

Adult Learners' Perceptions of Teaching Portfolios: Reflection, Motivation, and Identity Development in Community Education

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<http://doi.org/10.33650/ijess.v5i2.14589>

Received: 20 February 2026, Revised: 29 June 2026, Accepted: 21 August 2026

Abstract:

This study examines adult learners' perceptions and experiences of teaching portfolios in Community Education and Training (CET), focusing on their potential to support reflection, academic growth, motivation, confidence, and learner identity. The study used a qualitative design involving ten adult learners and three facilitators. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews and non-participant classroom observations and analyzed through data condensation, data display, and data verification. The findings identified five interconnected themes. Teaching portfolios supported learners' reflection and academic growth by enabling them to review their work and recognize progress. They also strengthened motivation, confidence, and learner identity; however, literacy difficulties, limited instructional time, and inadequate learning materials constrained engagement. Facilitator scaffolding, explicit guidance, and constructive feedback were central to meaningful portfolio engagement. A further tension emerged between portfolios as developmental learning tools and their use as compliance-oriented assessment requirements. The findings suggest that portfolios can serve as inclusive, developmentally oriented assessment practices when supported by responsive facilitation, accessible learning conditions, and sufficient opportunities for reflection. CET practitioners should therefore prioritize learner support and developmental purposes rather than treating portfolios primarily as administrative requirements.

Key Words: Adult Learners, Teaching Portfolios, Learner Perceptions

Please cite this article in APA style as:

Ntshangase, M. X., Mathebula, N. E., Maceke, R. R., Chinaza, K., & Zachariah, I. (2026). Adult Learners' Perceptions of Teaching Portfolios: Reflection, Motivation, and Identity Development in Community Education. *Indonesian Journal of Education and Social Studies*, 5(2), 252-268.

INTRODUCTION

Adult education is essential to expand educational opportunity, reduce inequality, and support lifelong learning among people who have experienced disrupted access to formal schooling (Susilo et al., 2025; Ampofo et al., 2026;

Mallows & Santos Costa, 2026). In South Africa, Community Education and Training (CET) centers provide important opportunities for adults to re-enter education, develop competencies, and participate more fully in social and economic life. However, access alone is insufficient if assessment practices reproduce the exclusion experienced in earlier schooling. Adult learners require assessment approaches that recognize their experiences, support participation, and make learning progress visible. Research on adult education emphasizes approaches that respond to learners' practical needs and diverse backgrounds (Akintolu & Letseka, 2021; Gouthro, 2022). Therefore, examining teaching portfolios matters because assessment can either strengthen adult learners' participation or create additional barriers to meaningful learning.

A major problem in adult education is the mismatch between conventional assessment practices and adult learners' diverse circumstances. Adults may enter learning programs with different literacy abilities, educational histories, responsibilities, and confidence levels. These differences can make assessment demanding, particularly when learners are expected to demonstrate learning primarily through written tasks. Portfolio assessment offers greater continuity and opportunities for reflection, but it also requires time, literacy, guidance, and sustained engagement. Studies indicate that portfolio practices can support reflection, autonomy, and learning development, while implementation difficulties may limit their effectiveness (Lam, 2023; Ferguson & Merga, 2021). In under-resourced adult learning environments, these challenges can become more pronounced. Consequently, the central problem is not simply whether portfolios are used, but whether they function as meaningful learning practices or become additional assessment requirements for already diverse and vulnerable adult learners.

This problem is particularly relevant in CET settings, where adult learners engage with teaching portfolios while managing different educational backgrounds and learning capabilities. At the selected Adult Community Learning Center in Capricorn South District, teaching portfolios document learners' work and support assessment. However, learners' engagement with portfolios varies. Some learners use portfolio entries to review previous work, recognize progress, and build confidence, while others struggle with reflective writing, limited learning materials, and insufficient time. Facilitators also play an important role by explaining tasks, providing examples, and giving feedback. Classroom observations also show differences between learners who engage reflectively and those who focus mainly on completing required sections. These conditions demonstrate a practical tension between the developmental potential of portfolios and the realities of their implementation within CET.

