

Transforming economics towards tackling teachers' challenges in teaching economics: A case of selected schools in buffalo city metropolitan South Africa

 Emmanuel Olusola Adu

University of Fort Hare, South Africa.

(Email: eadu@ufh.ac.za)

ABSTRACT

Introduction/Purpose: Economics is a dynamic subject whose students use the contents to address real-life problems. Therefore, this paper examines the transformation of economics to tackle teachers' challenges in the teaching of economics.

Design/Methodology/Approach: This paper used a qualitative research technique to collect information from teachers based on a phenomenological research design. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 12 teachers of economics in 6 selected schools in Buffalo City. A semi-structured interview was used to elicit information from the respondents and the data were analysed using a thematic approach.

Findings: The study identifies certain notable issues including imprecise economics curriculum materials and learners' inability to demonstrate interest due to various statistics and data components of the subject. Teachers' participation in professional development activities such as seminars, in-service training and workshops for knowledge updates is one of the solutions offered to overcome these difficulties.

Limitation: This paper uses only 12 economics teachers from Buffalo City metropolitan municipality. Larger samples can be used in another municipality. A quantitative approach can be used to accommodate representative samples.

Practical Implications: Teachers are expected to be at the forefront of disseminating the contents of the subject appropriately because a teacher can only give what he or she has. Teachers should be proactive and current with the recent developments in the nation and be technologically compliant.

Contribution to the Literature: This paper contributes to the literature by highlighting practical solutions to the challenges teachers face during the teaching of economics.

Keywords: Curriculum, Economics, Pedagogy, Teachers, Teachers' challenges, Transformation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Student skin colour had an impact on educational standards and learning efficacy before 1994 in apartheid South Africa. The South African education system underwent a significant remodeling in 1994 when the African National Congress (ANC) government took office. The government of Nelson Mandela worked to eradicate educational disparities. The South African Schools Act (SASA) which was announced in 1996 aimed at eradicating all racial injustices by providing a standard structure for the organisation, governance and funding of schools.

The government introduced Curriculum 2005 (C2005), a new educational programme focused on "outcomes-based education" (OBE) in 1997. OBE was secretly abandoned in 2006 when it became clear that it had failed as a social experiment. Additionally, the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) was created from the new National Curriculum Statement (Adu & Ngibe, 2014).

According to Umalusi (2014), CAPS is rather mute on pedagogy since it enables teachers to create context-specific responsibilities. It was recognised that difficulties can arise when economics teachers lack the essential repertoire of pedagogic content knowledge. According to Maistry (2014) and Umalusi (2014), the Economics Annual Teaching Plan (ATP) is practical but problematic in practice or its application because it does not outline how economics teachers should instruct students in the CAPS-required ideas. According to Maistry (2014), there were some discrepancies and mistakes in the economics CAPS document. It depends on further work to cover in addition to

exploring a few concepts in-depth. As a result, it is suggested that the curriculum's depth be increased rather than broadened to increase the amount of high-level information.

The Centre for Development and Enterprise (CDE) Technical Report of 2019 on teacher demand and supply saw teachers as at the centre of any education system and their quality directly affects learner achievement. The report also highlighted the shortage of teachers for key subjects and the discrepancy between the system's demand for teachers who can teach effectively across all subject areas and the qualifications and specialisations of teachers. This was found to be a risk to the success of teaching economics in schools (for this study). The quality of a country's teachers determines the learning outcomes; teachers should prepare for class activities and spend as much time as possible teaching (Kunwar, Shrestha, Poudel, & Phuyel, 2023). According to Mouton, Louw, and Strydom (2013), the South African curriculum allowed for the integration of pertinent content knowledge and ability into an already-existing topic without compromising the traditional subject's primary focus. When teaching courses in economics, teachers are expected to incorporate economics into the real-life environment to broaden the subject's focus and test out new pedagogical approaches. However, Umalusi (2014) pointed out that the CAPS contains weak requirements for integrating economics with other disciplines and weak requirements for integrating economics with common knowledge. It also offers no strategy for how teachers might use integration successfully and efficiently. On the other hand, most studies advocated Information Communication Technology (ICT) in teaching and learning economics. Hence, economics teachers use it as one of their teaching strategies to ensure productive teaching. Moreover, it has been proven by many to be effective in teaching and learning economics in South African secondary schools (Adu, 2013; Adu & Zondo, 2022; Mji & Idika, 2018).

According to Hoadley (2019) in "Knowledge, knowers and Knowing: Curriculum Reform in South Africa," the country's education system is in crisis which is evident from the learners' level of underperformance. Therefore, teachers' improved teaching pedagogies will lessen the problem. Thus, preparing teachers with the ability to share their skills and experience in a more supported and systematic way can offer real benefits for learners and the education system in South Africa.

