



Exploring the management approaches of project managers in corporate-funded educational interventions

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ABSTRACT

Corporate Social Investment (CSI) has become a pivotal strategy for tackling South Africa's enduring educational challenges, especially in foundational literacy and numeracy. While substantial corporate funding supports numerous educational interventions, concerns about their effectiveness and sustainability persist. This study employed a qualitative, interpretivist approach to investigate the management practices of project managers working in non-profit organisations (NPOs) implementing corporate-funded educational programmes in Limpopo and Mpumalanga. Through semi-structured interviews with ten project managers, the research analysed themes in planning, stakeholder engagement, resource management, and monitoring and evaluation. Results revealed that project managers contend with contextual constraints such as limited and fragmented resources, systemic inequalities, and complex coordination needs, but also demonstrate adaptive leadership, innovation, and collaborative problem-solving to sustain interventions. The study highlighted that effective stakeholder engagement, responsiveness to local context, and transparent monitoring are key determinants of success. Contributions included identifying best practices in project management and advancing strategies to enhance the sustainability and impact of CSI-funded educational programmes in resource-constrained environments. Recommendations centred on strengthening stakeholder alignment, investing in institutional capacity, and promoting evidence-based policy support to foster inclusive and lasting educational development.

Keywords: Adaptive leadership; Corporate Social Investment (CSI); educational interventions; monitoring and evaluation; non-profit organisations (NPOs); project management; stakeholder engagement; sustainability

DECLARATION

I, Nobulungisa Sweetness Batala, hereby declare that this mini-dissertation, titled "Exploring the management approaches of project managers in corporate-funded educational interventions," submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Master of Business Administration (MBA) in the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences at the North-West University, is my original work and has not been submitted to any other institution of higher education for any qualification. All the sources used in this study have been acknowledged and cited accordingly in the text and listed in the reference list.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

B-BBEE:	Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment
CSI:	Corporate Social Investment
CSTL:	Care and Support for Teaching and Learning
CSR:	Corporate Social Responsibility
DBE:	Department of Basic Education
DoE:	Department of Education
ECD:	Early Childhood Development
HRBA:	Human Rights-Based Approach
M&E:	Monitoring and Evaluation
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPO:	Non-Profit Organisation
PIRLS:	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
POPIA:	Protection of Personal Information Act
TIMSS:	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study

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CERTIFICATE: LANGUAGE EDITING

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This study explored the strategies employed by NPO project managers in implementing corporate-funded educational interventions in South Africa. The research focused on their experiences, challenges, and innovative solutions to provide insights into practices that enhance the effectiveness of interventions.

NPO project managers oversee the entire project lifecycle, including planning, implementation, and evaluation. Key responsibilities include resource allocation, team organisation, budget management, risk analysis, progress monitoring, and stakeholder communication (Beretta, 2012). In settings with limited resources, managers must optimise operations and align strategic planning with the organisation's mission to achieve sustainable, long-term impact (Nonprofit Learning Lab, 2024).

Literacy and numeracy are foundational for individual and societal development. However, many South African learners fail to meet basic achievement benchmarks, despite constitutional guarantees (Republic of South Africa, 1996). International assessments highlight these challenges noted in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) of 2016, reporting approximately 81% of Grade 4 learners being unable to read for meaning (Spaull, 2021), while the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) in 2019 identified further deficits in mathematical achievement (Spaull, 2021). Targeted interventions have the potential to improve learner outcomes (Combrinck *et al.*, 2017:21).

Corporate-funded educational interventions, often delivered through partnerships among corporations, NPOs and government, seek to address these gaps and promote equitable learning opportunities (Trialogue Knowledge Hub, 2024). The effectiveness of such initiatives depends on the strategies adopted by project managers, particularly in terms of implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. However, empirical research examining the specific role of NPO project managers in resource-constrained environments remains limited (Spaull & Taylor, 2022:3).

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite substantial investment in education, South Africa continues to face persistent challenges in learner outcomes, particularly with respect to foundational literacy and numeracy (Spaull & Pretorius, 2019:14). The PIRLS (2021) indicates that approximately 81% of Grade 4 learners in 2021 could not read for meaning, which shows significant barriers to foundational literacy acquisition (Spaull, 2021:1). These deficiencies in academic performance have far-reaching consequences for learners' educational trajectories, that is, the long-term pathways of their academic progress and future life opportunities shaped by early literacy and numeracy skills (Pirjo et al. 2019:19).

CSI programmes, which are implemented through partnerships between corporations and NPOs, have emerged as central mechanisms for addressing educational gaps in South Africa (Datatec, 2022). The National Development Plan (NDP) highlights the importance of collaboration between government, business, and civil society to enhance educational outcomes (Volmink & Van der Elst, 2023:14). However, the actual effectiveness of these interventions remains limited by competing priorities and resource constraints. NPOs are often required to balance the demands of funders with the needs of the communities they serve, in contexts where resources are scarce (Leach, 2018:21)

This study, therefore, investigates the effectiveness of educational interventions delivered by NPOs and funded by corporate partners, with a specific focus on their contribution to addressing foundational skills gaps. The analysis of project management strategies and innovations provides an evidence base for identifying practices that improve both academic and social development outcomes, while also highlighting areas that require further enhancement.

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1.3.1 Primary objective

To evaluate the effectiveness of the approaches employed by NPO project managers in implementing, monitoring, and evaluating corporate-funded educational interventions aimed at improving literacy and numeracy outcomes in South Africa.

1.3.2 Secondary objectives

The secondary objectives of this study were:

- To identify best practices that NPO project managers adopt in planning, implementing, and managing corporate-funded educational interventions.

- To explore NPO project managers' challenges in managing corporate-funded educational interventions, including resource constraints, stakeholder coordination, and monitoring and evaluation processes.
- To examine innovative solutions developed by NPO project managers to overcome challenges and enhance the effectiveness of corporate-funded educational interventions.

1.4 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study is positioned within the field of strategic management and examines the role of the NPO sector in implementing corporate-funded educational interventions in South Africa. The research focused on how project managers coordinate and deliver educational programmes in the Limpopo and Mpumalanga provinces, which were selected for their distinctive rural and peri-urban characteristics and significant educational challenges (Leach, 2018).

1.5 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study is grounded in an interpretivist qualitative paradigm, which assumes that reality is socially constructed and is best understood through the meanings individuals attach to their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018:1). Within this paradigm, a qualitative research design is adopted to investigate the strategies and practices of project managers overseeing corporate-funded educational interventions in the Limpopo and Mpumalanga provinces. This approach is suitable for generating nuanced, context-specific insights into the lived experiences and management practices of individuals operating within diverse educational settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018:1).

In this investigation, the project manager, rather than the organisation or province, is designated as the unit of analysis to foreground individual perspectives on operational and stakeholder-related challenges. Semi-structured interviews serve as the primary data-collection instrument, facilitating the elicitation of rich, in-depth perspectives on the management of educational initiatives. All interviews are audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to maximise data accuracy, and manual data coding and analysis follow a thematic analysis framework that combines inductive and deductive processes to identify and systematically organise prominent themes and patterns.

Ethical standards are strictly adhered to throughout the research process, including obtaining informed consent from all participants, maintaining confidentiality, and ensuring that all research data are securely stored for the duration of the project.

1.6 LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review entails a structured and critical analysis of scholarly sources directly relevant to the research topic. It provides the foundation for academic inquiry by contextualising the research problem within current knowledge, clarifying important theoretical constructs, and guiding the development of research questions or hypotheses (Snyder, 2019:333). Through the systematic evaluation and synthesis of pertinent literature, the review demonstrates the current state of research, identifies key findings, highlights gaps or inconsistencies, and situates new research within an established academic context (Fink, 2019:6). This analytical process ensures that the study is both theoretically and practically relevant, and positions the research as a meaningful contribution to, and extension of, ongoing scholarly debate (Creswell, 2018:75).

1.6.1 Project management in NPOs

Effective project management is vital for the successful implementation of educational interventions by the non-profit sector. Project management capacity is widely recognised as both scarce and highly valuable when overseeing complex projects across diverse sectors (Leach, 2018). Within this context, project managers play a pivotal role in executing corporate-funded educational initiatives, with key responsibilities encompassing planning, resource allocation, stakeholder coordination, and monitoring and evaluation (Spaull & Taylor, 2022:3). Mkhize and Mubangizi (2021:3) further highlight that effective project management requires not only technical competencies, such as budgeting and monitoring and evaluation, but also soft skills, including communication and leadership.

Project managers in the non-profit sector often confront significant challenges. These include limited resources, insufficient stakeholder collaboration, and difficulties in measuring the impact of interventions (Trialogue, 2023). Research by Moyo and Moyo (2021:25-32) suggests that inadequate funding and poor coordination among stakeholders hinder the effective implementation of educational projects. Van der Berg *et al.* (2021:89) add that the lack of robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks complicates the assessment of long-term outcomes for academic initiatives.

1.6.2 CSI in education

CSI represents an integral aspect of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). It encompasses both financial and non-financial contributions by companies toward socio-economic development, particularly in disadvantaged communities (Trialogue, 2024). Typical CSI activities involve

allocating funding, professional expertise, and employee volunteer time to advance social impact and strengthen corporate relationships with stakeholders (Trialogue, 2024).

In South Africa, CSI has assumed growing significance, mainly in response to persistent socio-economic inequality and legislative measures such as the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) Act, which stipulates that companies allocate at least one per cent of net profit after tax to CSI projects (Mueller-Hirth, 2016:2). The education sector remains the primary focus of CSI expenditure due to its critical role in the nation's development agenda (Trialogue, 2024).

Corporate-funded educational initiatives are often delivered through collaborations involving businesses, NPOs and government entities. These interventions are designed to address key literacy and numeracy challenges in underserved communities by providing targeted resources and support (Trialogue, 2023). The effectiveness of such projects depends on alignment with national education priorities and the project managers' ability to optimise available resources and foster stakeholder engagement (Moyo & Moyo, 2021:32).

1.6.3 The role of NPOs in education

NPOs play a crucial role in advancing educational goals in South Africa, often through partnerships with corporate entities and government departments. The NDP recognises the strategic importance of NPOs in enhancing educational outcomes, emphasising their capacity to innovate and leverage resources effectively (NASCEE, 2024). Despite their importance, NPOs often face significant funding limitations and bureaucratic constraints, which can impede the delivery of impactful educational programmes (Patel, 2005:56)

1.7 SAMPLING

1.7.1 Population

The study population comprised 30 project managers from NPOs in the Limpopo and Mpumalanga provinces of South Africa who manage corporate-funded educational interventions.

1.7.2 Sampling frame

The sampling frame for this study comprised project managers from NPOs in South Africa, with a focus on the provinces of Limpopo and Mpumalanga, who manage corporate-funded educational interventions.

1.7.3 Sampling method

This study used a purposive sampling strategy, intentionally selecting participants for their direct relevance to the research question and their ability to provide rich, context-specific insights into corporate-funded educational interventions (Bhardwaj, 2019:157). Project managers, from NPOs in Limpopo and Mpumalanga were chosen because they are directly responsible for planning, implementing, and evaluating these interventions and are therefore best positioned to describe the management approaches under investigation (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016:3). Purposive sampling was particularly appropriate given the qualitative design and the time and financial constraints of the study, as it enabled the efficient collection of high-quality data from a smaller, targeted group most relevant to the study objectives (Shukla, 2018:69).

At the same time, purposive sampling has limitations, especially the risk of selection bias and restricted generalisability, because participants are chosen using the researcher's judgement rather than random procedures (Bryman, 2016:187). To mitigate these concerns, the study applied explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria, included managers from different organisations and experience levels, and complemented sampling decisions with strategies to enhance trustworthiness such as reflexivity, member checking, and maintaining an audit trail, aiming not for statistical generalisation but for transferability through rich contextual description (Saunders et al., 2019:296).

1.7.4 Sampling size

Sample size in qualitative research refers to the number of participants purposively selected from a broader population to provide rich, relevant data for the study's objectives (Bryman, 2016:115). For this study, 30 project managers from NPOs operating in the Limpopo and Mpumalanga provinces were purposively selected as participants.

1.7.5 Interview structure and data collection

A semi-structured interview guide was developed for this study to facilitate context-rich responses and deeper exploration of participant perspectives (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017:91). Data collection was conducted via secure, NWU-approved virtual platforms, including Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and WhatsApp, which were selected to ensure accessibility for participants across diverse geographical locations (Bryman, 2016:86). These platforms incorporated password protection to uphold security and meet university data protection requirements, thereby safeguarding confidentiality of participant information. To preserve anonymity, all identifying details were systematically removed from interview transcripts and research reports. Participants were

assigned pseudonyms or unique codes, with only aggregated, non-identifiable data included in the study's findings (Saunders *et al.*, 2019:286).

1.7.6 Data analysis

Manual thematic analysis was adopted as the primary data analysis method in this study. This approach involves systematically identifying, coding, and categorising themes in data generated from semi-structured interviews, thereby facilitating the discovery of underlying patterns and meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The use of thematic analysis, combined with rigorous methodological procedures, supports a comprehensive understanding of the research topic while ensuring credibility and academic rigour (Yin, 2018:66).

1.7.7 Ethical considerations

This research is conducted in strict adherence to the North-West University (NWU) ethics policy guidelines and principles. Ethical considerations provide a foundational framework for the study, ensuring integrity, compliance, and respect for all participants, and ethical research practice involves upholding principles such as beneficence, which requires maximising benefits and protecting participants from harm (Resnik, 2005:13).

All research procedures conform to the requirements of the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) (Republic of South Africa, 2013). Personal information is processed lawfully, securely stored, anonymised in transcripts and reports, and used exclusively for research purposes. Participants are fully informed of their rights, including the ability to access, amend, or request deletion of their data, with explicit consent obtained before participation in accordance with the POPIA Code of Conduct for Research. Ethical clearance is obtained from the university's research ethics committee before data collection, ensuring alignment with institutional and national ethics policies.

To ensure trustworthiness in this qualitative study, rigorous criteria, including credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability, are applied. Member checking allows participants to review and validate their interview transcripts, supporting interpretive accuracy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:50). Documentation of all procedures, together with the implementation of reflexivity and triangulation, helps minimise bias and reinforce the methodological robustness of the research.

1.8 LAYOUT OF THE STUDY

1.8.1 Chapter 1: Introduction and background to the study

This chapter outlines the educational context in South Africa, focusing on current literacy and numeracy challenges. It reviews relevant literature and highlights the increasing role of corporate-funded interventions managed by NPOs. The chapter highlights the strategies employed by NPO project managers, the barriers they are likely to encounter, and presents the problem statement, research questions, and objectives. Finally, it explains the study's significance and potential contributions for academic and practical stakeholders.

This chapter introduces the study by outlining South Africa's educational context, with specific attention to current literacy and numeracy challenges and the policy and CSI environment in which they occur. It briefly motivates the focus on corporate-funded educational interventions implemented by NPOs and the central role of project managers in these programmes. The chapter then presents the problem statement, research objectives and questions, delineates the scope of the study, and provides a concise overview of the research design and methodology, including the qualitative approach, sampling, data collection, and analysis procedures. Finally, it clarifies the study's significance for both academic and practical stakeholders and concludes with an outline of the structure of the remaining chapters.

1.8.2 Chapter 2: Literature review

This chapter reviews the existing literature on literacy and numeracy challenges in South Africa, the role of corporate-funded interventions, and the strategies and challenges encountered by project managers within NPOs. It further identifies gaps in the current body of knowledge that this study seeks to address.

1.8.3 Chapter 3: Research methodology

This section outlines the qualitative interpretivist research design adopted for the study, including semi-structured interviews and document analysis, the sampling strategy, the data analysis process, and the ethical considerations that guide the research. The design focuses on exploring project managers' perspectives and practices, rather than examining a single bounded case. It is therefore more accurately described as a qualitative interpretivist approach than a case study.

1.8.4 Chapter 4: Results and discussion

This chapter focuses on presenting and interpreting the study findings through themes and sub-themes.

1.8.5 Chapter 5: Conclusion and recommendation

This chapter presents a summary of the research, integrating key findings with insights from the literature review to inform the study's conclusions and practical recommendations. The chapter also identifies the limitations that constrained the research and suggests areas for further investigation.