Previous research shows that portfolios can support reflective and deeper learning by enabling learners to document experiences, examine progress, and connect evidence to personal development (Hamidah & Maspupah, 2026; Mulyadi et al., 2025; Zainuddin & Asmoni, 2026). Di Silvestro and Nadir (2021)

found that ePortfolio development fostered reflection and deeper learning in adult education, while Scoupe et al. (2024) highlighted portfolios' role in developing reflective practice. Other studies associate portfolio assessment with higher-order thinking, learner autonomy, motivation, willingness to communicate, and professional development (Al-Hawamdeh et al., 2023; Ibrahim & Rakhshani, 2024; Mahmud et al., 2025). These findings demonstrate substantial pedagogical value. Nevertheless, much of this research has been conducted in university, professional, medical, or language-learning contexts. Consequently, less is known about how adult learners themselves experience portfolios within community-based adult education, particularly in South African CET environments.

Existing literature also shows that portfolio effectiveness depends strongly on facilitation, contextual conditions, and the purpose attached to assessment. Facilitator scaffolding and feedback can help learners engage more deeply with portfolio tasks (Sarmiento-Campos et al., 2022; Lim et al., 2023; Dewi et al., 2026), while insufficient support may encourage superficial completion. Research further identifies tensions between learner agency and accountability when portfolios serve multiple purposes (Gulden et al., 2024). Similarly, adult learners may encounter literacy and resource barriers that affect participation (Manyike et al., 2026). Although these studies clarify important conditions for effective portfolio implementation, they provide limited insight into how these dynamics interact in under-resourced CET settings. The present study therefore addresses this gap by placing adult learners' experiences at the center of the analysis and examining reflection, motivation, constraints, facilitator support, and compliance within one contextualized account.

This study's novelty lies in examining teaching portfolios as a multidimensional practice within a South African CET context, rather than treating them solely as assessment instruments. The study brings together learners' experiences of reflection, academic growth, motivation, confidence, learner identity, portfolio constraints, facilitator scaffolding, and completion practices. This perspective recognizes that portfolio outcomes are shaped by interactions among learners, facilitators, assessment expectations, and available learning conditions. The study also moves beyond the assumption that portfolio use automatically produces reflective learning. Instead, it investigates how developmental possibilities coexist with practical barriers and compliance-oriented behavior. By focusing on adult learners' everyday experiences, the study provides a context-sensitive understanding of what makes portfolio practices meaningful, accessible, and developmentally oriented in community-based adult education.

This study addresses how adult learners experience and understand teaching portfolios within a CET environment. It asks: How do adult learners perceive and experience using teaching portfolios in a CET context? The study argues that portfolios can support reflection, academic growth, motivation,

confidence, and learner identity when learners receive appropriate guidance and opportunities to engage meaningfully with their work. However, literacy difficulties, limited time and resources, insufficient support, and pressure to meet assessment requirements may weaken their developmental value. The study therefore contributes by showing that effective portfolio practice requires more than providing portfolio tasks. It requires responsive facilitation, accessible learning conditions, and an assessment orientation that prioritizes learner development alongside accountability. This argument provides the basis for examining learners' experiences through a qualitative research design.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore adult learners' experiences and perceptions of teaching portfolios in a Community Education and Training (CET) context. A qualitative approach was appropriate because the study focused on participants' experiences, reflections, and perceptions within their learning environment rather than numerical measurement. The study was conducted at a selected Adult Community Learning Center in the Capricorn South District, Limpopo Province, South Africa. The center serves adult learners from rural and peri-urban communities, including individuals with interrupted educational backgrounds and limited learning resources. Teaching portfolios were routinely used in learning and assessment activities at the center, making it an appropriate setting for examining how portfolios influenced reflection, motivation, learner identity, and engagement. The contextual focus also responded to the importance of accessible and meaningful adult education practices (Akintolu & Letseka, 2021; Gouthro, 2022).

Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their direct experience with teaching portfolios. The sample included 10 adult learners and 3 facilitators representing varied ages, educational backgrounds, and levels of participation in CET activities. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews and non-participant classroom observations. Interviews explored participants' experiences with portfolio activities, including reflection, motivation, challenges, facilitator support, and portfolio completion. Classroom observations examined learners' participation, portfolio-related activities, interactions with facilitators, and engagement patterns. Interviews and observations enabled the study to capture both participants' reported experiences and their observed classroom practices. This approach was consistent with research emphasizing reflective portfolio use and adult learners' experiences in educational settings (Silvestro & Nadir, 2021; Gulden et al., 2023).

We analyzed data through three sequential stages: data condensation, data display, and data verification. First, we condensed interview and observation data by identifying statements, activities, and recurring patterns relevant to the research focus. Second, we organized and displayed the

condensed data by similarities and differences across participants and data sources. Third, we verified emerging patterns by repeatedly comparing interview accounts with classroom observations to ensure consistent and accurate interpretation. Through this process, we identified five major themes: portfolios as catalysts for reflection and academic growth; motivation, confidence, and learner identity; constraints to portfolio engagement; facilitator scaffolding and feedback; and the tension between developmental intentions and compliance-driven completion. These analytical stages provided a systematic basis for presenting the findings and developing the subsequent discussion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Analysis of data from semi-structured interviews and non-participant classroom observations identified five main themes concerning adult learners' experiences with teaching portfolios at the selected Adult Community Learning Center in the Capricorn South District. The data were systematically condensed, organized, and compared to identify recurring patterns in participants' experiences, perceptions, and classroom practices. The analysis generated five themes: (1) portfolios as catalysts for reflection and academic growth, (2) portfolios as sources of motivation, confidence, and learner identity, (3) constraints to portfolio engagement, (4) facilitator scaffolding and feedback as central to engagement, and (5) tension between developmental intentions and compliance-driven completion. Together, these themes capture how learners experienced portfolio activities, the factors that influenced their engagement, and the differences observed in how portfolios were used during learning activities.

Portfolios as Catalysts for Reflection and Academic Growth

The findings showed that teaching portfolios gave participants opportunities to review their learning experiences and recognize their academic progress. Participants described portfolios as records of completed work that enabled them to compare earlier assignments with more recent work. Through this comparison, learners could identify changes in their performance and recognize areas where they had improved. Several participants also indicated that reviewing previous work encouraged them to reflect on their learning process rather than focus exclusively on completing individual assignments.

One participant stated, "The portfolio made me see how much I have learned over the months; I could compare my old work with new assignments and understand my progress." Similar responses indicated that participants valued having previous assignments available for review because these records provided evidence of what they had learned over time. Some learners used earlier entries to identify aspects of their work that still required improvement, while others compared different assignments to observe changes in the quality of their performance. The interview findings therefore showed that portfolio use

was commonly associated with reviewing previous learning experiences and recognizing changes in academic performance.

Classroom observations provided further evidence of learners' use of portfolio materials during subsequent learning activities. Several learners referred to previous portfolio entries when completing new tasks, while others reorganized their materials or reviewed earlier assignments before continuing their work. Facilitators also examined portfolio evidence to monitor learners' progress and identify areas that required additional attention. These observations showed that portfolios were used not only to store completed work but also as materials that learners and facilitators revisited during ongoing learning activities.

Portfolios Strengthen Motivation, Confidence, and Learner Identity

The findings indicate that learners' engagement with teaching portfolios was associated with increased learning motivation and confidence in their abilities. The portfolio functioned not merely as a repository for assignments but also as a visual medium through which learners could concretely observe their learning processes and achievements. By viewing a collection of completed assignments in a single document, learners gained a clearer understanding of the effort they had invested and the progress they had made. In this way, the portfolio transformed previously abstract learning achievements into observable, assessable evidence. This experience of accomplishment may have strengthened learners' perceived competence and encouraged more active engagement in the learning process. The patterns identified from the interviews and observations are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Themes of Teaching Portfolio Engagement and Learner Development