1.1. Research Objectives

The objectives of this paper are to:

- Identify the challenges economics teachers and learners face in the teaching and learning of economics.
- Find out the mitigating strategies for addressing teachers' challenges in economics pedagogy.
- Explore how economics teaching can be transformed to tackle the challenges teachers face when teaching economics.

2. TRANSFORMATIVE THEORY OF THE SOCIOECONOMIC APPROACH TO TEACHING AND LEARNING

The Socioeconomic Approach to Learning and Teaching (SEALT) is a transformational theory that can assist in overcoming difficulties in the teaching of economics. SEALT emphasizes the integration of students' socioeconomic realities and experiences into the teaching and learning process. It seeks to bring more relevant, engaging and applicable behaviour economics education to students' lives. SEALT encourages teachers to relate economic concepts to real-world situations and local contexts. Teachers can make the subject matter more relatable and meaningful by incorporating examples and case studies that reflect students' socioeconomic backgrounds. It promotes problem-based and inquiry-based learning approaches. Teachers encourage students to explore and analyse real economic problems or issues instead of solely focusing on theoretical concepts (Balsiger et al., 2017).

Students are encouraged to ask questions, conduct research, collect data and propose solutions. This approach develops critical thinking, problem-solving and analytical skills. SEALT emphasizes experiential learning activities. Teachers can organise simulations, role plays or field trips that provide students with practical experiences related to economics. Engaging students in real-world scenarios helps them tangibly understand economic concepts promotes active learning and encourages collaborative learning and dialogue among students. Group work, discussions and debates foster the exchange of ideas and different perspectives. These promote a deeper understanding of economic concepts, enhance communication skills and encourage critical thinking through interaction and negotiation (Taylor, 2017).

SEALT emphasises the importance of reflection and the application of economic knowledge. Students are encouraged to reflect on their learning experiences, connect new knowledge to previous learning and apply

economic concepts to analyse current events or issues. This helps students internalise economic principles and develop a long-lasting understanding. It encourages community engagement and involvement. According to [Taylor \(2017\)](#), teachers can facilitate projects or partnerships with local organisations, businesses or community members to address economic issues or challenges. This helps students see the relevance of economics in the wider community, promotes active citizenship and emphasises the need for inclusive teaching practices that cater to diverse learners. Teachers should consider students' different learning styles, abilities and backgrounds when designing instructional strategies. Differentiation, scaffolding and the use of technology can address individual needs and promote equal opportunities for all students. Economics teachers can create a transformative learning environment that addresses the challenges faced in teaching economics by adopting SEALT ([Taylor, 2017](#)). When an economics teacher uses the combination of learners' socioeconomic background and real-world examples in local contexts, the learners can overcome the challenges being faced and better understand the connection between economic concepts and the society in which they live. In addition, students will see the relevance and applicability of economics in their daily lives. It will help them understand how economics shapes the world around them. It also encourages students to think critically about the distribution of resources, inequality, poverty and other social issues influenced by economic factors and provides them with opportunities to investigate and explore economic problems and propose possible solutions ([Balsiger et al., 2017](#)). This promotes a deeper understanding of economic concepts enhances communication and teamwork skills, helps students see the multifaceted nature of economic issues encourages a holistic understanding of the subject and promotes students' ethical reasoning skills. Teachers can create a more engaging and relevant learning environment that takes into account the socioeconomic factors that shape economic behaviours and outcomes by incorporating these strategies into the teaching and learning of economics.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review is guided by the study's stated objectives.

3.1. Challenges Economics Teachers and Learners Face in the Teaching and Learning of Economics in South Africa

In South Africa, economics teachers and learners face several challenges in the teaching and learning of economics. These challenges can affect the quality of education and the understanding of economic concepts. Some of the common challenges are discussed subsequently. Resources are scarce in many South African schools especially those located in underprivileged areas. This includes a lack of instructional materials, computers, dependable internet connectivity and textbooks. A lack of resources can result in inefficient teaching and limited student exposure to information and examples from real-world economies. Training and capacity building for teachers are required especially for those teaching economics. Numerous teachers may lack strong backgrounds in economics which can make it difficult for them to teach the subject effectively. Teachers' topic knowledge and pedagogical skills can be improved with better training programmes and resources ([Adu & Zondo, 2023a](#)).