1.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The primary purpose of this chapter was to provide a general overview of the study. The problem statement and the research processes undertaken to achieve the objectives of this investigation were discussed. Attention was given to the main objectives, methodological approach, data collection, and analysis procedures used in the study. Trustworthiness and ethical considerations were addressed to ensure the integrity of the research process. Chapter 2 will present previous research findings that relate to the objectives of this study.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter critically analyses existing literature regarding the strategies and approaches adopted by project managers in NPOs in South Africa, with particular emphasis on the management of corporate-funded educational interventions aimed at achieving sustainable outcomes. The literature review synthesises current research, providing the intellectual foundation for new scholarly inquiry. It plays a vital role in identifying knowledge gaps, situating the present study within established theoretical frameworks, and guiding methodological decisions that contribute to research quality and relevance (Hart, 2018:4–6). As Creswell (2018:75) notes, a well-constructed literature review also enables the researcher to assess the academic viability of the selected topic.

2.2 SOUTH AFRICA'S EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

South Africa's education system continues to grapple with deep-rooted inequities that undermine national objectives of quality learning and social mobility (Muyambi, 2025:2). Persistent challenges are most evident in foundational literacy and numeracy, where achievement gaps remain entrenched due to historical legacies, inconsistent governance, and pronounced socio-economic divides. While the constitution guarantees free and equitable education, and investment in the sector reached 6.15% of GDP in 2023, above global averages for middle-income countries' outcomes, especially in rural and under-resourced schools, remain unsatisfactory (World Bank, 2025).

The national government's commitment is reflected in substantial fiscal allocations, with R332.3 billion invested in basic education in 2023, representing 18.49% of total public expenditure. Despite this effort, progress in learning outcomes has been limited (World Bank, 2025). International benchmark assessments indicate a continued crisis: PIRLS 2021 found that 81% of Grade 4 learners could not read for meaning, ranking South Africa last among participating countries (Spaull, 2021). Similarly, TIMSS (2023) highlighted further declines in mathematics, with the most significant setbacks affecting no-fee schools serving the poorest communities (Department of Basic Education, 2024).

Socio-economic status and geographic location are primary determinants of educational performance in South Africa; learners from affluent households benefit from superior resources and learning environments (Muyambi, 2025). At the same time, those in lower-income areas often experience overcrowded classrooms, limited infrastructure, and inadequate access to water,

sanitation, and electricity (Afrobarometer, 2025). The widening digital divide further marginalises rural learners who lack basic educational materials and connectivity, in contrast to their urban peers, who increasingly access digital learning platforms and additional support (Future SA, 2025).

Despite policy reforms and efforts to broaden access, many interventions remain urban-centric. Evidence suggests these models are often poorly adapted to rural environments where basic infrastructure and qualified staff are in short supply (Sumida, 2021). As a result, interventions effective in urban or peri-urban contexts may struggle, or even fail, when transferred to rural schools.

Apartheid-era inequalities continue to shape educational outcomes in communities facing persistent poverty, unemployment, and food insecurity (Equal Education, 2023). Reforms narrowly focused on pedagogy frequently overlook broader structural barriers, including a lack of classrooms, poor nutrition, and unstable home conditions (Equal Education, 2023). Without careful consideration of these contextual factors, proposed reforms risk being mismatched and ineffective.

Research cautions that poorly contextualised interventions may exacerbate rather than alleviate inequality, especially when a one-size-fits-all approach is adopted (Munnik, 2019). For NPOs and project managers, this underscores the importance of adaptive, context-sensitive strategies informed by ongoing stakeholder engagement.

Amid these constraints, limited progress is evident, such as increasing years of schooling for the younger population, a sign of incremental gains in educational access (Afrobarometer, 2025). Current policy reforms increasingly prioritise Early Childhood Development (ECD) and the professionalisation of foundation-phase teaching to address foundational literacy and numeracy challenges at their root (Department of Basic Education, 2024). The role of CSI in education has expanded significantly, with companies regarding education support as both a moral duty and a strategic investment in future human capital (Trialogue, 2023).

Nevertheless, pervasive systemic barriers persist. Despite investment in pro-poor funding models, accurate equity has not been achieved, and corruption continues to undermine public trust in the school system. The Afrobarometer (2025) reports that 1 in 10 citizens has encountered requests for bribes in educational settings. Fragmented reading campaigns and uncoordinated teacher development programmes further limit the long-term impact of reforms (World Bank, 2025). These deficits constrain national competitiveness and efforts to alleviate poverty by limiting skill development and employability.

The South African education system thus presents a paradox: although significant investment, comprehensive policy intent, and multi-stakeholder partnerships are in place, deficits in equity, quality, and learner achievement persist (World Bank, 2025). Locally responsive interventions built around systematic evaluation and adaptation to poor and rural contexts appear markedly more effective than standardised, donor-driven, or misaligned programmes (World Bank, 2025).

For this research, it is essential to analyse how NPOs that manage corporate-funded interventions navigate these complex constraints and contribute to equitable gains in literacy and numeracy. Further investigation is needed into project management practices that foster contextual responsiveness, stakeholder engagement, and sustainable outcomes, while also supporting national priorities and scaling up success without sacrificing local relevance (World Bank, 2025).

2.3 CSI IN SOUTH AFRICA'S EDUCATION SYSTEM

CSI is a cornerstone of private sector engagement with South Africa's education system. Recent estimates reveal that 92% of companies participate in CSI, with education accounting for 45% of total CSI expenditure in 2024 (Trialogue Knowledge Hub, 2024). As the most significant stream of non-state investment in human development, CSI support is typically directed to early childhood development, teacher training, school infrastructure, bursaries, and the integration of digital technology into classrooms (Trialogue Knowledge Hub, 2024).

Strategically designed and effectively scaled CSI interventions demonstrate the sector's transformative potential. For instance, The Answer Series' Project Jika provided study guides to schools in the Eastern Cape and Limpopo, increasing pass rates from 19% to 84% and from 44% to 97% over a short period (The Answer Series, 2021). Similarly, the Development Bank of Southern Africa invested R24 million in 27 early childhood development facilities, supporting infrastructure, nutrition, and community empowerment to foster sustainable educational and social improvement (Impact SA, 2024). Further notable programmes include multilingual resource development, robust after-school offerings, and teacher professional development (Trialogue, 2023). Despite these achievements, the overall reach and effectiveness of CSI in education remain uneven.

A significant source of inequity is the disparity between large, well-managed NPOs and their smaller, rural-based counterparts. Larger NPOs benefit from superior governance and stronger donor networks, securing ongoing investments and compliance with reporting requirements (National Development Agency, 2020). In contrast, smaller and rural NPOs struggle with unstable funding, weak leadership continuity, and poor resource mobilisation, often limiting their long-term impact (National Development Agency, 2020). This dynamic channels more investment into

visible, urban-based partners, even though local organisations usually possess deeper community relationships and insights.

Sector fragmentation and misalignment with national policy further undermine the effectiveness of CSI. When CSI projects operate in isolation or duplicate efforts, they reduce overall sector efficiency and hinder systemic progress (Makhavhu *et al.*, 2022:62). Geographic disparities persist, as urban and peri-urban schools being more accessible to donors, attract the bulk of investment, resulting in ongoing underfunding for rural and disadvantaged schools (Moletsane, 2024:105).

Complicating matters, the B-BBEE framework incentivises compliance-focused CSI projects, prioritising visible, short-term outputs over sustainable, context-sensitive interventions. This orientation, as highlighted by Siyobi (2016:5), can perpetuate inequality and constrain CSI's transformative potential.

The collective evidence reflects a dual reality. Robust CSI programmes with strong governance, transparent monitoring, and alignment to local needs can deliver measurable educational gains, as seen in Project Jika and DBSA's early childhood investments (Impact SA, 2024). However, gaps in planning, reporting, and coordination, coupled with urban bias and compliance-driven decision making, leave many learners and local organisations excluded from these benefits (Makhavhu *et al.*, 2022:62).

To fulfil its promise as a driver of equity, transformation, and sustainability, CSI in education requires a strategic shift. Project managers should not only implement programmes but also act as strategists, brokers, and facilitators, bridging corporate objectives and community needs. Effective CSI management must integrate donor requirements with responsive approaches, nurture genuine stakeholder partnerships, demand long-term commitment, and promote transparent evaluation and collaborative sectoral action.

2.4 THE NPO LANDSCAPE IN SOUTH AFRICA

The NPO landscape in South Africa has been profoundly shaped by the country's socio-political history and evolving development challenges. During apartheid, NPOs, often described as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or civil society organisations, were pivotal in providing essential services to excluded communities and leading advocacy for human rights and political change (Weideman, 2014:21). The post-apartheid transition in 1994 marked significant expansion and professionalisation within the sector. NPOs began to be formally recognised as strategic partners in nation-building and social development. Key legislative reforms, such as the Non-

Profit Organisations Act 71 of 1997, introduced voluntary registration, improved regulatory oversight, tax benefits, and a transparent framework for organisational accountability (National Development Agency, 2020). These measures contributed to a surge in the number of registered NPOs and formalised their role in service delivery and policy consultation.

Over the past two decades, South Africa's NPO sector has grown to include nearly 300,000 registered entities active across education, health, social justice, and poverty alleviation domains (Create Infinity, 2024:6). International and domestic donor funding, particularly in the early 2000s, enabled many organisations to scale operations and forge deeper, more effective partnerships with government, the private sector, and other stakeholders. NPOs have made substantial contributions to major national initiatives such as the Reconstruction and Development Programme and the National Development Plan (Volmink & Van der Elst, 2023:14).

The sector encompasses notable strengths, including its dynamic professional workforce and capacity for innovation. NPOs routinely supplement government services, pilot solutions to community challenges, and build local capacity, key attributes for delivering education and health interventions to marginalised populations (Domingo, 2025:68 85). According to recent statistics, the nonprofit sector now employs more than one million individuals, rivalling major industries in its contribution to national development (Domingo, 2025:68).

However, significant challenges persist. These include reduced international aid, increased competition for limited resources, and compliance burdens linked to successive regulatory changes, for example, new requirements for Section 18A donations and anti-money laundering measures (Domingo, 2025:85). Smaller and rural NPOs face barriers to resource mobilisation and capacity building, resulting in disparities in reach and impact compared to urban-based organisations (National Development Agency, 2020). Presently, over half of South Africa's registered NPOs are considered non-compliant, highlighting acute concerns around financial sustainability, risk management, and ethical governance (Domingo, 2025:78)

The nonprofit sector exhibits both adaptability and vulnerability. While many strategically aligned, well-governed NPOs continue to drive innovation and deliver essential services, others struggle to remain viable amid funding and regulatory uncertainty (Domingo, 2025:68). For this research, examining how project managers within NPOs navigate contextual constraints, leverage partnerships, and balance accountability to donors and communities is vital for understanding the sector's evolving contributions to South African society.

2.5 THE ROLE AND IMPACT OF NPOS IN EDUCATION

NPOs are fundamental to advancing educational outcomes in South Africa, acting as key partners to both government and corporate entities (Volmink & Van der Elst, 2023:14). Their independence and proximity to communities enable contextually relevant interventions. At the same time, their capacity for innovation allows the piloting and scaling of evidence-based programmes, provides technical assistance, and acts as intermediaries between schools, communities, and the state. However, they also face persistent challenges, including funding constraints, bureaucratic hurdles, and pressures to align with donor or government agendas, sometimes at the expense of community needs (Patel, 2005:1). These challenges are particularly acute for smaller organisations and those operating in rural or peri-urban contexts, where disparities in capacity and access to resources are pronounced (Van der Berg *et al.*, 2021:17).

A particular challenge is measuring the long-term impact of educational programmes. Research indicates that delayed manifestation of educational benefits, attribution difficulties, data-collection challenges, and methodological limitations are key barriers (Van der Berg *et al.*, 2021: 5). These difficulties stem from the extended timeline over which educational benefits become apparent. Unlike immediate outputs, the transformative effects of educational interventions, such as improvements in literacy, numeracy, and broader life outcomes, often manifest years or even decades after the initial intervention. This temporal gap complicates the process of attributing observed outcomes directly to specific programmes, as a multitude of overlapping factors typically influence learners throughout their educational journeys (Sustainability Directory, 2025)

Another major challenge concerns the availability and quality of data, as well as methodological limitations. Longitudinal data collection is essential for tracking the impact of interventions over time; however, such efforts are frequently hampered by high costs, logistical difficulties, and ethical concerns, particularly in developing contexts where educational data systems may be fragmented or underdeveloped (CEM, 2020). Attrition, where participants drop out of studies over time, further undermines the reliability of long-term assessments. Additionally, it is often difficult to isolate the effect of a single intervention from broader systemic or contextual influences, which further complicates efforts to establish clear causal links between interventions and outcomes (National Institutes of Health, 2021)

NPOs have demonstrated resilience and adaptability, often serving as catalysts for innovation in the education sector. The study would benefit from understanding the specific strategies NPOs employ to support project managers in managing corporate-funded educational interventions, particularly in resource-constrained settings (Spaull & Taylor, 2022:3).

Adaptive leadership and resilience frameworks have become central to effective project management in the South African non-profit space, especially in education. Given the volatility and complexity of the landscape marked by shifting policy, unpredictable funding, and frequent external shocks, adaptive leaders are required to demonstrate strategic flexibility, decisiveness, and a capacity for collaborative problem-solving (Abukalusa, 2023:249). South African case studies, such as the response of education-focused NGOs during the COVID-19 pandemic, illustrate adaptive leadership in action, where leaders rapidly pivoted from classroom to digital platforms, deepened stakeholder engagement, and leveraged local partnerships to sustain delivery amidst crisis (Mayet, 2021:14). Organisational resilience was bolstered through systems thinking, future-oriented scenario planning, and distributed decision-making, all of which helped NPOs withstand internal and external shocks (Singh *et al.*, 2022:12).

Despite these advantages, persistent challenges remain for NPOs, including funding insecurity, administrative burden, misalignment with donor and government priorities, and difficulties in securing skilled leadership and resources, especially in rural or underserved areas (Patel, 2005:1). Measuring long-term impact is particularly problematic. Short funding cycles and donor expectations for rapid outputs contrast with the protracted timelines required to realise genuine improvements in literacy, numeracy, and life outcomes for learners (Van der Berg *et al.*, 2021:11).

The NPOs with strong adaptive leadership and resilience frameworks, characterised by open systems, flexible structures, and capacity for rapid learning, are best positioned to deliver innovative and sustainable solutions in the face of adversity. What works are collaborative leadership styles, robust local partnerships, and investment in professional development and organisational systems. What does not work is rigid hierarchical management, top-down planning that is disconnected from local realities, and an exclusive reliance on compliance-driven interventions.

For this study, a nuanced understanding of stakeholder relationships and stewardship practice is fundamental to analysing the project management approaches of NPO managers within corporate-funded educational interventions.

NPOs are essential for enhancing educational outcomes in South Africa, operating as key partners to government and corporate actors (Volmink & Van der Elst, 2023:14). Their independence and deep-rooted presence within local communities enable them to deliver contextually relevant interventions and act as catalysts for innovative, evidence-based programmes. NPOs also serve as intermediaries between schools, communities, and the state, contributing technical assistance and facilitating multi-sectoral collaboration.

However, NPOs encounter persistent barriers, including funding limitations, administrative and bureaucratic hurdles, and pressure to align with donor or governmental agendas, sometimes at the expense of community priorities (Patel, 2005:1). These issues are often more severe for smaller or rural organisations, which experience greater disparities in both capacity and resource access (Van der Berg *et al.*, 2021:17). A critical challenge is measuring the sustained impact of NPO-led educational interventions: research highlights the delayed manifestation of benefits, attribution problems, data collection difficulties, and methodological constraints (Van der Berg *et al.*, 2021:5). The transformative effects of interventions such as gains in literacy, numeracy, and broader life outcomes may emerge only years after initial implementation, which complicates efforts to clearly attribute these improvements to specific programmes (Sustainability Directory, 2025).

Longitudinal evaluation is further complicated by fragmented or underdeveloped educational data systems, high costs, and logistical and ethical issues in low-resource settings (CEM, 2020). The phenomenon of participant attrition, where learners drop out of studies over time, further undermines the robustness of long-term assessments. Efforts to establish causal links between interventions and outcomes are frequently impeded by the complex, overlapping factors that influence learner trajectories (National Institutes of Health, 2021).

Despite these challenges, NPOs have demonstrated resilience and adaptability, often acting as sources of innovation and capacity-building in the sector. Understanding the specific strategies NPOs employ to support project managers, particularly in corporate-funded education initiatives in resource-constrained settings, remains a critical area of inquiry (Spaull & Taylor, 2022:3). Adaptive leadership and resilience frameworks now occupy a central place in effective project management for South African NPOs. Leaders must respond to volatile environments marked by policy shifts, uncertain funding, and external shocks by demonstrating flexibility, strategic foresight, and collaborative problem-solving capacity (Abukalusa, 2023:249).