Finding Aspect	Empirical Indicator	Evidence from Interviews/Observations	Analytical Meaning
Learning motivation	Desire to improve work	Learners became motivated after reviewing their collected assignments	Evidence of progress functioned as a stimulus for intrinsic motivation
Awareness of progress	Ability to compare earlier and later work	Learners recognized changes in the quality and completeness of their assignments	The portfolio supported the development of self-monitoring
Sense of achievement	Recognition of successfully completed tasks	Learners expressed satisfaction when reviewing their portfolios	Documented accomplishments strengthened perceptions of competence
Self-confidence	Recognition of personal abilities	Learners felt more confident after observing improvements in their work	Successful experiences strengthened self-efficacy
Participation	Engagement in discussions and task completion	Learners actively participated in discussions and completed assignments	Awareness of personal capabilities was associated with greater willingness to participate

Learning autonomy	Management and organization of portfolio materials	Several learners organized their materials more independently	The portfolio encouraged responsibility for the learning process
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Table 1 shows that the portfolio's primary contribution lies not simply in the existence of a collection of assignments, but in the reflective process that emerges when learners engage with evidence of their own learning. Comparing earlier and more recent work enables learners to identify concrete changes, including improvements in quality, completeness, and task performance. This process develops self-monitoring, defined as the ability to observe and evaluate personal progress based on accumulated learning experiences. This finding is significant because motivation appears to emerge not merely from outcomes, but from learners' ability to connect those outcomes to their effort and development. The portfolio therefore serves as an instrument that connects learning experiences, self-reflection, and awareness of progress.

The confidence dimension also emerged in how learners interpreted their documented accomplishments. One participant stated, "Seeing my work in the portfolio motivates me to keep improving. I feel capable now, not just a student." This statement reflects a shift from perceiving oneself merely as a recipient of instruction toward recognizing oneself as an individual capable of producing meaningful work. Other participants similarly reported that reviewing their assignments helped them recognize abilities that they had previously overlooked. Analytically, this experience can be understood through the concept of self-efficacy, in which successful task completion becomes information that reinforces beliefs about personal capability. Nevertheless, the finding represents an association based on participants' experiences rather than causal evidence that portfolio use directly increased self-efficacy.

Classroom observations reinforced this pattern by revealing differences in learners' behavior during portfolio-related activities. Learners who actively reviewed and managed their portfolios tended to participate more in discussions, complete assigned tasks, evaluate previous work, and organize portfolio materials independently. Expressions of satisfaction while reviewing completed work and discussing it with facilitators also indicated an affective response to achievement. Importantly, this participation was not limited to observable physical activity but also included cognitive engagement through reviewing outcomes, emotional engagement through satisfaction with accomplishments, and behavioral engagement through task completion and organization. These findings suggest that the portfolio provides a space in which these three dimensions of learning engagement can converge. Overall, the findings indicate an interconnected developmental pattern in Figure 1.



Figure 1. From Evidence to Confidence

The portfolio acquires pedagogical value when learners do more than merely collect assignments; they also review, compare, and interpret the development reflected in those materials. From an educational psychology perspective, this process provides experiences of accomplishment that can strengthen perceptions of competence and support engagement in learning. Accordingly, the effectiveness of portfolios depends less on the volume of documents collected than on the quality of the reflection that accompanies their use. The findings underscore the importance of facilitators giving learners opportunities to interpret their own development, enabling the portfolio to function as both a documentation tool and a mechanism for reflection, motivation enhancement, and the development of learning confidence.

Constraints to Portfolio Engagement

The findings revealed several factors that constrained participants' engagement with teaching portfolios. Interviews and observations identified three main constraints: difficulties with literacy and written expression, limited instructional time, and shortages of learning materials. These challenges were not experienced equally by all participants, as learners differed in their educational backgrounds and levels of familiarity with written portfolio activities. The findings therefore indicated that both learner-related difficulties and contextual conditions affected the consistency and quality of portfolio engagement.

Difficulties with written expression were particularly evident when learners were required to complete reflective sections of their portfolios. Some participants indicated that they understood the learning activities but struggled to express their thoughts in writing. One participant stated, "Some learners struggle to complete reflective sections because they cannot express themselves well, and we do not always have enough time or materials to support them adequately." Interview responses showed that reflective writing may therefore require additional support, particularly for learners who have difficulty translating their understanding of an activity into written responses.

