformation	**Implement a strategic digital transformation strategy** by introducing mandatory cloud-based reporting systems and associated management training.	The findings of **behavioural digital avoidance** showed that digital systems were often available but unused. Mandatory training paired with new systems is required to collapse manual processes and ensure administrative efficiency.
II. Performance Management	**Revise and implement a regular, structured performance appraisal framework** that includes staff feedback, observation, and developmental critiques.	The study revealed managers avoided staff assessment and conflict (HR deficit). A formalised framework is essential to enforce the culture of accountability and enable the required developmental feedback that is foundational to CBT.
III. Peer Learning	**Formalise mentorship and Community-of-Practice (CoP) learning** between experienced and new CMs.	Managers already relied on informal peer support (relational strength). Formalising these networks is a cost-effective strategy for continuous professional development and knowledge sharing to close competency gaps.

6.3.3 Recommendations for Individual CMs

In light of the identified competency gaps, individual CMs are encouraged to adopt a proactive stance toward their professional development. This includes actively seeking out short, targeted training interventions in areas such as ICT literacy and financial management. These focused efforts should be complemented by the pursuit of advanced qualifications in educational leadership, which would not only enhance managerial capacity but also contribute to the broader professionalisation of the CET sector.

Equally important is the cultivation of self-reflexive practice. Managers should consider instituting structured reflective routines such as maintaining a leadership journal or engaging in deliberate reflection following incidents of conflict or interpersonal tension. These practices are instrumental in fostering greater self-awareness and assertiveness, particularly in addressing psychosocial and human resource-related challenges. By embedding reflection into their daily leadership activities, managers can begin to confront and overcome the tendency to avoid difficult situations, thereby strengthening their emotional resilience and relational competence.

6.4 Limitations of the Study

Although the study successfully met its objectives through a rigorous qualitative methodology, several limitations must be acknowledged. These limitations do not undermine the value of the findings but rather contextualise their scope and applicability.

Firstly, the research was confined to a single CET college within KwaZulu-Natal. This deliberate narrowing of focus, consistent with the case study design, enabled the generation of rich, contextually embedded insights. However, it also limits the generalisability of the findings to CET colleges in other provinces, particularly those operating under different geographical, socio-economic, or institutional conditions.

Secondly, the data collection relied predominantly on self-reported accounts obtained through interviews and focus groups. While these methods are well-suited to exploring lived experiences and perceptions, they are inherently susceptible to social desirability bias.

Participants may have unintentionally overstated positive behaviours or understated challenges, which could influence the interpretation of managerial competencies and institutional dynamics.

Thirdly, the study was conducted within a limited timeframe and under resource constraints. These practical limitations precluded a longitudinal approach, which would have allowed for the tracking of management competency development over an extended period. As a result, the study offers a snapshot rather than a temporal progression of leadership practices and institutional change.

6.5 Recommendations for Future Research

Building on the findings and limitations outlined above, several avenues for future scholarly inquiry are proposed.

A large-scale, quantitative comparative study across multiple provinces could test the generalisability of the managerial competency deficits identified in this KwaZulu-Natal case. Such research would provide a broader empirical foundation for policy and practice.

Additionally, a longitudinal investigation into the impact of formalised mentorship and peer learning programmes is recommended. This would enable researchers to assess whether such interventions lead to measurable improvements in centre efficiency, including operational metrics such as procurement timelines and student retention rates.

Further research is also needed to explore the socio-cultural dimensions of digital transformation within the CET sector. Specifically, an in-depth examination of behavioural digital avoidance among CMs and staff could inform the development of targeted interventions that go beyond technical training to address underlying attitudes and systemic barriers.

Finally, a policy-focused analysis is warranted to interrogate the legislative and funding alignment between the DHET and the CET sector. Such research should critically assess whether the existing policy framework, particularly as outlined in Chapter 2, creates structural impediments to the development of professional competencies among CET leadership.

6.6 Concluding Statement

This research project successfully utilised a pragmatic worldview to bridge the gap between the theoretical rigour of competency-based theory and the complex realities of the KwaZulu-Natal CET sector. By systematically identifying critical managerial deficits (ICT, HR, Finance) and quantifying the systemic barriers (lack of induction), the study has moved beyond description to provide an evidence-based, actionable framework. The findings confirmed that enhancing CET leadership is not solely a matter of skills provision, but a systemic imperative demanding strategic policy intervention. The successful implementation of the recommendations provided herein will significantly contribute to standardising practice, fostering professional competence, and ultimately elevating the CET sector's capacity to deliver on its national mandate for adult education and community empowerment.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

LIKERT-TYPE SCALE QUESTIONNAIRE



Interview Guide for Centre Managers, Focus Group and DP Academic Services

Dear Centre Managers

I am currently busy with a master's degree in education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. My research explores the leadership development of community education and training centre managers in KwaZulu-Natal. I would appreciate it if you could complete the questionnaire below. The interview will last for approximately 45 to 60 minutes. The questionnaire is completed anonymously, and all information will be handled with the utmost confidentiality. Your time and cooperation are sincerely appreciated.