Recent case studies, such as the sector's rapid digital pivot during the COVID-19 pandemic, illustrate how NPOs leverage adaptive leadership, local partnerships, and scenario planning to maintain educational delivery under crisis conditions (Mayet, 2021:14). Organisational resilience is further supported by distributed decision-making, robust professional development, and open systems that facilitate rapid learning.

Persistent challenges, however, remain funding insecurity, administrative burdens, and difficulties in securing skilled leadership and resources, especially in underserved contexts, which continue to hinder NPO effectiveness (Patel, 2005:1). Furthermore, the short-term nature of typical funding

cycles often conflicts with the protracted timelines needed to achieve lasting educational improvements (Van der Berg *et al.*, 2021:11).

NPOs with strong adaptive leadership, flexible organisational cultures, and robust local partnerships are best positioned to deliver sustainable, innovative solutions to South Africa's ongoing educational challenges (Karakas & Kavas, 2023). Approaches that rely on collaborative leadership, community engagement, and investment in both professional development and organisational systems are most likely to succeed. At the same time, models centred on rigid, top-down planning and compliance-driven interventions tend to underperform.

For this study, a nuanced understanding of stakeholder relationships and stewardship practices is fundamental to analysing the project management approaches of NPO managers within the context of corporate-funded educational interventions, particularly in the varied and resource-limited environments of South Africa.

2.6 PROJECT MANAGEMENT WITHIN NPOS

Project management within NPOs, especially those implementing corporate-funded educational programmes in South Africa, reflects a mix of notable accomplishments and persistent constraints (Trialogue Knowledge Hub, 2024). Literature highlights that effective project managers have driven improvements in access to education, upgraded infrastructure, and facilitated teacher development by leveraging multi-stakeholder partnerships and tailoring interventions to local needs (Volmink & Van der Elst, 2023:14). A notable example is the Care and Support for Teaching and Learning (CSTL) programme's integration into government policy, demonstrating the impact of adaptive and collaborative project leadership.

Despite such successes, project managers in NPOs confront complex challenges, including unstable funding, limited human and operational resources, stakeholder resistance, and service delivery gaps in rural areas (McIntyre, 2021:8). Conventional funding models often fail to cover critical overheads, and CSI funding is frequently short-term, forcing managers to innovate while constantly seeking ongoing resources. Effective stakeholder engagement, particularly with unions and school governing bodies, is essential yet often underemphasised in early project phases, leading to delays and challenges that can affect programme implementation (JET Education Services, 2022).

Rural logistics intensify these barriers as many NPOs struggle with shortages of infrastructure, learning materials, and qualified personnel. Project managers commonly contend with unreliable connectivity, high staff turnover, and insufficient local capacity, which obstruct large-scale,

sustainable implementation (Mkhize & Davids, 2023:127). Evaluation of impact is also hindered by weak data systems and an overemphasis on short-term outputs at the expense of sustainable learning outcomes, driven by donor reporting requirements (Van der Berg *et al.*, 2021:17).

Leadership and governance capacity remain stretched, particularly as NPOs expand their operations. Smaller organisations, in particular, frequently lack the skilled structures required for sustainable growth, while high turnover and constrained professional development exacerbate difficulties in building effective project management (Ilifa Labantwana, 2017). Nevertheless, robust management practices such as comprehensive stakeholder analysis, co-creation of shared visions, and cultivation of project champions are increasingly acknowledged as pivotal to programme success (Siyobi, 2016:5). The adoption of digital tools for planning and reporting has improved coordination. However, complexity and cost remain significant obstacles for smaller NPOs (Magwali & Fore, 2018:20).

Recent shifts in non-profit project management focus on context-responsive, participatory approaches and enhanced digital infrastructure, marking a trend towards greater innovation and adaptive capacity (Community Chest, 2025). However, sustained resource limitations and fractured stakeholder relationships persist, especially in under-resourced communities (The Caban Foundation, 2025).

This literature highlights the importance of identifying adaptive best practices, examining management gaps, and understanding the lived experiences of project managers operating within South Africa's complex educational and donor landscape, thereby laying a foundation for practical

2.7 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT IN EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTION

Stakeholder engagement within corporate-funded educational initiatives is a complex process, shaped by competing interests, unequal power dynamics, and divergent accountability frameworks. It is defined as the systematic approach through which organisations identify, communicate with, and develop relationships with parties who can influence or are affected by their operations (Kujala *et al.*, 2022:999). While engagement is frequently portrayed in literature as a pathway to collaborative co-creation and legitimacy (Meyer & Barker, 2020:58), in practice, especially in South Africa, stakeholder dynamics often reflect entrenched power imbalances, with corporate funders generally occupying dominant roles and beneficiaries exerting limited influence.

Corporate funders often determine programme priorities based on branding, reporting, or regulatory requirements such as B-BBEE (Meyer & Barker, 2020:69). Community members, parents, and learners, those most directly affected, may play only marginal consultative roles.

The disconnect between upward accountability to donors and downward accountability to beneficiaries frequently leads to fragmented or superficial engagement, undermining programme ownership at the local level. Donors' focus on measurable outputs and reputational returns can overshadow the deliberate, context-sensitive process of grassroots consultation and design (Kujala *et al.*, 2022:1046).

A critical and often overlooked stakeholder is the Department of Education (DoE) at the provincial and district levels. Engagement with DoE structures is essential to securing genuine buy-in, as these government bodies ultimately exercise authority over public schools and are central to policy and operational approvals (Department of Basic Education, 2024). Literature and recent stakeholder initiatives emphasise that integrating the DoE not merely as a passive recipient but as an active project partner enables better alignment with official priorities, facilitates access to schools, supports principal and educator buy-in, and substantially increases the chances of programme sustainability and systemic integration (Makhavhu *et al.*, 2022:56).

Poorly structured engagement, by contrast, can result in contextual disconnects. Many programmes are conceived at a national or boardroom level and presuppose the existence of infrastructure, governance, and teacher readiness that is rarely present in underserved schools (Makhavhu *et al.*, 2022:56). Educators often resist externally imposed designs, resulting in weak adoption or even collapse. The problem is compounded when multiple corporate actors implement overlapping interventions in the same area, resulting in duplication and inefficient resource utilisation.

Trust and legitimacy are critical underpinnings of successful engagement. Historical marginalisation, ongoing corruption, and the proliferation of so-called “briefcase NGOs” have contributed to scepticism and, at times, open hostility toward externally funded educational projects (Afrobarometer, 2025). Where engagement is perceived as tokenistic, interventions fail to generate legitimacy or lasting relational capital and are viewed as vehicles for donor self-interest rather than genuine community development.

Positive impacts are most likely when funders facilitate participatory co-design that involves all stakeholders, from government officials, NPOs, teachers, parents, and learners, from the outset. Such inclusion not only ensures local relevance, but also strengthens trust, supports integration with policy frameworks, and is associated with sustained, systemic impact (Makhavhu *et al.*, 2022:56). Transparent governance and reporting, coupled with a willingness to share power, can reshape stakeholder roles, transform communities from passive recipients to active partners, and foster the long-term investment needed for lasting progress (Afrobarometer, 2025).

The literature thus makes clear that the effectiveness and sustainability of corporate-funded educational interventions depend substantially on the depth, inclusiveness, and integrity of stakeholder engagement, especially the early and active involvement of the Department of Education at provincial and district levels. This approach moves beyond transactional or compliance-driven engagement towards authentic co-ownership, enabling interventions to address root causes of inequality and to drive systemic, enduring educational improvements.

2.8 ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP AND ORGANISATIONAL RESILIENCE IN NPOS

Adaptive leadership, as conceptualised by Heifetz (1994), is a leadership approach that enables organisations to address complex and recurring challenges by mobilising collective action and learning, especially in contexts marked by uncertainty and rapid change (Singh *et al.*, 2022:25). Unlike traditional top-down models, adaptive leadership emphasises distributed authority, ongoing learning, and collaborative innovation across organisational levels. A central idea of this theory is the distinction between technical problems, which have established solutions, and adaptive challenges, which require organisations to embrace new learning, test innovative interventions, and examine their underlying values and operational assumptions. Effective adaptive leaders encourage broad participation in diagnosing issues, experimenting with responses, and embedding structures for continuous feedback and learning (Singh *et al.*, 2022:25).

Adaptive leadership is relevant in the context of South African NPOs, where volatility, resource constraints, and ongoing change are the norm. By fostering a culture rooted in organisational justice, emotional intelligence, and open-mindedness, such leaders position their teams to navigate uncertainty and support sustained transformation in corporate-funded educational interventions (Singh *et al.*, 2022:25).

A survey of the literature highlights several key advantages to adopting adaptive leadership in NPOs. The model's focus on distributed authority and organisational flexibility enables rapid adjustment to fluctuations in funding, evolving regulations, and complex stakeholder demands (Abukalusa, 2023:249). Empirical research shows that adaptive leadership enhances organisational resilience, helping NPOs operate effectively even amid disruptions, while also strengthening engagement with key stakeholders, a critical determinant of success in collaborative educational projects (Singh *et al.*, 2022:25). When adaptive leaders encourage risk-taking, facilitate open communication, and share decision-making, staff are empowered to develop creative solutions and sustain momentum, even in challenging settings.

Nevertheless, the literature also cautions against potential barriers to effective adaptive leadership. Deeply entrenched hierarchies, cultural resistance to devolved authority, and role ambiguity may all hinder the adoption of adaptive practices. Without adequate structures or a clear strategic vision, adaptive initiatives can result in confusion, reduced accountability, or suboptimal decision-making (Abukalusa, 2023:249). Building adaptive capacity is resource-intensive, requiring sustained investment in staff development, facilitation, and training, a challenge for underfunded NPOs. Excessively prioritising continuous change and experimentation, without strategic direction, may also erode programme coherence and contribute to staff fatigue.

The literature thus positions adaptive leadership and organisational resilience as robust, contextually relevant frameworks for NPO management in South Africa's education sector. These frameworks are most effective when closely integrated with clear organisational strategies, strong learning cultures, and sufficient resources (Singh *et al.*, 2022:25). Where these preconditions are met, adaptive leadership contributes to sustained innovation, flexibility, and the cultivation of productive partnerships. Where they are not, introducing adaptive practices risks compounding organisational challenges.

This review highlights that harmonising adaptive leadership theory with practical strategy and capacity building is critical to realising its potential, supporting the study's focus on identifying management approaches that optimise educational outcomes and intervention sustainability in South African NPOs.

2.9 THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework developed for this study draws upon three closely interrelated theoretical foundations: Social Inclusion Theory, the Capability Approach, and the Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA). Together, these frameworks articulate the normative standards and practical considerations that shape how project managers in South African NPOs design, deliver, and assess corporate-funded educational interventions, particularly against a backdrop of entrenched inequality and persistent barriers to meaningful participation in education.

2.9.1 Social inclusion theory

Social Inclusion Theory emphasises the importance of actively addressing structures and practices that marginalise individuals or groups from full participation in society (Fraser, 2008). Given the historical and ongoing exclusion of rural and disadvantaged communities from quality education, this theory is especially pertinent in the South African educational context (Saloojee,

2011). NPOs, therefore, serve not only as service providers but also as facilitators of systemic integration, working to ensure that interventions foster participation, connectedness, and empowerment among learners, parents, and communities (JET Education Services, 2022:3). Project managers operationalise this theory by engaging stakeholders at all levels, building trust with school governing bodies and community members, and tailoring interventions to address the unique barriers marginalised groups face.

2.9.2 The Capability approach

The Capability Approach, as articulated by Nussbaum (2011:18), shifts the focus from the mere provision of resources to the expansion of individuals' substantive freedoms and capabilities. In education, this means that interventions must go beyond access to schooling and address the opportunities learners have to develop essential skills such as literacy and numeracy. Project managers, guided by this approach, design programmes that are responsive to the diverse needs and backgrounds of learners, ensuring that both material resources (e.g., textbooks, digital devices) and non-material supports (e.g., teacher development, parental involvement) are in place to enable learners to convert educational inputs into meaningful outcomes (Combrinck *et al.*, 2017:21-25). This is particularly significant in South Africa, where disparities in infrastructure, teacher quality, and home environments mean that equal inputs do not always yield equal achievements.

2.9.3 The Human Rights-Based Approach

The HRBA frames access to quality education as a fundamental right, enshrined in the South African Constitution (Section 29) and international conventions (UNESCO, 2018). This approach requires that equity, participation, accountability, and non-discrimination principles guide educational interventions. For NPO project managers, this translates into fostering inclusive participation in decision-making, ensuring transparency in resource allocation, and advocating for systemic change where rights are not being realised (Volmink & Van der Elst, 2023:14). HRBA also demands that interventions empower learners, parents, and communities to claim their rights and hold duty-bearers accountable. This is critical in a context where many learners remain excluded from meaningful educational opportunities despite constitutional guarantees (Volmink & Van der Elst, 2023:6).

These theoretical perspectives jointly inform the project management cycle in NPOs. In the phases of needs assessment and planning, Social Inclusion Theory and HRBA encourage participatory mechanisms that ensure marginalised voices shape programme design (UNESCO, 2018). During implementation, the Capability Approach informs the creation of adaptive, learner-

centred interventions, while HRBA reinforces the commitment to non-discrimination and empowerment. Stakeholder engagement strategies are grounded in the imperative to build networks and foster accountability and participation across all actors. In the domain of monitoring and evaluation, these frameworks collectively demand that outcomes be assessed not only through quantitative measures but also by the extent to which they advance inclusion, capability expansion, and rights realisation.

Integrated in this manner, the conceptual framework is well aligned with the objectives of this study, which are to identify effective project management strategies, evaluate the influence of stakeholder relations and contextual obstacles, and offer evidence-based recommendations for advancing educational equity, access, and sustainable impact in resource-constrained settings (Volmink & Van der Elst, 2023:12). It lays out how the core capacities of project managers' adaptive leadership, digital tool integration, stakeholder engagement, and ongoing professional development enable or constrain intervention success (Abukalusa, 2023:249).

The framework further accounts for how stakeholder relationships, trust, shared vision, and participatory governance mediate both the process and the outcomes of educational programming (Meyer, 2020:79). It also recognises the external contextual factors, such as funding volatility, shifting policies, or infrastructural gaps, that affect project delivery across South Africa's diverse settings (Moletsane, 2024:88).

Notably, the empirical literature highlights persistent tensions and operational challenges in translating these theoretical ideals into practice. For example, HRBA's focus on rights and participation may conflict with donor demands for measurable outputs, and the Capability Approach's emphasis on learner-centred tools may be hampered by severe infrastructural deficits in rural areas (Mkhize & Mubangizi, 2021:321). These tensions highlight the importance of understanding how project managers balance ideals with constraints during the evaluation process.

By weaving together these core theoretical perspectives, the framework provides a robust analytical lens for examining the pathways that connect inclusive, capability-expanding, and rights-based management practices to tangible educational outcomes. The synthesis ensures that the study's findings and recommendations are closely attuned to both scholarly developments and the everyday realities encountered by project managers working in the South African non-profit education sector. This approach upholds methodological rigour and transparency, supporting the overall research goals of strengthening project management practice and enhancing the sustainability and equity of corporate-funded educational interventions in challenging environments.

2.10 SUMMARY

Chapter 2 critically reviewed literature on corporate-funded education interventions by NPOs in South Africa, focusing on challenges and strategies for improving literacy and numeracy. The discussion identified enduring systemic inequities, highlights the uneven impact of CSI, and explores how NPOs overcome resource and governance constraints through adaptive leadership and stakeholder partnerships. Effective project management requires context-sensitive approaches and collaborative stakeholder engagement, but is hindered by challenges related to measurement and sustainability.

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 2 provided a comprehensive overview of relevant literature contextualising this study. This chapter outlines the methodological framework adopted to investigate project managers' approaches to managing corporate-funded educational interventions within NPOs in Limpopo and Mpumalanga, South Africa. This study is grounded in an interpretivist paradigm, which recognises that knowledge is constructed through participants' lived experiences and perspectives. This aligns with the qualitative approach, focusing on the generation of rich, contextual insights (Creswell & Poth, 2018:1). The analysis explores the strategies, challenges, and innovations adopted by project managers to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes. The chapter details the qualitative research design, the contextual setting, the sampling strategy, the data collection and analysis procedures, as well as ethical considerations and measures to ensure the rigour and trustworthiness of the study (Saunders *et al.*, 2019:215).

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Creswell and Creswell (2023:3) define research design as the framework that integrates the components of a study systematically to address the research problem effectively. This study is grounded in an interpretivist qualitative paradigm, which assumes that reality is socially constructed and best understood through the meanings individuals attach to their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018:1). Within this paradigm, a qualitative research design is adopted to explore the nuanced experiences, strategies, and challenges faced by project managers operating within diverse educational settings.