Classroom observations also identified incomplete, brief, or delayed portfolio entries among some learners. Several learners needed additional support before they could complete reflective sections or organize evidence appropriately within their portfolios. Limited classroom time sometimes led learners to continue portfolio-related activities beyond the immediate learning session or leave some sections incomplete. Resource shortages also affected the

availability and organization of materials required for particular portfolio tasks, indicating that both instructional and material conditions influenced portfolio engagement.

Facilitator Scaffolding and Feedback as Central to Engagement

The findings showed that facilitator guidance and feedback were central to participants’ portfolio experiences. Learners frequently requested clarification on portfolio requirements, particularly when completing reflective sections or deciding which evidence to include. Facilitators responded by providing explanations, examples, questions, and individual assistance during portfolio activities. Participants’ accounts indicated that this support helped them understand the requirements and continue working on tasks that they initially found difficult.

One participant stated, “When the facilitator explains what to write and gives feedback, I can do better. It makes me feel supported.” Other participants similarly described facilitator explanations as useful when they were uncertain about how to begin or complete a portfolio task. Feedback also helped learners identify aspects of their work that needed revision or further development. Some learners indicated that repeated guidance gradually made them more confident in completing similar portfolio activities with less assistance.

Classroom observations confirmed that facilitators provided support both individually and in groups. Facilitators clarified instructions, answered questions, reviewed learners’ work, and suggested revisions during portfolio-related activities. When learners struggled with reflective writing, facilitators used questions and examples to help them formulate and organize their responses. Learners who received this assistance continued their portfolio activities, revised their work, and completed sections that had initially been difficult.

Development–Compliance Tension

The analysis identified five interconnected themes concerning adult learners’ experiences with teaching portfolios: learning progress, motivation and confidence, learning constraints, facilitator support, and portfolio engagement orientation. The findings indicate that participants used portfolios differently depending on their learning needs, available time, literacy abilities, and perceptions of assessment requirements.

Table 2. Key Themes Emerging from the Portfolio Findings

Theme	Empirical Evidence	Main Finding
Learning progress	Learners reviewed previous work, compared performance, and identified areas for improvement.	Portfolios enabled learners to recognize and monitor their progress.
Motivation and	Participants reported achievement and greater confidence after reviewing	Visible evidence of progress supported positive learning

confidence	completed work; facilitators observed stronger participation among active users.	experiences.
Learning constraints	Literacy difficulties, limited time, and insufficient learning materials affected portfolio completion and reflection.	Contextual conditions influenced the depth and consistency of engagement.
Facilitator support	Explanations, examples, assistance, and feedback helped learners complete and revise portfolio tasks.	Scaffolding made portfolio requirements more accessible and manageable.
Engagement orientation	Some learners reflected on their development, while others prioritized completing sections and meeting deadlines. One participant stated, "Sometimes I just fill in what I think the facilitator wants so I can submit it on time."	Portfolio use ranged from developmental reflection to compliance-oriented completion.

Table 2 shows that participants who actively reviewed their portfolios used previous work to understand their development and identify areas for improvement. Completed evidence also contributed to feelings of achievement and greater confidence, particularly when learners could see tangible progress. However, these experiences varied across participants and were influenced by literacy difficulties, limited instructional time, and shortages of learning materials. Under greater time pressure, learners tended to provide shorter, task-focused responses rather than detailed reflections.

Facilitator support was another important feature of portfolio engagement. Participants valued clear explanations, examples, and feedback, while observations showed facilitators assisting with portfolio activities. Such support helped learners understand expectations, complete reflective tasks, and revise their work, particularly when literacy or organizational difficulties were present.

A further finding was the coexistence of developmental and compliance-oriented engagement. While some participants used portfolios to review and reflect on learning, others concentrated on completing required sections and meeting submission deadlines. This difference became more apparent when deadlines approached, or several requirements had to be completed within a limited period. Overall, the findings show that portfolio use was not uniform: its developmental potential was more evident when learners had adequate time, support, and capacity to engage with their evidence, whereas contextual pressures could shift participation toward task completion.