The teaching of economics is facing many challenges including inadequate funding of economics education programmes, inadequate instructional materials, poor research in economics, negative attitudes of students towards economics and inadequate instructional materials and infrastructural facilities ([Ogunode & Abubakar, 2020](#)). Another challenge in South Africa is the language barrier. Although there are several official languages in South Africa, English is frequently used as the primary language of instruction in schools. According to [Thao, Yen, Khang, Khoi, and Quyen \(2022\)](#), some students might not be fluent in English or might want to learn in their mother tongue. The quality of teaching and learning with the appropriate method is determined by the language of teaching. Understanding complex economic concepts might be difficult due to language limitations which lower achievement and interest ([Adu & Zondo, 2022](#)).

According to [Oru \(2020\)](#), the challenges faced by economics teachers include a very high teacher-student ratio, poor teaching techniques and class size. [Ayeni and Olowe \(2016\)](#) supported the claim of [Oru \(2020\)](#) by referring to class size as an educational tool that can be used to describe the number of students per class in a given school, class size is an administrative decision over which the teacher has little or no control. [Goodluck \(2019\)](#) believed that students' attitudes and the inability of teachers to be skillful in mathematics are also some of the challenges teachers face in the teaching of economics. Since the contents of economics are mathematical in nature, teachers who lack mathematical ability may not be able to effectively teach the course's contents.

Contextual relevance is another challenge because students in South Africa particularly those from poor families may not necessarily connect the economic principles presented in the classroom to their daily experiences and reality. Economics instruction needs to be placed within the framework of South Africa's socioeconomic system which includes problems like unemployment, inequality, and historical legacies (Adu & Zondo, 2023b). Teachers are frustrated by students' perceptions that economics is a tough topic which shapes their attitudes in class.

Lack of application and practical skills from the knowledge of economics poses another challenge since economics focuses on developing practical applications and skills rather than just academic principles. In economics, there is a need for the applicability of what is taught to real-life situations since economics is a living and dynamic subject to improve students' capacity to comprehend and negotiate complex economic issues (Adu & Zondo, 2023a). The issue of assessment techniques cannot be left behind as part of the challenges teachers and learners face. Assessment techniques can have an impact on how economics is taught and learned. Traditional assessment methods that emphasise rote memorisation and regurgitation of knowledge may limit students' ability to apply economic principles to real-world situations. Assessments must be made to gauge the application of economic knowledge and higher-order thinking abilities (Adu, 2013).

Significant socioeconomic disparities exist in South Africa which may affect students' educational chances and results. Access to high-quality education may be restricted in certain regions due to economic inequality and resource constraints which can result in unequal learning environments. Improving economics teaching and learning requires addressing these larger socio-economic issues (Adu & Zondo, 2022). Collaboration between politicians, educational institutions, instructors and other key stakeholders is necessary to address these difficulties. More effective economics teaching and learning in South Africa can be achieved by providing enough resources, boosting teacher preparation and support, fostering contextual relevance, and improving assessment procedures. Furthermore, initiatives to address wider socioeconomic disparities can contribute to the development of an educational system that is more egalitarian and inclusive.

3.2. Strategies for Mitigating Teachers' Challenges in Economics Pedagogy

Husbands and Pearce (2012) contend that the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its instructors. Hence, the best schools have the highest quality teachers to ensure that schools in South Africa (SA) have the best possible teachers (labelled with good economics pedagogies). This brings us to the question "What should be done to address teachers' challenges in economics pedagogy"? Umalusi (2014) found that the CAPS document covered economic concepts but less on the depth of the concepts and therefore proposed a reduction in the breadth of the curriculum and an increased depth to intensify content and the amount of high-order content. Damilie (2018) claims that there are no action verbs in the curriculum document, thus suggesting modifying the topic listing to add command verbs that communicate the extent and depth of recommended material in the CAPS document.

Bray (2018) reported weaknesses in the CAPS document about the pedagogy and thus argued that the document should include detailed subject-specific pedagogies that are appropriate for the teaching of economics. Adu and Zondo (2022) and Ogbonnaya, Mji, Mafa-Theledi, and Ngulube (2020) viewed ICT integration as another mitigating strategy to enhance teachers' pedagogies. These authors argue that the Department of Basic Education (DBE) needs to develop a support document that demonstrates specific integration possibilities to enlighten teachers on how best they can teach economics in schools. It is worth noting that there is literature responding to what should be done to address teachers' challenges in economics pedagogy.