A qualitative interpretivist approach enables engagement with complex social phenomena in their natural context, facilitating the collection of rich, detailed data that is typically unattainable through quantitative methods (Creswell & Poth, 2018:18). In this study, the primary focus is on the perspectives of project managers, rather than solely on organisational or provincial characteristics, to gain deeper insight into the approaches used in managing corporate-funded educational interventions in Limpopo and Mpumalanga.

3.3 SAMPLING

3.3.1 Population

A population is defined as the entire set of individuals, objects, or events from which a researcher seeks to draw conclusions and to which research findings are intended to be generalised (Enago Academy, 2023). In this study, the population consists of project managers working in NPOs based in the Limpopo and Mpumalanga provinces who are actively responsible for planning, implementing, and managing corporate-funded educational interventions. These provinces were purposefully selected because they exhibit high levels of educational disadvantage while also hosting significant CSI and NPO activity in foundational literacy and numeracy, making them particularly suitable settings for examining how project managers navigate resource constraints, rural–peri-urban conditions, and complex multi-stakeholder partnerships in such programmes (Spaull & Pretorius, 2019:14).

NPOs were specifically chosen because they act as key implementing partners for corporate-funded educational initiatives, operating at the interface between funders, government, schools, and communities, and are therefore uniquely positioned to provide insights into the management approaches, challenges, and innovations that shape the effectiveness and sustainability of these interventions (Volmink & Van der Elst, 2023:14).

3.3.2 Sampling frame

The sampling frame comprises project managers, programme managers, and project leads from the selected NPOs, regardless of age or gender.

3.3.3 Sampling method

This study utilises a purposive sampling strategy, enabling the deliberate selection of participants who are most relevant to the research objectives and best positioned to provide rich, detailed insights into the management of corporate-funded educational interventions (Bhardwaj, 2019:157). Purposive sampling, also referred to as judgemental or selective sampling, is a recognised non-probability technique in qualitative research in which participants are intentionally selected for their specific expertise or relevant experience (Patton, 2015:4).

For this investigation, the sample comprises project managers, programme managers, and project leads from NPOs based in Limpopo and Mpumalanga, each of whom is directly involved in planning, implementing, and evaluating such interventions. This approach is especially suited to qualitative research, where the aim is not broad generalisation, but the attainment of a deep

understanding of complex phenomena in real-world contexts (Etikan *et al.*, 2016:4). Focusing on individuals with direct, relevant experience ensures that the data gathered is both pertinent and insightful.

3.3.4 Sample size

Kumar *et al.* (2013:122) describe sample size as the number of participants selected from a broader population to draw meaningful conclusions. In this study, the population comprises approximately 30 project managers working in non-profit organisations in Limpopo and Mpumalanga that implement corporate-funded educational interventions, from whom ten were purposively selected and interviewed.

The final sample size was guided by data saturation, defined as the point at which no new themes or substantive insights emerge from additional interviews (Hennink *et al.*, 2017:591). By the ninth and tenth interviews, the analysis showed repetition of existing themes and no identification of new categories, indicating that saturation had been reached, which aligns with methodological guidance for relatively homogeneous qualitative samples.

3.3.5 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The inclusion criteria were designed to ensure that participants have sufficient experience and contextual understanding to offer meaningful insights into the management of corporate-funded educational interventions. Eligible participants included current project managers, programme managers, and project leads from NPOs who are directly responsible for implementing, monitoring, or evaluating educational projects funded by corporate entities. Furthermore, participants were required to work in NPO's from Limpopo or Mpumalanga, as the study specifically targeted these provinces due to their unique educational challenges. Emphasis on managers actively involved in educational interventions ensures direct relevance to the study's objectives, which centre on foundational skills development and effective project management strategies in resource-constrained environments (Spaull & Taylor, 2022).

Several groups are deliberately excluded from the study to maintain a homogeneous and relevant sample. Firstly, non-managerial staff, such as administrative personnel, field coordinators, and volunteers, are excluded because they are typically not involved in strategic decision-making or the overall management of educational interventions. Their exclusion is justified as their perspectives may not adequately address the research focus on project management strategies and challenges (Bhardwaj, 2019:157). Secondly, project managers operating outside Limpopo and Mpumalanga are excluded to ensure that findings are contextually grounded in the unique

socio-economic and educational landscapes of the selected provinces, where rural-urban dynamics and resource constraints significantly influence intervention strategies (Spaull & Pretorius, 2019:14).

Thirdly, individuals managing projects outside the education sector, such as those in health or infrastructure, are excluded because the study's scope focuses exclusively on educational interventions that improve literacy and numeracy outcomes. Finally, managers in charge of projects funded solely by government or international donors are also excluded, as corporate-funded initiatives present distinct reporting requirements, partnership dynamics, and stakeholder expectations that are central to the research focus (Van der Berg *et al.*, 2021:17). These targeted inclusion and exclusion criteria strengthen the study's internal validity by ensuring that the sample remains relevant and sufficiently focused to address the research questions.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

3.4.1 Permission to collect data

Before starting data collection, the researcher obtained written permission from the Chief Executive Officers of the selected non-profit organisations and received ethics clearance from the Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee (EMS-REC) at North-West University. Each organisation was informed of the study's objectives, and individual participants provided informed verbal consent before participating.

All interviews were conducted in English via Microsoft Teams at times convenient for participants. Each session lasted approximately 45 to 55 minutes and followed a semi-structured format, using a consistent set of core questions to ensure comparability while allowing follow-up questions where needed. The interview guide is attached as Appendix A.

3.4.2 Data collection methods

Data were collected using a semi-structured interview guide, developed with open-ended questions to ensure alignment with the research objectives and the key questions identified in Chapter 1. This semi-structured format supports the generation of rich, authentic responses that reflect participants' experiences and perspectives by enabling flexibility and in-depth probing during interviews (Cohen *et al.*, 2011:393).

To enhance the clarity and relevance of the interview protocol, a pilot interview was conducted with two project managers to formalise data collection, in accordance with recommendations for

qualitative research instrument design (Alshenqeeti, 2014). The interview guide was structured around the study's research questions and allowed for the incorporation of supplementary questions to explore general views and opinions in greater detail when needed. This approach supports methodological rigour and ensures that data collection remains focused while allowing depth of insight.

3.4.3 Interview protocol

The researcher distributed interview invitations via email to prospective participants. Each invitation included a link to the informed consent form, which provided comprehensive details about the study, participation rights, and data protection assurances. Upon receiving consent, individual interview dates and times were coordinated with participants.

All interviews were conducted online via Microsoft Teams, selected for its accessibility and to mitigate financial constraints, as the study lacked external funding. Before commencing each interview, the following statement was read aloud to participants: "By continuing with the interview, you permit the interview results to be used in this study. You have the right to withdraw at any time. If you do not feel comfortable answering a specific question, you are under no obligation to do so. Your identity will be kept anonymous, and you will be referred to by a symbol only. Confidentiality of your inputs is also guaranteed. May I kindly record the interview to transcribe the discussion accurately?" Interviews began only after participants provided consent to be recorded, in accordance with the principles of qualitative research ethics (Alshenqeeti, 2014). Each session followed a standardised, semi-structured interview protocol, with all participants responding to the same core set of questions as detailed in Appendix A.

Throughout the interviews, the researcher followed established procedural rules, including minimising explanatory remarks, maintaining participant focus, and preventing external interruptions. This approach is consistent with guidance in the qualitative methods literature, which emphasises the role of the interviewer as an active listener who facilitates a natural, detailed conversational flow (Dörnyei, 2007).

3.4.4 Researcher's reflection on digital data collection

Conducting virtual interviews required careful consideration of both platform reliability and participant preferences. Using secure, accessible tools like Microsoft Teams proved valuable for most sessions, while Zoom highlighted the risks posed by connectivity issues and technical challenges (Bryman, 2022). These occasional disruptions, along with device malfunctions and transcription software inaccuracies, enhanced methodological adaptability and informed

contingency planning when collecting qualitative data remotely (PMC, 2022). The process demonstrated that flexibility, careful platform selection, and proactive preparation are vital for effective digital data collection.

Equally important, offering participants a choice of digital interview platforms, such as Teams, Zoom, and WhatsApp, enabled greater inclusivity and accessibility. This approach accommodated a range of technological abilities, connection circumstances, and personal preferences, supporting participant comfort and convenience. Providing multiple virtual options is widely recognised as an ethical and methodological best practice in remote qualitative research, as it promotes responsiveness to diverse needs and enhances the quality and richness of collected data (PMC, 2022).

3.5 DATA ANALYSIS METHODS

Data analysis methods are systematic techniques and processes used to organise, interpret, and extract meaning from collected data to address the study's research questions (Afolabi, 2022). In this study, all interview data were transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis was utilised to identify, analyse systematically, and report patterns within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022:43). This method offers flexibility and rigour, allowing qualitative data to be organised into meaningful themes that directly address the research objectives (Braun & Clarke, 2022:41).

An inductive coding process was employed, meaning that initial codes were generated directly from the data before being grouped into broader thematic categories (Braun & Clarke, 2022:41). This approach ensures the analysis remains firmly grounded in participants' perspectives and facilitates the identification of salient and relevant patterns within the dataset (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017:3353). The adoption of thematic analysis was guided by its demonstrated ability to generate rich, practical insights relevant to both academic and practitioner audiences (Nowell *et al.*, 2017:4).

3.5.1 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations encompass the principles and standards that guide researchers to conduct studies responsibly, ensuring respect for participants' rights, dignity, and welfare throughout all stages of data collection and analysis (Afolabi, 2022). This study adhered to ethical guidelines in line with institutional requirements and South African legislation. Ethical clearance was obtained from the North-West University Research Ethics Committee before data collection commenced. All participants were provided with comprehensive information about the study's purpose,

procedures, potential risks and benefits, and their rights, and written informed consent was secured before participation.

Central to ethical research in South Africa is compliance with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA), Act No. 4 of 2013, which governs the processing and protection of personal data (Republic of South Africa, 2013). Accordingly, all personal information, including names, contact details, and interview transcripts, was treated with strict confidentiality. Data were anonymised during transcription, with pseudonyms used in any reports or publications to protect participant identities. Digital data were stored on password-protected devices, and physical documents were secured in locked cabinets accessible only to the researcher and academic supervisor.

Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. They were assured that their participation or withdrawal would not affect their relationship with their employer or the university. In accordance with POPIA, all participants were informed of how their data would be used, stored, and disposed of on study completion. Data retention followed the university's policy for the required minimum period, after which it was securely destroyed. Adherence to the university's ethical standards and POPIA ensures respect for participants' privacy and dignity and contributes to the overall credibility and integrity of the research (Lewis & Thornhill, 2019:215).

3.6 TRUSTWORTHINESS

Trustworthiness in qualitative research reflects the degree of confidence that the researcher has in the data, the methods applied, and the interpretations made, ensuring the overall quality of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, as cited in Anney, 2014). In this research, trustworthiness was established through the application of Lincoln and Guba's four criteria: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. These standards were adopted to ensure that the findings are authentic, consistent, objective, and sufficiently detailed to enable applicability in other educational research settings.

Table 1: Trustworthiness of the study

Term	Explanation	Ensuring quality
Credibility	Confidence in the truth and accuracy of research findings	Alignment between theory, research questions, objectives, data collection, and results; transcripts and findings are

		shared with participants; peer debriefing is conducted.
Dependability	Consistency and reliability of research findings over time	Use of peer-reviewed literature; transparent, traceable documentation of all data and analytic processes.
Confirmability	Objectivity of findings, minimising researcher bias	Data accurately and honestly represent participants' responses; all findings are traceable to recorded data sources.
Transferability	Applicability of findings to other contexts and settings	Thick, rich descriptions of context and methodology; audit trail maintained to support transferability judgements.

Source: Lester *et al.* (2020)

Together, these measures ensure that the study's findings are credible, dependable, confirmable, and transferable, thereby upholding the standards of methodological integrity proposed by Lincoln and Guba (as cited in Anney 2014) and operationalised through Lester *et al.*'s (2020) trustworthiness framework.

3.6.1 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is recognised as a foundational element of qualitative research, requiring the researcher to engage in ongoing critical self-reflection regarding their own positionality, underlying assumptions, and the potential influence they may exert on the research process and findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018:1). In this study, reflexivity is explicitly applied in line with Lincoln and Guba's trustworthiness criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba 1985). In the context of examining project managers' approaches to managing corporate-funded educational interventions in South Africa, reflexivity serves as a key strategy to strengthen the credibility and overall trustworthiness of the study.

The interpretive nature of qualitative research means that the researcher's background, values, and professional experiences can shape aspects such as the formulation of research questions, the conduct of interviews, and data interpretation (Nowell *et al.*, 2017:4). Given that the researcher is a CSI project manager and MBA candidate, specific professional insights may influence interactions with participants and theme development during analysis. To address this, a reflective

journal will be maintained throughout the research, documenting key decisions, potential biases, and reflections on positionality, as recommended by Nowell *et al.* (2017:2).

In practice, reflexivity in this study involves several deliberate strategies: acknowledging one's professional background and possible biases within the research report; applying ongoing critical self-questioning during data collection and analysis; and conducting peer debriefings with the academic supervisor to critically evaluate emerging reflections. These strategies collectively strengthen the study's methodological rigour. Incorporating reflexivity throughout the research promotes transparency, minimises researcher bias, and supports the validity and trustworthiness of findings (Berger, 2015:234). It remains essential for ensuring the authentic representation of project manager perspectives within the South African context.

3.7 SUMMARY

This chapter outlined the methodological framework applied to explore project management practices in corporate-funded educational interventions across Limpopo and Mpumalanga. Using an interpretivist, qualitative approach, the study employs purposive sampling and semi-structured interviews to generate contextual insights into the strategies, challenges, and innovations of NPO project managers. The chapter discusses rigorous data analysis, ethical procedures, and the steps taken to ensure validity and trustworthiness. Limitations related to sampling, context, and scope are acknowledged, underscoring that the chosen methods provide an in-depth, credible foundation for the study's findings and recommendations.

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 3 detailed the research design and methodological approach that guided the present study. In this chapter, the analysis and presentation of findings are based on data derived from programme managers overseeing corporate-funded educational interventions. The results are organised to address the core research objectives, with interview questions providing the primary structure for thematic discussion.

To contextualise the findings, a brief synopsis of the research methodology and the researcher's reflections on the data collection process are provided at the outset. Data analysis procedures are also succinctly summarised to ensure transparency and methodological rigour.

The discussion in this chapter centres on the management of corporate-funded educational interventions in Limpopo and Mpumalanga provinces. Thematic analysis revealed six central themes: project planning and implementation; stakeholder engagement; resource management; monitoring, evaluation, and adaptation; challenges encountered by project managers; and innovation and adaptive strategies. Each theme is examined in relation to the relevant research question and supported by evidence from participant responses, thereby facilitating an integrated and substantiated interpretation of the results.

4.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This study was guided by a qualitative research approach, which is well-suited to investigating complex social phenomena and understanding participants' lived experiences within their specific contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As outlined in Chapters 1 and 3, the research design, sampling strategy, and data collection procedures were carefully developed to yield in-depth insights into the perspectives and management experiences of project managers engaged in corporate-funded educational interventions. The qualitative methodology enabled a nuanced exploration of management practices, focusing on authenticity and context-rich data to address the study's research objectives.

4.2.1 Participant profile

The study's sample comprised ten participants who were all currently serving in project management roles within non-profit organisations responsible for implementing corporate-funded

educational interventions in Limpopo and Mpumalanga, South Africa. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, based on clearly defined inclusion criteria rather than convenience. Specifically, each participant was required to (1) occupy a project, programme, or implementation management position within an NPO; (2) hold direct responsibility for the planning, implementation, and/or monitoring of corporate-funded educational interventions; and (3) operate within either Limpopo or Mpumalanga, thereby aligning the sample with the study's focus on rural and peri-urban educational contexts. This strategy prioritised information-rich cases and ensured that participants were well positioned to provide in-depth insights into the management of CSI-funded educational programmes.

To ensure confidentiality, neutral pseudonyms were generated by assigning each participant a label of "P" followed by a unique sequential number (e.g., P001-P010). This method aligns with established best practices for protecting participant anonymity in qualitative research (Allen & Wiles, 2013). The assignment of pseudonyms did not encode demographic characteristics but preserved geographic context by indicating the corresponding province, Limpopo or Mpumalanga, in the demographic table. Participant identities and organisational affiliations were removed from transcripts and replaced with pseudonyms for reporting and analysis. Table 2 summarises key demographic characteristics: participant ages ranged from 27 to 60 years, providing a balanced representation of early-career professionals and experienced managers. Their project management experience ranged from less than 1 year to over 17 years, further supporting the study's findings' diversity and relevance.