Discussion

This study's findings show that teaching portfolios served as more than repositories for completed assignments. Participants used portfolios to review their previous work, recognize their progress, and connect earlier learning with subsequent tasks. This finding is consistent with previous research showing that

reflective portfolios can promote deeper learning by encouraging learners to examine, interpret, and evaluate their learning experiences. Di Silvestro and Nadir (2021), Fontao et al. (2024), and Scoupe et al. (2024), for example, demonstrated that reflective portfolios can support metacognitive awareness and reflective practice. Similarly, Mahmud et al. (2025) found that portfolio-based assessment can promote higher-order thinking when learners actively analyze and evaluate their work. Thus, the present finding confirms that the pedagogical value of portfolios lies not merely in the products collected but also in the reflective processes through which learners examine evidence of their learning. However, this study extends previous research by demonstrating that these reflective functions also occur in a community-based adult education setting characterized by diverse educational backgrounds and limited resources. In this context, portfolios helped participants recognize the continuity of their learning, particularly when their previous educational experiences had not been continuous.

In addition to supporting reflection, the findings indicate that portfolio use contributed to participants' motivation, self-confidence, and perceptions of themselves as capable learners. Participants described a sense of achievement when reviewing their completed work, while facilitators observed increased participation and persistence among learners who actively engaged with their portfolios. This finding is consistent with Al-Hawamdeh et al. (2023) and Ibrahim and Rakhshani (2024), who found that portfolio assessment can strengthen motivation, autonomy, willingness to communicate, and other positive learning dispositions. Research by Mohajer et al. (2023) and Schmude et al. (2025) similarly indicates that portfolios can strengthen learners' professional self-concepts and perceptions of personal development. Nevertheless, this study extends this body of research by showing that identity development is not only relevant to professional or higher education contexts but also occurs among adult learners in a Community Education and Training (CET) context. In this study, portfolios became concrete and visible representations of participants' progress, enabling learners to recognize and acknowledge their own development. This study therefore highlights that the motivational function of portfolios is closely connected to learners' ability to see tangible evidence of their progress. For adult learners with disrupted or limited educational experiences, recognizing such progress may become an important part of rebuilding confidence and developing a positive learner identity.

Despite these benefits, the findings also show that participants' engagement with portfolios was uneven. Literacy difficulties, limited time, and shortages of learning resources constrained some participants' ability to organize and reflect effectively on evidence of their learning. This finding aligns with Ferguson and Merga (2021) and Manyike et al. (2026), who showed that reading and writing difficulties can affect adult learners' participation and confidence, particularly among those with interrupted educational histories. Research on

portfolio implementation has likewise emphasized the importance of adequate time, resources, and institutional arrangements (Lam, 2023; Hogan et al., 2023). These similarities indicate that successful portfolio implementation depends not only on assessment design but also on learner characteristics and the learning environment. However, this study adds context by showing how these constraints operate simultaneously in an under-resourced adult education environment. Unlike higher education or digitally mediated learning contexts, where learners may be assumed to possess particular levels of literacy and technological access, participants in this study required additional support to express their reflections and organize evidence of learning. This finding therefore extends the understanding of portfolio accessibility by showing that accessibility involves not only technological access but also literacy capacity, available time, prior educational experiences, and the pedagogical support provided to learners.

The findings further demonstrate the central role of facilitator scaffolding and feedback in helping participants use portfolios meaningfully. Participants reported that explanations, examples, and feedback helped them understand portfolio requirements and improve their work, while observations showed that facilitators provided continuous assistance during portfolio activities. This finding supports previous research by Lim et al. (2023) and Sarmiento-Campos et al. (2022), which indicates that scaffolding can help learners understand complex tasks, increase metacognitive engagement, and support learning development. It is also consistent with Trujillo et al. (2025), who identified feedback as an important mechanism for improving learning processes and learner development. Specifically in portfolio-based learning, Gulden et al. (2023) and Ting et al. (2023) found that guidance is necessary to ensure that portfolios function not merely as collections of evidence but as meaningful learning processes. The present study reinforces these findings while contributing further insight into why facilitator mediation becomes particularly important when learners have heterogeneous educational backgrounds and literacy levels. In this context, the facilitator functions not only as an assessor but also as a pedagogical mediator who translates portfolio expectations into forms learners can understand and apply. Such mediation can gradually enable learners to move from dependence on facilitator assistance toward greater independence in reflecting on and managing their own learning.