SECTION A:

BIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. ***Gender***

Male	
Female	

2. **Age**

18-25 years	26-30 years	31-35 years	35-40 years	41-44 years	46+ years

3. **Education level (you may tick more than one)**

Matric	Certificate	Diploma	Bachelors/Honours	Masters	PhD

4. **Experience**

0-5years	6-10 years	11-15 years	16-20 years	21+ years

SECTION B
Interview schedule

THEME 1: Essential Core Competencies for CET Centre Manager
• From your experience, what are the key competencies you find essential for successfully managing a CET Centre? • Could you describe how these core competencies play a role in the day-to-day operations and longer-term success of your centre? • How do these competencies differ from those required in other management roles, if at all?
THEME 2: Self-Perception of Competency Levels Among CET Centre Managers
• How would you rate your own level of proficiency in each of the core competencies you've identified as essential? • Can you provide examples or scenarios where you have successfully applied these competencies in your role as a CET Centre Manager? • Are there any competencies you feel you could further develop, and if so, how do you plan to enhance these areas?
THEME 3: Identified Skill Gaps in CET Centre Management
• What specific leadership skills do you feel require further development within your role or within your team of managers? • In what ways do these skill gaps impact the functionality or performance of the CET Centre you manage? • Have you received any feedback, either formal or informal, from peers, staff, or stakeholders that support these identified areas for development?
THEME 4: Strategies for Competency-Based Training Programme Development
• What strategies or approaches have you seen to be most effective in delivering leadership development programmes for managers like yourself? • Can you share any experiences or observations about the methods used in past training programmes and their outcomes? • In your opinion, what elements are critical to include in a competency-based training programme, and why do you believe they contribute to its effectiveness?

Appendix 2

Focus Group Guiding Questions for Lecturers

THEME 1: Observing Effective Centre Management

- From your perspective as lecturers, what are some of the key characteristics or actions of centre managers that you believe contribute to a well-functioning and effective learning environment? (Focus on observable behaviours and skills).

- Can you share examples of when a centre manager's actions or skills had a positive impact on your work, the learners, or the centre as a whole? (Elicit concrete examples).

- What kind of leadership from the centre manager helps you to be most effective in your role as a lecturer? (Focus on leadership competencies).

THEME 2: Perceived Strengths and Areas for Development in Centre Management

- Based on your observations, what are some of the key strengths you see in the management of this centre or other CET centres you are familiar with?

- Are there any areas where you feel centre managers in general could benefit from further development or support?" (Focus on perceived skill gaps from a different viewpoint).

- Have you noticed any specific challenges that centre managers face that might indicate areas where different competencies are needed?

THEME 3: The Impact of Centre Management on Teaching and Learning

- How does the leadership and management of the centre directly affect your ability to deliver quality teaching and learning? (Link managerial competencies to educational outcomes).
- Are there specific managerial skills or approaches that create a more supportive or challenging learning environment for students?
- How effectively do you feel the centre management communicates the vision and goals of the centre? (Relates to strategic leadership).

THEME 4: Suggestions for Supporting Centre Manager Development

- From your perspective, what kind of training or support would be most beneficial for centre managers to enhance their effectiveness? (Explore potential training strategies).
- Are there any specific competencies you believe should be prioritized in leadership development programmes for centre managers?
- How could communication and collaboration between lecturers and centre management be improved to support effective centre operations and leadership? (Consider relational aspects).

Appendix 3

Interview for Deputy Principal Academic Services

1. ***Gender***

Male	
Female	

2. ***Age***

18-25 years	26-30 years	31-35 years	35-40 years	41-44 years	46+ years

3. ***Education level (you may tick more than one)***

Matric	Certificate	Diploma	Bachelors/Honours	Masters	PhD

4. ***Experience***

0-5years	6-10 years	11-15 years	16-20 years	21+ years

Theme 1: Essential Core Competencies for CET Centre Manager

- From your perspective as a supervisor, what do you consider the most critical core competencies for a CET Centre Manager to be effective in their role?
- How do you evaluate whether a Centre Manager possesses the necessary competencies for managing a CET Centre?
- Are there any specific competencies that are unique or particularly important in the CET context as compared to other education sectors?

Theme 2: Self-Perception of Competency Levels Among CET Centre Managers

- How accurately do you think CET Centre Managers assess their own competencies and areas of strength?
- Have you observed any common patterns or discrepancies between Centre Managers' self-perception and their actual performance?
- In your opinion, what factors influence how CET Centre Managers perceive their own competency levels?

Theme 3: Identified Skill Gaps in CET Centre Management

- Based on your oversight, what are the most common competency gaps among CET Centre Managers?
- How do these skill gaps impact the overall effectiveness of CET Centre operations?
- Can you share any specific examples where a lack of certain competencies has led to challenges or missed opportunities?

Theme 4: Strategies for Competency-Based Training Programme Development

- What strategies would you recommend for designing a training programme that effectively addresses the skill gaps of CET Centre Managers?
- How can training be tailored to meet both the institutional goals and the professional development needs of individual Centre Managers?
- What role should you or the Academic Services division play in supporting the implementation of competency-based training programmes?

Appendix 4

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2196

19 November 2025

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I certify that I have edited the master's dissertation

Competency Development and Leadership Challenges Among Community Education and Training (CET) Centre Managers in KwaZulu-Natal

by

Mhlumiseni Richman Mbatha

However, the correction of all errors/missing information remains the responsibility of the author.

[redacted]

G.C. HANNANT (BA HED)

Appendix 5

higher education & training
Department:
Higher Education and Training
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

16 November 2024

Dear Mr Mbatha

RE Permision to conduct research

1. Your letter dated 16 November 2024 has reference
2. In the above-mentioned letter, you have requested permission to conduct research in the KwaZulu-Natal CET College on the topic: **'COMPETENCY DEVELOPMENT AND LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES AMONG COMMUNITY EDUCATION AND TRAINING (CET) CENTRE MANAGERS IN KWAZULU-NATAL'.**
3. Permission is granted to you to conduct the research, as requested.
4. On behalf of the KwaZulu-Natal Community Education and Training (CET) College, I wish you everything of the best with your studies.

[redacted]
Dr BSV Mthethwa, PhD
Principal: KZN CET College
Date: 16/11/2024

DEPARTMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING
2024 -11- 16
KWAZULU-NATAL COMMUNITY EDUCATION AND TRAINING COLLEGE