Table 2: Participant profile

Participant ID	Province	Age	Years as Project Manager
001	Limpopo	57	5
002	Limpopo	47	4
003	Limpopo	34	5
004	Mpumalanga	46	11
005	Limpopo	34	7
006	Mpumalanga	46	14

007	Limpopo	27	1.5
008	Mpumalanga	60	5
009	Mpumalanga	53	0.8
010	Mpumalanga	50	17

4.2.2 Data collection tool

A semi-structured interview guide was developed by the researcher, incorporating open-ended questions closely aligned with the study's research objectives and the questions formulated in Chapter 1. This approach enabled the elicitation of comprehensive and nuanced responses from participants while ensuring the collected data remained directly relevant to the research's core aims. The semi-structured design also facilitated flexibility in probing for additional insights where appropriate, thereby enhancing the richness and validity of the findings.

4.2.3 Data collection procedure

Participants were formally invited to participate in the study via email, along with a comprehensive consent form outlining the voluntary nature of participation and the study's ethical considerations. After participants confirmed their willingness to participate, mutually convenient interview dates and times were arranged and confirmed through follow-up emails. Before each interview, both verbal and written consent for audio recording were obtained, as stipulated by the research ethics protocol approved by the North-West University Research Ethics Committee.

All interviews were conducted in English using Microsoft Teams, ensuring accessibility and consistent engagement across geographic locations. Each session followed a structured sequence of open-ended questions drawn from the semi-structured interview guide, enabling participants to elaborate freely while maintaining focus on the research objectives. Interviews averaged 55 minutes per session. The interview guide used in the study is attached as Appendix A.

4.2.4 Researcher's experiences with data collection using MS Teams and Zoom meetings

Of the ten interviews conducted, nine were held virtually via Microsoft Teams, while one participant preferred Zoom. Both platforms provided secure and accessible environments

conducive to qualitative engagement; however, the Zoom session was notably more affected by connectivity disruptions, with intermittent internet issues causing delays and necessitating rescheduling. The researcher encountered no significant technical challenges when using Teams.

While most sessions proceeded efficiently, occasional device malfunctions and the unreliability of automated transcription software further complicated logistics, particularly during the Zoom interview. These experiences enhanced the researcher's methodological adaptability and contingency planning, deepening practical understanding of digital data collection in qualitative research settings. The challenges encountered, primarily during the Zoom interview, underscore the importance of selecting the right platform and planning flexibly when conducting remote qualitative studies.

4.3 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY

The trustworthiness of this study was ensured through the application of Lincoln and Guba's four widely recognised criteria for qualitative research: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, as cited in Anney, 2014). Employing these principles ensured that the findings are authentic, consistent, and grounded in participants' lived experiences, while also providing sufficient contextual detail to enable transferability to similar research settings. The specific techniques implemented to address each criterion are described in Chapter 3 of this study.

4.4 DATA ANALYSIS

Data were analysed manually using thematic analysis, employing an inductive coding process consistent with qualitative research methodology (Braun & Clarke, 2022:43). This inductive approach enabled the identification of patterns, categories, and broader themes that emerged directly from participants' narratives, rather than being influenced by pre-existing theoretical frameworks or researcher assumptions. Thematic analysis ensured that participants' perspectives shaped the findings, thereby enhancing the credibility and richness of the results.

4.4.1 Coding

In this study, systematic manual coding was applied to the transcripts of semi-structured interviews, in line with established qualitative research protocols, to derive codes, categories, and themes inductively from the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018:5). This process entailed a detailed, line-by-line review to identify recurring patterns, significant concepts, and salient participant experiences related to programme design, stakeholder engagement, resource management, and adaptation in varied NPO contexts.

The initial codes were grouped into broader categories, following the procedures for thematic coding described by Creswell & Poth (2018:5). Sub-categories were further generated by analysing these categories, drawing both on patterns and data-driven insights, while ensuring alignment with the study's conceptual frameworks, most notably, the HRBA and Social Inclusion Theory (Anney, 2014:9).

Table 3: Themes and sub-themes

Themes	Sub-themes
Project Planning and Implementation	• Needs assessment and baseline studies • Alignment with DBE policy • Development of tailored tools and models
Stakeholder Engagement	• Onboarding and buy-in • Transparent communication • Participatory planning • Multi-stakeholder co-creation
Resource Management	• Allocation of Financial Resources • Assignment of Human Resources • Provision of Material and Technological Resource • Collaboration for Resource Sharing and Optimisation
Monitoring and Evaluation	• Monitoring Systems • Digital and Hybrid Approaches • Physical Monitoring and Relationship-Building • Formative and Summative Evaluation Processes • Tensions Between Donor and Departmental Expectations

Themes	Sub-themes
	• Reflective Adaptation and Continuous Learning • Balancing Accountability and Practical Improvement
Challenges	• Teacher and staff turnover • Resistance to new interventions • Poor Infrastructure and inadequate transport • Operational and ethical dilemmas • Administrative burden • Community-level obstacles
Mitigation and Innovation	• Flexible programme design • Digital tools and remote support • Catch-up and differentiated support • Succession planning • Community-driven solutions

4.5 FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The following section presents six key themes that emerged from the study's findings, examining each in relation to the existing literature.

4.6 THEME 1: PROJECT PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

This theme plans to illustrate the fundamental processes involved in planning and implementing corporate-funded educational interventions, as observed by participants within NPOs. The findings reveal key sub-themes, including needs assessment and baseline studies, alignment with the DBE policy, and the development of tailored tools and adaptive frameworks.

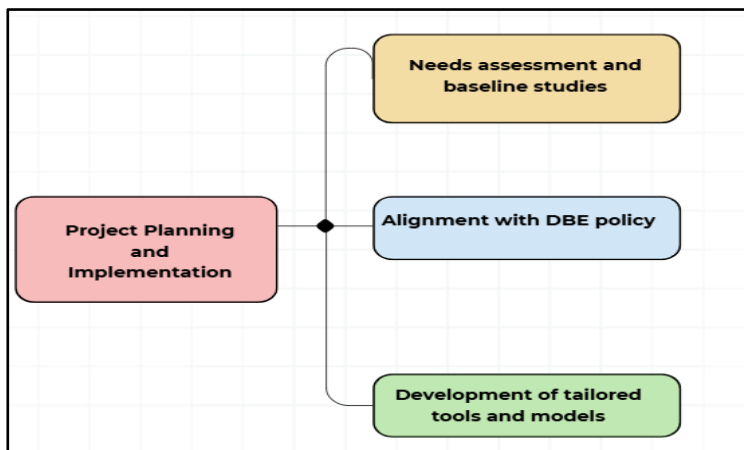


Figure 1: Project planning and implementation

4.6.1 Needs assessment and baseline studies

According to the findings, planning consistently began with rigorous needs assessments and baseline studies. Participants from both provinces emphasised the need to collect contextual and demographic data at the outset, meticulously profiling each school or district to ensure interventions were both relevant and practical. As Sumida (2021:115-132) points out, differentiated strategies and sensitive, context-driven planning are essential to avoid reinforcing educational inequities. Recent studies further highlight that thorough baseline assessments, stakeholder collaboration, and ongoing contextual analysis are critical for designing effective interventions that are responsive to local needs (Thrive by Five, 2024)

“We begin with a feasibility study of the schools we support, followed by a baseline assessment to determine challenges and the level of mathematical understanding among teachers and learners.” This approach was widely echoed and framed the context-driven ethos of NPO project management (P003).

“We conduct baseline and endline assessments for teachers before and after training, and for learners, to gauge knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours pre- and post-intervention.” (P005).

These assessments were considered vital for identifying immediate priorities and setting achievable long-term goals in literacy and numeracy (Ilifa Labantwana, 2017). Notably, the process was ongoing, with regular feedback and adaptive adjustments ensuring sustained relevance and effectiveness.

4.6.2 Alignment with DBE policy

According to the results, alignment with the DBE policy emerged as a defining and recurring theme in project design and implementation. Participants from both provinces frequently adapted their methodologies for each context, rather than applying a universal template. Moyo and Moyo (2021:25-32) confirm that adapting interventions to DBE policy enhances the legitimacy and long-term impact of educational programmes, while rigidly standardised approaches often encounter resistance and limited uptake.

“We are guided by policy; the DBE policy guides us in coming up with these tools that we use to support teachers. So, depending on a specific district or province, we tailor-make tools to suit their needs and make an impact” (P001).

Numerous managers noted the critical importance of matching intervention content with the official curriculum and departmental tools to ensure legitimacy and teacher acceptance (Mweli, 2024).

“We now use the standardised tests, the Early Grade Reading Assessments (EGRA), which the Department of Education approve, umh, If there is criticism, because we usually get criticism as well from them, to say, ‘No, you didn’t align properly,’ we consult, and then they give us direction” (P002).

“When there is a misalignment between our intervention tools and what the Department expects, teachers are quick to push back. They ask, ‘Why do we need to repeat this if we already submit similar reports?’ Integrating our project’s monitoring with departmental systems was essential to avoid extra work and ensure smoother acceptance.” (Participant 008).

The participants' lived experiences confirmed that interventions not aligned with DBE policy faced resistance or confusion within schools, reinforcing the sector's imperative for alignment. Recent research reinforces this point, showing that interventions not aligned with DBE policy are likely to face resistance and confusion within schools, reinforcing the need for responsive adaptation (Vorwerk, 2024).

4.6.3 Development of tailored tools and frameworks

Participants emphasised that creating tailored tools and frameworks was not only an indicator of innovation but also a strategic requirement in effective project management for NPO-led interventions. Managers frequently described utilising intervention models, log frames, Gantt charts, and risk matrices, with the integration of these operational frameworks seen as essential

for addressing funding challenges and adapting to diverse contextual constraints (Moyo & Moyo, 2021:25-32).

"Each project has what we call an intervention model that we use. So, the intervention model, followed by a developed log frame from the project, was used, uhm, The implementation plan then aligns with the objectives you'll find in the log frame" (P002).

"I wouldn't say they are standardised as such because it depends on the needs of each project, but we are guided by policy, uhm, the DBE policy guides us in coming up with these tools that we use to support the teachers. So, depending on a specific district or province, we tailor-make the tools to suit their needs so that we have an impact" (P008).

Participants consistently reported that customisation was key, with frameworks and support tools adapted to each specific province or district and closely aligned with DBE policy requirements (Ilifa Labantwana, 2017). The latest literature highlights that digital and participatory approaches, including the use of Google Forms and analytic dashboards, have emerged as increasingly valuable, enabling real-time data collection and dynamic performance monitoring (Moyo & Moyo, 2021:25–32).

"We have now transitioned to the Google Form. Our trainers go in, and they collect data, which speaks to our KPIs" (P006).

4.7 THEME 2: STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

This theme explores the ongoing processes and challenges involved in building relationships and securing participation from all relevant groups essential to sustaining educational projects. The theme comprises four sub-themes: onboarding and buy-in, transparent communication, participatory planning, and multi-stakeholder co-creation, as illustrated in Figure 2 below:

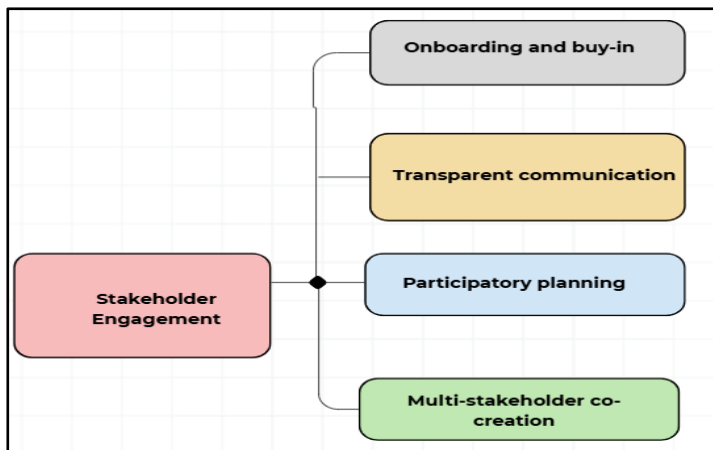


Figure 2: Stakeholder engagement

4.7.1 Onboarding and buy-in

According to the findings, securing the commitment of all relevant stakeholders at the beginning of an intervention is essential to its success. Participants consistently emphasised the importance of initiating onboarding sessions at the outset with provincial and district officials, school leaders, teachers, and community representatives to foster understanding, trust, and shared alignment around intervention goals. Achieving buy-in at the district level was found to be especially critical for legitimising intervention activities and securing access. At the same time, failure to prioritise this process often resulted in communication issues and practical obstacles to implementation (Bizcommunity, 2025).

"Sometimes district officials feel like we are taking over their roles. They become protective of their spaces and responsibilities, making it very hard to secure their cooperation for onboarding and project activities" (P001).

Notably, securing stakeholder buy-in has emerged as a crucial consideration in both Limpopo and Mpumalanga. Still, it is even more critical in Mpumalanga, where the education sector is prone to teacher strikes and vigorous union activity. In such environments, proactive engagement is vital to minimise resistance and ensure uninterrupted project delivery (SADTU, 2025).

These findings are supported by the literature, which underscores that onboarded and committed stakeholders reduce resistance, clarify roles, and lay the foundation for sustainable collaboration throughout the project lifecycle (Kujala *et al.*, 2022:999-1046).

4.7.2 Transparent and participatory communication

Findings indicate that transparent, timely, and respectful communication is fundamental to effective stakeholder engagement in educational interventions. Participants from both provinces emphasised the importance of practices such as regular updates, honest dialogue about expectations, and responsive feedback channels in building trust and overcoming initial apprehension or resistance. This spirit of openness enabled quick troubleshooting and adaptation as conditions changed. Research echoes that transparency in information flow and decision-making strengthens engagement, credibility, and support throughout the intervention lifecycle (Smith & Williams, 2024:157).

"We involve the school governing body, the community leaders, and we have quarterly forums with them. At the beginning of each term, we don't impose the implementation plan. We have the forum to reflect on our implementation from the previous term, uhm, We consult properly and then they give us direction. If we've got reservations about their input, we are also open and say 'Guys, we don't think this is going to work for us because of all those values, integrity, transparency, collaboration and consultation. That's how we've managed to maintain healthy relationships" (P002).

Participants also emphasised the importance of participatory planning in fostering meaningful engagement. Through collaborative forums, joint workshops, and regular review meetings, stakeholders co-created goals, work plans, and assessment tools. This participatory approach led to more relevant, context-grounded interventions and built local buy-in and responsiveness to emerging realities (Kujala *et al.*, 2022:999-1046).

"We never work in isolation, uh, every big decision or change in the project is discussed in open meetings where both teachers and community representatives share their perspectives. It's this participatory structure that makes it easier to adapt and keeps everyone invested in outcomes" (P003).

"We transformed stakeholder forums by allowing community members to take the lead, shifting from reporting results to actively listening. This has created genuine opportunities for stakeholders to evaluate and shape the project." (P002).

4.7.3 Multi-stakeholder co-creation

The findings indicate that advancing beyond traditional consultation, participants actively facilitated the co-creation of interventions with diverse actors, including NPOs, businesses, civic associations, government departments, and funders. Joint planning sessions, collaborative

implementation, and shared problem-solving significantly broadened the reach and sustainability of interventions. Multi-stakeholder co-creation is a critical driver of systemic change, resource mobilisation, and innovation in education (Volmink & Van der Elst, 2023:6-14)

"I think the funders need to listen to the stakeholders. There are quite several variables on the ground that they might not have even thought of. Uhm, funders should directly engage and listen to the local community before launching interventions. They must put faces to their beneficiaries' people must not be numbers. Effective solutions prioritise community needs and local context, so participatory forums are essential before any programme starts."

Research stresses the importance of reciprocal engagement and flexible governance structures to ensure lasting impact through co-creation (Smith & Williams, 2024:157).