At the same time, the study identifies a tension between the developmental and compliance-oriented functions of portfolios. Although participants recognized that portfolios provided opportunities for reflection and improvement, some participants completed portfolio sections primarily to meet assessment requirements or submission deadlines. This finding is consistent with Gulden et al. (2024), who identified tensions between accountability requirements and learner agency in multipurpose portfolio systems. Alkaabi and Abdallah (2024) and Hogan et al. (2023) similarly reported that portfolio

implementation can become dominated by documentation and formal assessment requirements when its developmental purpose is not sufficiently emphasized. The present study extends these findings by demonstrating that compliance-oriented engagement in adult education is not caused solely by institutional assessment demands. Limited time, literacy difficulties, and insufficient support can also lead learners to see portfolios as tasks to complete rather than opportunities for learning and reflection. This finding offers a more nuanced understanding of why portfolios' reflective function may weaken in practice. In other words, the orientation of portfolio engagement results from the interaction among assessment design, learner capacity, facilitator support, and institutional conditions. This matters because it suggests that transforming portfolios into meaningful learning tools requires more than mandating their use; learners also need sufficient time, capacity, and support to engage in reflective processes.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the effectiveness of teaching portfolios is shaped by the interrelationship among portfolio purpose, learner capacity, facilitator support, and institutional conditions. This finding confirms previous research identifying portfolios as tools for reflection, assessment, motivation, self-directed learning, and professional development (Di Silvestro & Nadir, 2021; Ibrahim & Rakhshani, 2024; Simon & Al-Ghailani, 2023), while extending this literature by showing that these benefits do not operate independently. Reflection enables learners to recognize their progress; visible evidence of progress can strengthen confidence, and facilitator feedback can sustain engagement in learning. Conversely, literacy difficulties, limited resources, insufficient time, and compliance pressures can disrupt these interconnected processes. The findings differ from the dominant focus of previous portfolio research on university education, professional education, medical education, teacher education, and online learning environments (Christensen et al., 2024; Schmude et al., 2025; Suazo et al., 2025; Taptamat et al., 2024) by placing adult learners in a CET context at the center of analysis. The main contribution of this study is therefore a contextualized, integrated understanding of teaching portfolios as spaces that simultaneously support reflection, motivation, development, learner identity formation, and assessment, while also becoming spaces where learners negotiate their learning needs with institutional expectations. The study's novelty lies in showing that the effectiveness of portfolios in adult community education cannot be separated from the social, pedagogical, and institutional conditions in which they are implemented. The findings suggest that portfolios are more likely to function as meaningful learning tools when their implementation is supported by a clear developmental orientation, continuous scaffolding and feedback, adequate time allocation, and designs that are sensitive to differences in learners' literacy levels and educational backgrounds.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that teaching portfolios can support reflection, learning development, motivation, confidence, and learner identity when implemented as developmental rather than purely assessment-oriented practices. However, their effectiveness depends on appropriate scaffolding, clear guidance, constructive feedback, sufficient time, and sensitivity to adult learners' literacy and resource constraints. The study contributes to adult education scholarship by extending portfolio research to a Community Education and Training (CET) context and highlighting the conditions that enable portfolios to function as meaningful learning tools. Practically, CET providers and facilitators should integrate structured guidance, formative feedback, flexible implementation, and accessible portfolio tasks into assessment practices. Given the qualitative design, purposive sample, and single-site setting, interpret the findings within their contextual boundaries. Future studies could examine multiple CET settings using longitudinal or mixed-methods designs to investigate further changes in learners' reflection, motivation, confidence, identity, and learning development.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors sincerely thank the CET facilitators, adult learners, and supporting institution for their valuable participation, cooperation, and assistance throughout this study.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGY

AI-assisted technology was used as a supporting tool in preparing this manuscript, mainly for language editing and improving clarity. It was not involved in data analysis, interpretation of findings, or scientific decision-making. The authors remain fully responsible for the manuscript's accuracy, originality, and integrity.

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