4.8 THEME 3: RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Resource management addresses the strategies and challenges involved in allocating essential resources for NPO-driven educational interventions. Four sub-themes were identified within this area: allocation of financial resources, assignment of human resources, provision of material and technological resources, and collaboration for resource sharing and optimisation. These sub-themes are further illustrated in Figure 3 below:

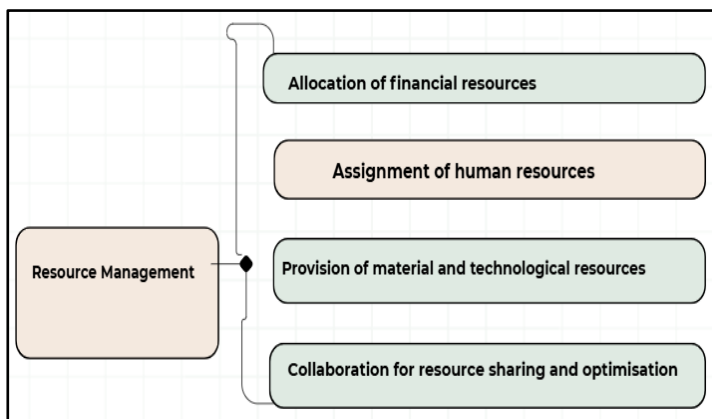


Figure 3: Resource management

4.8.1 Allocation of financial resources

Participants explained that budgets were never static. Instead, project managers continually revisited and recalibrated budgets to account for funding reductions or unforeseen financial shocks. When budgets were cut, leaders revised planned activities, re-prioritised critical

interventions, and actively pursued alternative sources of support to safeguard programme continuity (Trialogue, 2023).

"When the budget, for example, is cut, uhm, you might have to change the number of coaches that you have. Which might leave you with less people, yet you still have to work with all the schools as from the beginning, and that impacts on the delivery. Where you were doing three support visits, you might have to reduce them to one or two, which might not be adequate for the implementation to be done. It is not as easy, but one way of making it work is to use remote support" (P002).

Most participants described using needs-based and evidence-informed allocation strategies, redirecting resources based on data and stakeholder feedback to preserve essential services and impacts despite financial pressures (Moyo & Moyo, 2021:25-32).

4.8.2 Assignment of human resources

The findings demonstrate that effective human resource management requires a nuanced balance between recruiting individuals with local language proficiency and community ties, and ensuring sufficient subject expertise and programme delivery capacity and in contrast, recruiting locally often enhanced school and community buy-in, and skills shortages, particularly for qualified language coaches in African languages, frequently necessitated seeking talent from broader pools (Volmink & Van der Elst, 2023). This challenge is especially pronounced in Limpopo, where competent language coaches are in short supply and sourcing suitable candidates with both language skills and teaching qualifications is a persistent barrier (University of Limpopo, 2025). Continuous professional development and structured mentoring were therefore essential for building staff capacity and sustaining programme quality at all levels (Moyo & Moyo, 2021:25-32).

"Securing school buy-in, especially where finding suitable coaches is difficult due to language, internet connectivity, particularly in Limpopo, which affects virtual workshop attendance, and ensuring the right coaches are recruited, not just because they can speak the local language, but they have the necessary qualification as well as experience. To address these, we collaborate with stakeholders to recruit talent, leverage departmental officials to foster school cooperation, and utilise technology to record sessions and share content to support teachers who miss workshops" (P004).

"Many new hires have little experience, requiring patience and structured development. The projects help people with the right attitude to grow, and some express deep gratitude for having participated and developed through the program" (P005).

4.8.3 Provision of material and technological resources

Material resource management in both provinces involved careful auditing of resources at each site to prevent duplication, ensure relevance, and seamlessly integrate new materials into the curriculum. Teachers benefited most when these resources aligned with DBE materials, thereby strengthening teacher ownership and promoting long-term adoption (Trialogue, 2023).

"For resources we print some resources like learner books. We also have resources like lesson plans which are in digital form. Our lesson plans are uploaded according to the languages and the subjects that are being offered and then funds are allocated accordingly based on how much printing is for the paper-based resources and then for the programs on the tablet, they are allocated accordingly and then each school is given the resources also based on the numbers because initially we will have collected data which is very important of how many teachers do we have in each specific grade" (P001).

"Resource planning starts from the allocated budget and considers the needs of each programme in line with the funder's requirements. The aim is always to use resources according to funder specifications and targeted project outcomes, while maintaining flexibility for any changes that arise along the way" (P007).

Technological management was an additional imperative. Managers transitioned from paper-based to digital systems for data collection and monitoring, which improved the quality and timeliness of reporting but introduced new challenges related to digital literacy and uneven connectivity. The Government Technical Advisory Centre's Programme and Project Management Toolkit (GTAC, 2024) specifically highlight the importance of leveraging fit-for-purpose digital tools and upskilling project staff to increase efficiency, accuracy, and knowledge transfer in public sector project management. However, the resource also cautions that project leaders must anticipate and address barriers such as variable connectivity, user readiness, and the need for ongoing training to realise the full benefits of digital transformation in education projects (GTAC, 2024).

"We used to use paper and pen, but it was not easy to interpret. Now, we have transitioned to the Google Form. Our trainers collect data, which speaks to our KPIs. If there are gaps, then we can see that things are not going well" (P002).

4.8.4 Provision of resources for collaborative and optimisation

Participants in both provinces identified the provision of resources for collaboration and optimisation as a critical enabler of programme success in corporate-funded educational interventions. Regular joint meetings among district officials, donor representatives, and school leadership were described as essential to creating a shared decision-making environment in which the real needs of schools and communities could be accurately identified and addressed. This collaborative approach not only improved the responsiveness and relevance of resource allocation but also fostered greater stakeholder buy-in and accountability for outcomes (Morel, 2025).

Recent research supports these findings, indicating that multi-stakeholder collaboration and participatory resource allocation lead to more effective, context-specific, and sustainable interventions in education. Such practices promote adaptive management, transparent decision-making, and ongoing stakeholder engagement, all of which are central to ensuring interventions remain flexible, equitable, and responsive to changing local needs (Volmink & Van der Elst, 2023).

“We routinely organise joint meetings with district officials, funders, and school leaders because only then do we truly understand what the real needs are on the ground. This helps us allocate resources where they will have the greatest impact and keeps everyone invested in the programme’s success” (P002).

By encouraging broad participation in resource planning and regular consultation, educational interventions are better positioned to optimise resources, overcome operational challenges, and achieve lasting results aligned with both local priorities and international best practice (Volmink & Van der Elst, 2023).

4.9 THEME 4: MONITORING, EVALUATION AND ADAPTATION

Monitoring, Evaluation and Adaptation is a cross-cutting theme that examines how systematic tracking, assessment, and iterative learning drive continual improvement in corporate-funded educational interventions. This theme highlights the role of comprehensive monitoring systems, digital and hybrid approaches, formative and summative evaluation, and ongoing adaptation in ensuring that projects remain effective, accountable, and aligned with evolving needs and goals, as discussed in Figure 4 below:

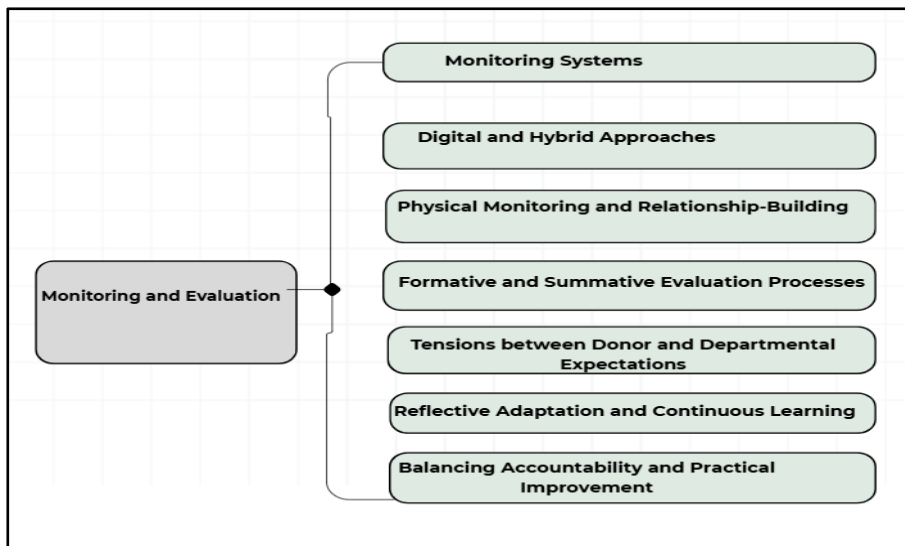


Figure 4: Monitoring and evaluation

4.9.1 Monitoring systems

Participants from both provinces emphasised that monitoring, evaluation, and adaptation must operate as integrated, ongoing cycles to ensure accountability, promote learning, and guide continuous improvement in educational projects. These monitoring systems are considered essential for tracking progress, informing adjustments, and supporting evidence-based decision-making throughout project implementation (Trialogue, 2023).

Managers reported using a diverse mix of tools, including baseline and end-line assessments, classroom observations, learner achievement data, and detailed performance reviews, to build a comprehensive picture of project outcomes and challenges. For example, feedback data gathered through evaluation tools informed adjustments in workshop delivery. At the same time, coaches submitted weekly reports via live Google Sheets to support real-time progress tracking and prompt issue resolution.

“We have a tool and an evaluation tool for the teachers, and they fill in that evaluation tool which will inform us of how the workshop was delivered and based on the data that we collect from there, we also adjust” (P005).

“Coaches submit weekly reports and populate live Google Sheets to track interventions and successes in real time, allowing prompt identification and resolution of challenges and progress toward targets” (P003).

“We use outcome-based monitoring and results-based management approaches, set targets or aspirational goals, break them down by project duration, and measure with relevant data collection. We track progress for short, medium, and long-term goals, adjusting interventions or project fidelity as necessary. Continuous collection and analysis of data drives all adjustments” (P004).

Recent research confirms that combining multiple data sources and maintaining a responsive approach enables real-time adaptation, increasing the effectiveness of interventions while also fostering a culture of accountability and learning (Mkhize & Mubangizi, 2021).

4.9.2 Digital and hybrid approaches

Participants indicated that the adoption of digital dashboards and online surveys has significantly strengthened data collection and the real-time analysis of programme activities (Volmink & Van der Elst, 2023). These digital tools were credited with improving the speed and accuracy of monitoring, enabling teams to track key performance indicators and adapt swiftly to emerging needs.

“Now we’ve transitioned to the Google Form. Our trainers go in, and they collect data, which speaks to our KPIs, uhm, we used to use paper and pen, but it wasn’t easy to interpret” (P002).

However, infrastructure disparities in both provinces necessitate hybrid approaches. In these settings, digital methods are complemented by paper-based tools to accommodate limited connectivity and varying levels of digital literacy (Spaull *et al.*, 2021). This blend ensures both inclusivity and reliability in monitoring and evaluation practices.

Beyond formal systems, participants also described the strategic use of WhatsApp as a versatile communication and monitoring tool.

“WhatsApp groups are used to share best practices among teachers and promote engagement and attendance at workshops. We also use it regularly to send reminders, distribute learning materials to coaches, and quickly communicate updates from district officials when in-person meetings or emails are not practical” (P003).

The integration of both sophisticated digital solutions and accessible, user-driven platforms, such as WhatsApp, reflects recent best practices in hybrid project and educational management, where flexibility, responsiveness, and stakeholder participation are key indicators of successful monitoring (Spaull & Taylor, 2022).

4.9.3 Physical monitoring and relationship-building

Participants highlighted the importance of in-person monitoring to validate implementation and foster stronger relationships with stakeholders. This approach aligns with Combrinck *et al.* (2017), who advocate that close interaction with implementers is crucial for maintaining fidelity and achieving impact.

"We do have physical monitoring both by me as the project manager and also by the monitoring and evaluation team... after workshops we have a follow up. Instructional coaching and when coaches go in class, then we do monitor that as well, how is it being done? Is it effective? Are teachers understanding? Are they following the methodologies? uhm, and also just to check on the impact that the program has on the learners" (P001).

4.9.4 Formative and summative evaluation processes

Participants emphasised that both formative and summative evaluation processes are integral parts of project routines in educational interventions. Formative evaluation is conducted continuously during the project to provide immediate feedback, inform necessary adjustments, and support ongoing improvement (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This adaptive approach enables teams to respond effectively to day-to-day challenges and dynamic classroom environments.

"We review our activities based on the feedback. If there are gaps, then we can see that things are not going well, and we make timely adjustments to improve" (P002).

The emphasis on real-time feedback creates learning opportunities and empowers stakeholders to co-create solutions as the programme unfolds.

Summative evaluation, in contrast, is reserved for key milestones or final project stages and is designed to assess whether the intervention has achieved its intended outcomes (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Summative processes often involve analysing quantitative measures, such as learner assessment scores, alongside qualitative reflections collected from various stakeholders.

"At project inception, donor targets are set, uhm, these targets are broken down into mini milestones. We evaluate performance at each stage and then conduct a final review at the end" (P003).

4.9.5 Tensions between funder and departmental expectations

A significant theme emerging from the data is the discrepancy between funders' short-term outcome orientation and the long-term, systemic perspective adopted by education practitioners.

Participants raised that funders typically prioritise immediate, measurable gains, such as improved learner assessment results within one or two years and seek evidence that can be captured in reports and statistical summaries. This focus creates pressure for project teams to deliver rapid results and emphasise numerical performance metrics (IPASA, 2023).

In contrast, practitioners and education department officials frequently advocate a broader, developmental definition of impact. They point out that meaningful change, such as shifts in teacher practice, enhanced learner motivation, and positive school culture, often takes years to materialise and is less easily measured through quantitative data alone (Spaull *et al.*, 2021). This divergence leads to ongoing negotiations over which success indicators are tracked and reported in project monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

"I've seen people thinking that impact is improving learner results. That's not the only impact, uhm, impact goes beyond learner results, including shifts in teacher behaviour and school culture. As a funder, you cannot always be asking for graphs and numbers" (P002).

"There are a lot of things that funders don't see as impact because they can't be easily measured in numbers, uhm, like shifts in teacher confidence or school climate. If you only focus on numbers, you miss the real change that often takes years to show in learner outcomes and teacher practices." (P004).

Participants noted that this tension often leads to disagreements over which indicators of success should be prioritised and included in monitoring and evaluation frameworks. Some described needing to balance donor reporting requirements with their own professional judgement about what constitutes authentic and sustainable improvement (IPASA, 2023).

"There are always negotiations about what gets reported. Funders want hard numbers and graphs, but in our view, those do not tell the whole story. Sometimes it means we have to submit additional qualitative evidence or advocate for outcomes that reflect deeper, longer-term change, even if they're not immediately measurable" (P002)

The literature supports these findings, indicating that meaningful, systemwide changes, especially in education, require several years to manifest and must be assessed using a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods (Spaull *et al.*, 2021)

4.9.6 Reflective adaptation and continuous learning

Participants consistently characterised adaptation as a proactive and reflective process, intentionally woven into routine feedback sessions, collaborative discussions, and ongoing

professional development efforts (Abukalusa, 2023:249). This approach was enabled by strong adaptive leadership and organisational resilience, characterised by open systems and flexible structures that supported innovation even in complex or uncertain environments (Abukalusa, 2023:249). Reflective learning was facilitated through debriefings and open forums where both successes and challenges could be examined transparently.

“Afterwards I do have a session with the coaches to support them on how best they can realize the objectives we have set. We talk through what worked, what didn’t, and what can be changed for next time” (P001).

“We hold debriefing meetings after major activities to reflect on what went well and what didn’t, then use that feedback to adjust our future planning and improve our approach. Every team member is encouraged to speak honestly-this openness is what helps us grow as a team” (P004).

Participants also mentioned that regular consultation with teachers, district officials, and community members formed the foundation for adaptation that was responsive and context-sensitive. Collaborative partnerships empowered participants to identify local priorities, foster trust, and establish a shared sense of ownership in the intervention’s ongoing development. Ongoing professional development, scenario planning, and peer learning opportunities further nurtured continuous learning (Chikiwa & Graven, 2024).

“We are always learning from each other in the field. Each challenge is a chance to try something new, learn from the outcome, and share the experience with the team” (P003).

4.9.7 Balancing accountability and practical improvement

Participants noted that the processes associated with monitoring, evaluation, and reporting often become overly bureaucratic, shifting the focus from authentic educational improvement to routine administrative tasks (Thutong, 2024).

“Sometimes, there are too many layers... we lose focus of the main thing to ensure that there’s a program for teachers to be supported on, they follow the program and there is an impact with the learners” (P001).

“I spend more time filling out forms and writing reports than actually working with teachers or learners. It can make you feel like you’re just ticking boxes instead of making a difference on the ground” (P002).

The literature highlights the need for accountability models that are designed with a clear sense of purpose and adaptability. When accountability frameworks are intentional, participatory, and meaningful to practitioners, they provide valuable insights for practical progress, rather than merely serving bureaucratic needs (Leach, 2018:33). Systems that strike a balance between summative accountability and formative, teacher-led reflection enable schools to focus on improvement, collaborative learning, and professional growth, ultimately leading to a sustained educational impact (Thutong, 2024).

4.10 THEME 5: CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY PROJECT MANAGERS

This theme seeks to illuminate the range and complexity of challenges that project managers face when delivering corporate-funded educational interventions. The purpose is to deepen understanding of the practical constraints and barriers that affect project effectiveness and sustainability. The theme is organised into six interconnected infrastructure and inadequate transport, operational and ethical dilemmas, administrative burden, and community-level obstacles, each shedding light on distinct yet overlapping aspects of project delivery, as demonstrated in Figure 5 below:

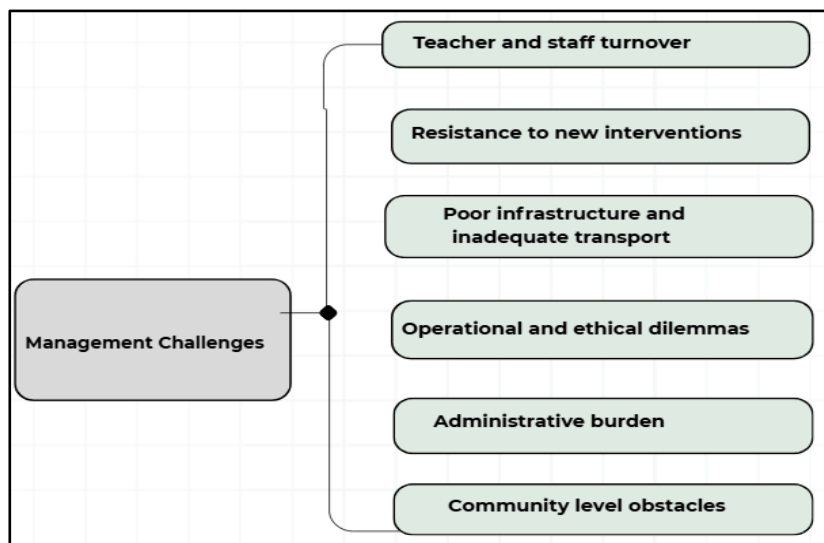


Figure 5: Management challenges

4.10.1 Teacher and staff turnover

Participants from both provinces identified several systemic challenges that routinely affect the implementation of corporate-funded educational interventions. Persistent staff turnover, skill variations, and gaps in teacher training hinder the continuity of high-quality education delivery in

both provinces. Literature demonstrates that turnover rates are exacerbated by weak professional development pipelines and limited opportunities for career progression (Volmink & Van der Elst, 2023).

“It becomes a challenge because when a teacher leaves, you have to orientate the new person all over again on the programme, the resources, and the apps, which takes a lot of time and slows down the project. Sometimes, we also need to retrain them on how to use the digital tools, and that’s even more time taken from supporting learners” (P001).

“When you lose a coach or a teacher, it doesn’t just mean finding a replacement. It sets everything back-relationships, understanding of the programme, and even the momentum we had built with learners and the school. It takes months to get back to where we were” (P003).

4.10.2 Resistance to new interventions

Resistance to new interventions emerged as a prevalent barrier in both provinces, particularly when educators perceived added responsibilities or a mismatch with existing curriculum expectations. Such resistance tends to be more pronounced in contexts where interventions are not clearly aligned with the DBE policy or when teachers feel insufficiently consulted and supported during implementation (Tyler, 2024).

Overcoming teacher resistance requires project staff to deploy robust soft skills, engage patients, and build transparent relationships. Participants indicated that fostering trust, modelling change, providing professional development, and ensuring ongoing support were key to helping educators see the genuine value of new practices and reducing initial reluctance (Makhavhu *et al.*, 2022).

“Early resistance from teachers is common when new routines and methods increase their workload. Coaches and project staff rely on soft skills, knowledge, and relationship-building to help teachers see the value in change” (P005).

“Some teachers feel threatened by new approaches, especially if they think it’s just more work without real benefit. It takes time and patience for them to trust that these interventions are genuinely helpful, not just another thing on their plate” (Participant 002).

“Teachers were somewhat resistant to assessment at first, but ongoing evaluation became integral to improvement” (P008).

Recent literature recognises that successful uptake of interventions depends on building trust, fostering collaborative relationships, and providing consistent opportunities for teacher input and

professional development. Practitioner engagement, modelling, and curriculum alignment help overcome initial reluctance and drive sustained improvement (CDE, 2023).

4.10.3 Inadequate transport and poor infrastructure

The findings reveal that logistical and contextual challenges present significant barriers to effective project implementation across both provinces, but these issues are especially pronounced in Limpopo. Inadequate transport systems and poor road infrastructure in Limpopo, combined with greater distances between schools, regularly disrupt consistent access to project sites and delay the delivery of essential educational resources (Moyo & Moyo, 2021). These difficulties affect every phase of intervention delivery and often restrict teacher participation, require creative scheduling solutions such as Professional Learning Communities for catch-up sessions, and necessitate reliance on limited local transport options.

"In Limpopo, transport arrangements sometimes limit teacher participation; they use common transport, so catch-up sessions are held via PLCs and resources are shared. Internet connectivity particularly affects virtual workshop attendance" (P003).

"Transport is a significant issue, as I often use my own vehicle for site visits and deliveries, and few local service providers are willing to help. Reimbursement requires extensive documentation, which can be rejected. The local roads are rough, which limits access to the site. Network coverage in the rural area is poor, complicating important meetings and stakeholder engagement. These factors regularly affect project support and outreach" (P009).

Recent research and government reports confirm that, although some progress has been made, such as increased budget allocations for school infrastructure, classroom upgrades, and the provision of scholar transport, significant challenges, including overcrowding, unsafe sanitation, and spending bottlenecks, remain pervasive. These issues underscore the urgent need for strategic investment, local coordination, and stronger monitoring to ensure equitable access and effective programme delivery (Equal Education, 2022).

4.10.4 Operational and ethical dilemmas

Findings reveal that participants commonly experience operational and ethical dilemmas arising from unstable donor funding cycles and abrupt mid-project budget reallocations. These conditions demand high levels of flexibility and ongoing adaptation, frequently forcing teams to redesign implementation plans or transition to less effective delivery models. Participants noted that such disruptions not only challenge the stability and continuity of programmes but also create ethical concerns around the quality and integrity of services delivered (Van der Berg *et al.*, 2021).

“Flexibility and rapid response are essential. Sometimes, new reporting systems or meeting schedules are introduced just as our team becomes comfortable with previous ones, requiring ongoing communication and training. Budget cuts force us to transition from face-to-face to virtual training, which is less engaging but necessary for cost savings” (P010).

“We had to change our programme delivery halfway through because the funder reallocated part of the budget with very little notice. It’s difficult-sometimes it feels like we’re compromising on what really matters for the sake of just keeping the project afloat” (P004).

Latest research and sector commentary confirm that these dilemmas are widespread. Donor fatigue, economic volatility, and shifting priorities have increased the risk of funding interruptions or unpredictable grant cycles, forcing NGOs and project teams to make rapid, sometimes ethically challenging decisions regarding resource allocation and delivery (Zenex Foundation, 2024). Effective collaboration among funders and between government and the non-profit sector is recommended to strengthen resilience, transparency, and strategic planning across the education landscape (National Treasury , 2025).

4.11 THEME 6: MITIGATION AND INNOVATION STRATEGIES

This theme examines how project managers utilise creativity, technology, and adaptation to overcome field constraints, ensuring ongoing progress and responsive solutions for corporate-funded educational initiatives. The theme has five sub-themes: flexible programme design, digital tools and remote support, catch-up and differentiated support, succession planning, and community-driven solutions, as displayed in Figure 6 below:

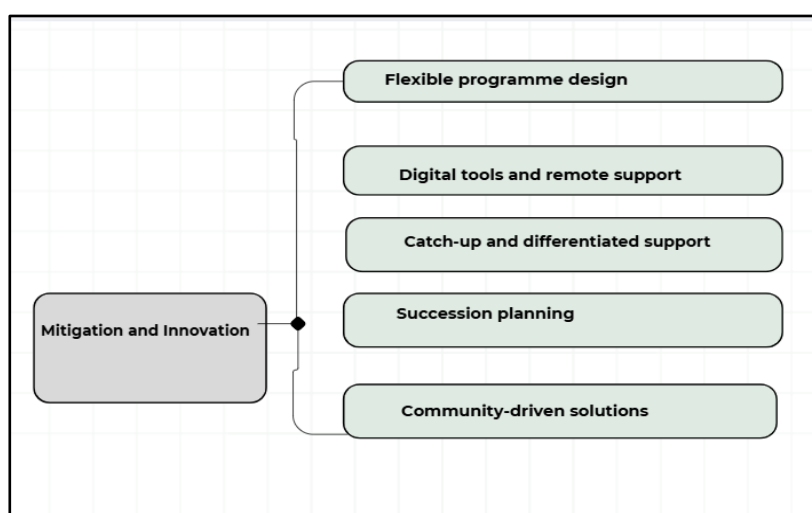


Figure 6: Mitigation and innovation

4.11.1 Flexible programme design

Faced with staff turnover, shifting resources, and diverse learner needs, participants emphasised the importance of flexible planning and catch-up support structures to sustain instructional quality and meet project goals. By tailoring interventions such as developing accelerated programmes for newly appointed or struggling teachers, project managers ensure continuity even in unpredictable environments. Literature underscores the importance of targeted, differentiated support as a key strategy for mitigating instability and learning loss in schools with high staff turnover (ADvTECH, 2025).

"When a teacher leaves, you have to orientate the new person all over again on the programme, the resources, and the apps, which takes a lot of time and slows down the project. Sometimes, we also need to retrain them on how to use the digital tools, and that's even more time taken from supporting learners... We do adjust the content for the term so that you have a catch-up program where you chunk content and then work with the teacher to say for you to cover the curriculum for this term this is what you can do. We have some tools that have been developed to support and ensure that teachers do implement, and learners are able to get what they're supposed to get, and they don't have to miss out when there's that gap between the old teacher and the new teacher" (P001).

4.11.2 Digital tools, remote support

Participants emphasised the vital role of digital platforms and remote support systems in sustaining project momentum amid frequent disruptions such as strikes, transport delays, and public health crises. When physical access to schools became impossible, project teams quickly shifted to remote coaching and the digital distribution of resources. WhatsApp groups were highlighted as especially effective for resource sharing, peer problem-solving, and fostering collaboration, ensuring that essential updates and best practices reached even the most remote teachers in real time. Managers also used live data-tracking tools to monitor progress, troubleshoot issues, and maintain continuity, enabling robust virtual support when on-site visits were not possible (Moyo & Moyo, 2021).

"WhatsApp groups are used to share best practices among teachers and promote engagement and attendance at workshops. We also use it regularly to send reminders, distribute learning materials to coaches, and quickly communicate updates from district officials when in-person meetings or emails are not practical. In Limpopo, internet connectivity particularly affects virtual workshop attendance, so we record sessions and share content on WhatsApp groups to support teachers who miss workshops. Succession planning is also important, uhm, we ensure that new

coaches get mentorship from experienced ones through regular peer learning forums, which keeps continuity in our support" (P003).

"We transitioned to using Google Forms for data collection because it's easier to analyse and share. Trainers gather information on classroom visits in real time, uhm, which means that if there are problems or gaps, we can immediately spot them and make the necessary adjustments- there's much less lag than with paper records" (P002).

Succession planning and structured peer learning further strengthened institutional resilience, enabling smoother transitions during staff turnover. These strategies ensured organisational memory and programme continuity despite inevitable personnel changes (Moyo & Moyo, 2021).

4.11.3 Succession planning and peer learning

Succession planning and structured peer learning emerged as vital strategies for strengthening institutional resilience and maintaining programme quality during internal personnel transitions (Creswell & Poth, 2018:1). Participants shared that having established processes for mentoring new coaches and systematically sharing knowledge minimised disruption, kept interventions on track, and preserved institutional memory during staff turnover. As a result, projects could continue smoothly even when experienced team members left unexpectedly, and new appointees quickly acquired the necessary skills and understanding to fulfil their roles.

These proactive efforts included regular peer learning forums, onboarding mentorship, and comprehensive documentation of procedures. Such approaches ensured not only the continuity of support and project delivery but also cultivated a culture of collaboration and professional growth across the organisation.

"When there is a new coach, we make sure they are paired with someone experienced for the first few months. Peer learning forums are held regularly so that skills and knowledge stay in the team, even if people move on. That way, the programme does not lose momentum every time staff change" (P003).

Regular review and updating of development plans, as suggested by current South African succession planning frameworks, further ensured alignment with organisational needs while simultaneously preparing employees for future leadership and specialist roles (UFS, 2024)

4.11.4 Community-driven and reflective approaches

According to the findings, Adaptive strategies include alignment with local realities through community-driven solutions, such as working with school governing bodies and leveraging local volunteers. This deepened community buy-in and bolstered sustainability, echoing research findings that context-sensitive, participatory models promote long-term project impact (World Bank, 2025).

Participants from both provinces emphasised the importance of a reflective learning culture, which is facilitated by regular debriefings, feedback sessions, and open forums. Such learning communities empowered project teams to remain agile, iterate on methods, and share innovations, which are hallmarks of successful adaptive management across varied South African contexts.

"We use these forums as a feedback session. We get feedback from the stakeholders, and we identify gaps in their feedback. And then there's also a survey that we send out to the school management team. It's anonymous, so they don't have to worry about it or feel they'll be targeted or something like that. So, we get that feedback. We review our activities based on the feedback" (P002).

4.11.5 The limits of innovation without structural change

Findings reveal that, while the adoption of these adaptive strategies in both provinces has undoubtedly enhanced the resilience and responsiveness of educational projects, several participants expressed concern that continuous adaptation, when not accompanied by systemic investment, can shift organisations into what they termed "survival mode." The focus shifts to short-term coping rather than long-term transformation, as participants are forced to prioritise operational agility to navigate budget constraints, changing donor expectations, and resource gaps (Volmink & Van der Elst, 2023).

"Funding is always a challenge—proposals are often cut... Now you have to debate whether you want to implement this project altogether or not for the integrity of your program. But then at the same time, if you don't take it, then you've got people that you need to pay, and they would lose their jobs... This forces hard organisational decisions and, at times, watered-down program versions" (P005).

"It sometimes feels like we're just doing enough to survive from year to year. Each cycle, the requirements change and the funding isn't certain. We're improvising all the time, rather than

building something lasting. Without resources for real growth, the system becomes stuck in a loop of short-term fixes” (Participant 004).

“If there was more certainty about funding for a longer period, we could plan real improvements instead of just reacting to crises each year. It would change everything, uhm, how we build partnerships, how we support teachers, and how we grow the project’s impact” (P004).

Such experiences highlight the urgent need for long-term, stable resource commitments from funders and policymakers as a precondition for impactful and sustainable change (Volmink & Van der Elst, 2023).

4.12 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter 4 presents and discusses the study's findings, focusing on the experiences and perspectives of participants involved in managing corporate-funded educational interventions. The chapter systematically incorporates direct participant quotations for each identified theme and sub-theme, vividly illustrating the realities and nuanced challenges faced on the ground. Linking these insights closely with relevant literature, the chapter demonstrates strong alignment with existing research particularly regarding the importance of adaptive management practices, stakeholder engagement, and responsive resource allocation.

CHAPTER 5 : CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 5 will include a summary of the study's main findings, synthesising the discussions that emerged under each central theme linked to the original interview questions. Practical recommendations for strengthening the management of corporate-funded educational interventions are then presented, highlighting strategies for effective project delivery in resource-constrained settings. The chapter further evaluates whether the study's objectives have been achieved and discusses the limitations encountered during the research. It concludes with insights on managerial implications and offers straightforward suggestions for future research avenues to support ongoing improvement in non-profit educational project management.

5.2 CONCLUSION OF THE EMPIRICAL STUDY

The conclusion of this study is based on the data presented in the previous chapter, where project managers responsible for corporate-funded educational interventions described a range of challenges encountered during implementation. Among the most significant challenges highlighted were budget and resource constraints, staff turnover, and logistical obstacles in accessing rural schools. Additionally, the complexity of balancing donor expectations with local needs, as well as the need for ongoing stakeholder coordination, emerged as persistent issues. Despite these hurdles, managers demonstrated notable adaptability and commitment to fostering positive educational outcomes in under-resourced contexts.

5.3 ACHIEVEMENT OF OBJECTIVES

Objective 1: The primary objective of this study was to identify best practices that NPO project managers adopt in planning, implementing, and managing corporate-funded educational interventions. This study established that effective NPO project managers prioritise context-driven planning, actively involve stakeholders, and align their strategies with both donor objectives and local needs. Best practices include thorough needs assessment, collaborative goal setting, continuous progress monitoring, and fostering strong community partnerships. These approaches ensure that interventions are sustainable, responsive, and tailored for maximum educational impact, requiring adaptive leadership and context-sensitive approaches to align donor requirements with community needs.

Objective 2: This study further investigated the challenges faced by NPO project managers in managing corporate-funded educational interventions, including resource constraints,

stakeholder coordination, and monitoring and evaluation processes. The findings reveal that managers frequently contend with limited funding, staffing shortages, and the complexities of coordinating diverse stakeholder interests. Additional challenges include navigating bureaucratic requirements and sustaining rigorous monitoring and evaluation practices amid operational pressures. These obstacles highlight the ongoing need for strategic leadership and resilient systems to address both internal and external barriers to effective project delivery.

Objective 3: Lastly, the study examined innovative solutions developed by NPO project managers to overcome challenges and enhance the effectiveness of corporate-funded educational interventions. Project managers responded to challenges through adaptive problem-solving, incorporating digital tools for real-time monitoring, fostering partnership synergies, and developing context-specific solutions, such as flexible scheduling and peer-learning networks. Their willingness to innovate and adapt processes fostered improved programme delivery, better stakeholder buy-in and enhanced overall project outcomes in sometimes highly resource-constrained environments.

5.3 Main conclusions from the study

This study demonstrates that the success of corporate-funded educational interventions in rural South Africa depends on strategic, context-specific planning and adaptive project management (Gustafsson, 2022). Project managers who base interventions on thorough needs assessments, tailor their approaches to local school realities, and align resources with the Department of Basic Education's curriculum consistently achieve higher engagement and programme relevance. In contrast, one-size-fits-all interventions developed externally typically fail to deliver meaningful change (Munnik, 2019:8).

Sustained stakeholder engagement is essential for effectiveness. Active collaboration with district education officials and local leaders promotes smoother implementation, deeper trust, and improved sustainability; conversely, poor coordination results in resistance and diminished outcomes (Ajani & Govender, 2023).

Resource challenges, staffing, materials, infrastructure, and digital connectivity significantly impact delivery. While project managers implement innovative solutions such as flexible staffing and ongoing professional development, the persistent lack of foundational support and limited infrastructure investment from funders restricts their reach (Gustafsson, 2022).

The tension between short-term donor funding priorities and the long-term nature of educational improvement is pronounced. Pressure for rapid results may lead to diluted quality or discontinued interventions, but real progress requires sustained, multi-year engagement (Gustafsson, 2022).

Innovation and adaptability are strengths of NPO-led management, evident in digital tools, differentiated teacher support, succession planning, and community support structures, yet these often compensate for broader systemic deficiencies rather than drive genuine transformation. Without committed investment in infrastructure, realistic impact timelines, and authentic collaboration among NPOs, funders, and government, lasting educational improvement remains difficult (Munnik, 2019:10).

Greater alignment among all stakeholders and increased investment in systemic capacity are essential to maximise the effectiveness and sustainability of educational interventions in South Africa's rural schools (Ajani & Govender, 2023).

5.4 STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations address the key challenges facing corporate-funded educational interventions. Focusing on funding flexibility, inclusive planning, infrastructure, capacity development, adaptive management, and coordination can enhance sustainability and academic impact in resource-constrained contexts (World Bank, 2025). The table below details the key challenges, causes, and recommendations.

Table 4: Key challenges and recommendations

CHALLENGES	CAUSES	STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS	OTHER AUTHORS RECOMMENDATIONS
Short-term funding & donor-driven focus	Emphasis on quick results, lack of multi-year investment, and top-down funder expectations	Align funding with educational realities by adopting longer, flexible investment cycles. Develop monitoring systems that go beyond short-term outputs and include qualitative outcomes (e.g., behaviour change, teacher growth, motivation).	Adopt multi-year, flexible funding cycles and collaborative planning to enable context-driven, sustainable improvements (World Bank, 2025).
Limited stakeholder engagement	Insufficient involvement of local communities, district officials and school teams	Conduct inclusive, context-driven planning and needs assessments. Engage beneficiaries and local leaders at all stages. Encourage funders to participate directly through site visits and co-design.	Promote continuous partnership and active community involvement to improve local relevance and sustainability (Volmink & Van der Elst, 2023:8).
Infrastructural & access barriers	Poor connectivity, lack of transport, and limited materials in rural schools	Prioritise infrastructure investments through dedicated budgets for transport, digital access, and quality teaching resources in rural/hard-to-reach areas. Leverage innovative financing and public-private partnerships for infrastructure gaps.	Strengthen public-private partnerships, invest in digital infrastructure and equitable access to resources, especially in rural and low-income contexts (DGMT, 2024).

CHALLENGES	CAUSES	STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS	OTHER AUTHORS RECOMMENDATIONS
Staff turnover & lack of capacity	Limited skilled personnel, high attrition, and minimal professional development	Adopt hybrid staffing (local recruitment plus content experts). Prioritise ongoing training, coaching and structured succession planning. Create peer learning networks and professional communities of practice.	Strengthen professional development, peer mentoring, and pipeline strategies for rural teacher retention (NASCEE, 2024).
Rigid project management & adaptation gaps	Static processes, lack of responsive feedback, and a focus on compliance rather than learning.	Foster an adaptive management culture with regular team debriefings, peer learning, and flexible monitoring. Use both quantitative and qualitative feedback to drive continuous improvement and organisational agility.	Encourage participatory leadership and organisational learning strategies to build sustained project agility (Meyer & Barker, 2020:66).
Fragmented coordination & duplication	Multiple uncoordinated projects, unclear roles, and a lack of shared reporting	Establish clear data reporting standards, explicit role definitions, and joint planning platforms. Build trust and transparency among NPOs, government, schools, and funders to enable integrated solution delivery and reduce administrative burden on schools.	Use integrated, cross-sector coordination frameworks to streamline delivery and reduce duplication (World Bank, 2025).

5.5 LIMITATIONS TO THE STUDY

The study is subject to several limitations. Firstly, the research was confined to selected rural provinces, limiting the generalisability of findings to other regions with different socio-economic or infrastructural realities. Secondly, the qualitative approach relied on the perspectives of a small group of project managers, which may not capture the full complexity or diversity of implementation experiences across organisations. Thirdly, time and resource constraints limited the ability to conduct longitudinal research or to systematically assess the long-term sustainability and impact of interventions. Finally, the reliance on self-reported data introduces potential bias, as participants may overstate successes or under-report challenges due to social desirability or organisational interests (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019:2).

5.6 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Based on insights from this study, several areas for further research could substantially broaden understanding of corporate-funded educational interventions in rural South Africa:

- Future studies should employ longitudinal and mixed-methods approaches to evaluate the long-term sustainability and impact of interventions, tracking changes in learner achievement, school environments, and ongoing professional development after funding concludes.
- Comparative research is needed to investigate the influence of different funding models on the quality, resilience, and transformative potential of education programmes, especially contrasting flexible, multi-year models with traditional, short-term investments.
- Further research should seek innovative solutions to persistent infrastructural barriers, particularly around transport, digital connectivity, and essential resources, by exploring cross-sector partnerships and new financing models that support effective reach and impact in remote settings.

5.6 SUMMARY

This chapter provided a concise synthesis of the study's main findings. It linked them to both existing literature and real-world challenges faced by corporate-funded educational interventions in rural South Africa. Recommendations emphasised the value of context-driven planning, inclusive stakeholder engagement, and long-term investment for sustained educational transformation. The chapter also highlighted current limitations and outlined future research priorities, including strengthening collaboration, addressing infrastructure challenges, and advancing effective programme design. Emphasis is placed on the growing significance of adaptive, community-based models in supporting meaningful rural educational development.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Data Collection Instrument-Interview guide Name of researcher: Nobulungisa Batala Supervisor: Prof. Nelda Mouton Institution: North-West University-Business School Topic: Exploring the management approaches of project managers in corporate-funded educational interventions
<u>Participant code: Consent Signed: Date:</u>
Objective 1: To document participants' personal and professional backgrounds for contextualising their perspectives and aligning sample characteristics to the research objective. • Q1: Could you please share your current age? • Q2: How many years have you worked as a Project Manager? • Q3: Before becoming a Project Manager, what kind of professional experience have you accumulated?
Objective 2: To understand the project manager's role, career pathway, and experience in managing corporate-funded educational interventions in an NPO setting. • Q4: Can you briefly describe your role as a project manager in your NPO and your experience in managing corporate-funded educational interventions?
Objective 3:

To identify and explore strategies and best practices for planning, stakeholder engagement, resource allocation, ongoing monitoring, and responsive adaptation in educational interventions.

- Q5: How do you plan and prepare for implementing educational interventions, and what tools or methodologies do you utilise?
- Q6: How do you manage relationships with stakeholders, including corporate funders, community members, and other partners?
- Q7: How do you allocate resources (financial, human, etc.) to ensure the effective execution of these interventions?
- Q8: What methods do you use to monitor and evaluate the success of these interventions, and how do you adjust strategies based on feedback?

Objective 4:

To identify significant challenges faced in managing corporate-funded educational interventions and assess solutions, adaptivity, and innovation in overcoming these barriers.

- Q9: What are some of the most significant challenges you face in managing these interventions, and how do you address them?
- Q10: Can you describe any innovative solutions or strategies you have developed to overcome challenges in managing these interventions?
- Q11: How do you adapt to changes in project scope, stakeholder expectations, or external factors that may impact the intervention?

Objective 5:

To evaluate the perceived and evidenced outcomes of interventions and strategies for future practice or policy.

- Q12: How do you perceive the impact of these interventions on literacy and numeracy outcomes among learners, and what evidence supports this perception?

Q13: What lessons have you learned from managing these interventions that could inform future projects or policy decisions?
Objective 7: To gain additional insights and practical recommendations for improved management and sector impact in South Africa. Q17: Are there any additional insights or recommendations you would like to share regarding the management of corporate-funded educational interventions in South Africa?
Conclusion

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM



NWU Business School
North-West University
Private Bag x6001
Potchefstroom, 2520
<http://commerce.nwu.ac.za/business-school>

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT NWU-BUSINESS SCHOOL

RESEARCHER:

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SUPERVISOR

Prof. Nelda Mouton
Cell: 073 590 9431
E-mail: nelda.mouton@nwu.ac.za

Topic: Exploring the management approaches of project managers in corporate-funded educational interventions.

Dear participant,

1. This Informed Consent Statement serves to confirm the following information:
2. The purpose of this study is to explore the management approaches of project managers in corporate-funded educational interventions.
3. The data collection procedure will be qualitative; interviews will be used to collect data, giving participants the opportunity to share their views on the noted topic.
4. You may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.
5. Should you cancel, any data collected from you up to that point will be securely deleted upon request.
6. This is a semi-structured interview, lasting approximately 60 minutes.
7. With your consent, the interview will be audio recorded solely for accurate transcription and analysis. You may decline to have the interview recorded, in which case, detailed notes will be taken instead.
8. All information collected during the study will be treated as strictly confidential.
9. Your identity will not be revealed in any reports or publications resulting from this research. Pseudonyms or unique codes will be used in all transcripts and reports to ensure anonymity.
10. Audio recordings and transcripts will be securely stored on password-protected devices and will only be accessible to the researcher and supervisor.
11. All data will be processed under the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) and North-West University's data protection policies.
12. Your data will be used exclusively for research purposes and will not be shared with any third parties. You have the right to access, correct, or request deletion of your data at any time.
13. There are no anticipated risks associated with participation in this study. While there are no direct benefits, your participation will contribute valuable insights into the management of educational interventions, which may inform future practice and policy.

I hereby declare that I have read and understood the content of the Informed Consent Statement and give my full consent to the researcher to use the information from the interview recording in her MBA mini dissertation..



Name and designation	Signature	Date
Researcher: Ms Nobulungisa Batala		15 August 2025

NAME AND SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT: _____

RESEARCHER:

Ms. Nobulungisa Batala
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 E-mail: 21169365@nwu.ac.za

SUPERVISOR

Prof. Nelda Mouton
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APPENDIX C: ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER



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Senate Committee for Research Ethics

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Feziwe.Mseleni@nwu.ac.za

4 July 2025

ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER OF STUDY

Based on approval by the North-West University Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee (EMS-REC) on 4 July 2025, the Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee hereby approves your study as indicated below. This implies that the North-West University Senate Committee for Research Ethics (NWU-REC) grants its permission that, provided the special conditions specified below are met and pending any other authorisation that may be necessary, the study may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

Study title:	Exploring the Approaches of Project Managers in Managing Corporate-Funded Educational Interventions																														
Study leader/Supervisor (Principal investigator/Researcher):	Prof N. Mouton	University no.:	10516387																												
Student:	N.S. Batala	University no.:	21169365																												
Ethics number:	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>N</td><td>W</td><td>U</td><td>-</td><td>0</td><td>0</td><td>6</td><td>7</td><td>1</td><td>-</td><td>2</td><td>5</td><td>-</td><td>A</td><td>4</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="3">Institution</td> <td colspan="4">Study number</td> <td colspan="3">Year</td> <td colspan="3">Status</td> </tr> </table>			N	W	U	-	0	0	6	7	1	-	2	5	-	A	4	Institution			Study number				Year			Status		
N	W	U	-	0	0	6	7	1	-	2	5	-	A	4																	
Institution			Study number				Year			Status																					
Status: S = Submission; R = Re-submission; P = Provisional authorisation; A = Authorisation																															
Application type:	Single study - Postgraduate research	Risk level:	Low/minimal risk																												
Commencement date:	7/4/25																														
Expiry date:	7/4/26																														
Approval of the study is initially provided for a year, after which continuation of the study is dependent on receipt and review of the annual (or as otherwise stipulated) monitoring report and the concomitant issuing of a letter of continuation.																															

Special in process conditions of the research for approval (if applicable):

None.

General conditions:

While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, the following general terms and conditions will apply:

- The study leader/supervisor (principal investigator)/researcher must report in the prescribed format to the EMS-REC:
 - annually (or as otherwise requested) on the monitoring of the study, whereby a letter of continuation will be provided, and upon completion of the study; and
 - without any delay in case of any adverse event or incident (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the study.
- The approval applies strictly to the proposal as stipulated in the application form. Should any amendments to the proposal be deemed necessary during the course of the study, the study leader/researcher must apply for approval of these amendments at the EMS-REC, prior to implementation. Should there be any deviations from the study proposal without the necessary approval of such amendments, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited.
- Annually a number of studies may be randomly selected for an external audit.
- The date of approval indicates the first date that the study may be started.
- In the interest of ethical responsibility, the NWU-SCRE and EMS-REC reserves the right to:
 - request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the study;
 - to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modification or monitor the conduct of your research or the informed consent process;
 - withdraw or postpone approval if:
 - any unethical principles or practices of the study are revealed or suspected;
 - it becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the EMS-REC or that information has been false or misrepresented;
 - submission of the annual (or otherwise stipulated) monitoring report, the required amendments, or reporting of adverse events or incidents was not done in a timely manner and accurately; and / or
 - new institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary.
- EMS-REC can be contacted for further information or any report templates through the secretariat. Botlenyana Maluleka (Botlenyana.Maluleka@nwu.ac.za/ +27 18 2852436) or the chair Prof Diana Viljoen-Bezuidenhout (Diana.Viljoen@nwu.ac.za/ +27 16 9103403).

The EMS-REC would like to remain at your service as scientist and researcher, and wishes you well with your study. Please do not hesitate to contact the EMS-REC or the NWU-SCRE for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

Yours sincerely,

Prof Diana
Viljoen-
Bezuidenhout

Digitally signed by Prof
Diana Viljoen-
Bezuidenhout
Date: 2025.07.04
16:14:24 +0200

Prof Diana Viljoen-Bezuidenhout

Chairperson: NWU Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee

APPENDIX D: LANGUAGE EDITING CERTIFICATE



CERTIFICATE: LANGUAGE EDITING

Herein, confirmation that the following document was edited:

MASTER OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION (MBA)

Title

Exploring the management approaches of project
managers in corporate-funded educational interventions

N S Batala

Student number: 21169365

orcid.org/0009-0001-3518-6082

The following was edited according to requirements, subject to Harvard Guidelines
(for article writing):

*Clarity and coherence, grammar, punctuation, consistency of style, citations and references,
formatting and layout, word choice and clarity, consistency of terminology, and readability*

(Academic integrity of the document was upheld and final changes and suggestions must be made by the student.
Editing check sheet annexed as page 2 of this certificate)

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