3.3. Transforming Economics to Tackle Teachers' Challenges in Teaching Economics

The relevance of teacher expertise and subject matter knowledge has shifted over time to the knowledge necessary to use pedagogical reasoning to transform the content of a particular issue into a comprehensible form (Loughran, 2019). The study by Ogbonnaya et al. (2020) demonstrated the need for South African teacher education programmes to incorporate a variety of instructional practices to enhance economics teaching in schools. They recommend that the economics curriculum be connected to students' actual environments, their recommendations include a re-evaluation of the curriculum considering ongoing discussions within the field and highlighting the importance of pedagogy training for economics teachers. This (pedagogical training) is said to enhance teachers' capacity to determine whether students are learning beyond simply passing examinations.

According to [Ojo and Jeannin \(2016\)](#), teachers have adopted online learning platforms for information sharing using ICT in order to make the discipline of economics more appealing to students and allow them to practice and learn in their respective homes. [Bray \(2018\)](#) opines that the case method is a valuable intervention in maximizing economics learning in the classroom because using a case as a teaching pedagogy shifts the dynamics of the class from “a passive learning environment to an active learning” where learners are the centre of learning. It allows students to think beyond their limits while applying what they have learned in the real world. They can tackle even tough issues since they are practically involved and they can relate to what is being taught allowing them to reach the level of analysing the economics and economic cycle.

Additionally, according to [Brownlow and Colvin \(2022\)](#), teacher education programmes should present in-service teachers with difficult material to broaden their horizons of knowledge or a review of essential concepts covered in secondary school. Teachers’ ought to employ educational resources that are relevant to society. Students will learn better if they can relate to what they are learning and can see how studying economics can help them understand the complexities of the world they live in.

4. METHODOLOGY

The methodology section describes the process of research approach, design, data collection instrument and data analysis. The interpretivism paradigm was used in this research which holds that reality is subjective, socially created and multiple. According to this theory, reality varies based on individual variations and societal perspectives ([Adu & Olowu, 2022](#)). The paper adopted a qualitative research approach of phenomenological research design to elicit information from the teacher about transforming economics towards tackling teachers' challenges in teaching economics in selected schools in Buffalo City Metropolitan South Africa. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 12 teachers in six selected schools in Buffalo City Municipality in East London, South Africa. There is a minimum of two teachers in each school teaching economics at the Further and Education Training (FET) levels. The schools selected are in both urban and rural areas of the municipality, the teachers selected are those teaching in Grades 10 and 11. A semi-structured interview was used to collect information from the respondents. The trustworthiness of confirmability, credibility and transferability were used to measure the validity of the instrument. The data were analysed using a thematic approach of coding, sorting, pattern, categorization and transcription.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following themes were raised and analysed based on the research objectives:

- What are the challenges economics teachers face in the teaching and learning of economics?
- What are the mitigating strategies for addressing teachers’ challenges in economics pedagogy?
- How can economics teaching be transformed to tackle the challenges teachers face when teaching economics?

5.1. Theme 1: Challenges in Economics Teachers Face in the Teaching and Learning of Economics

All the teachers interviewed believe that there are a lot of challenges being faced. Specifically, some of them said:

In our school, we are facing scarce resources perhaps because of the school location but some of my colleagues in schools located in urban areas said that they are facing the same problem. Our students' exposure is another challenge, the contents of economics are primarily on data and statistics and our students are limited in their knowledge of data and statistics (T2).

Some of us lack training and capacity building; you will agree with me that as teachers, we need to undertake professional development programmes to build our capacity. I have been at this school for more than seven years and I have not attended any workshop. We are forgotten and abandoned here (T5).

Another teacher said the following:

For the past ten years, I have been teaching economics what I have always come across is the insufficient and extensive backgrounds of learners in economics. As it becomes abstract to our learners the language of teaching is another challenge, the policy only permits us to teach in English whereas the majority of the learners can only understand the concepts in

economics when they use their mother tongues. However, I do not possess the mastery of more than two local languages. So, it is difficult for me to come to their level (T1).

On the other hand, another teacher said:

What I see as a challenge to me in the teaching of economics is the lack of application and practical skills. Without knowledge of economics, our learners could not apply the practical skills being taught in the subject to their daily lives. Another challenge is learners' absenteeism and background. I believe the background has an influence on learners' attendance in the classroom. This affects the assessment mode because I have to change my assessment method every time (T9).

5.2. Summary and Discussion of the Findings on Theme 1

The respondents expressed their concerns about different challenges being faced in the teaching of economics. The challenges range from inadequate resources, a lack of learners' exposure, a lack of professional development and training, learners' backgrounds, the language of teaching, a lack of application of skills acquired and so on. These are in line with [Adu and Zondo \(2023b\)](#) in their submission that the teachers of economics are facing the challenges of inadequate teaching aids and skills. They also align with [Oru \(2020\)](#) who listed a very high teacher-student ratio, poor teaching techniques and class size as some of the challenges faced by economics teachers. Similarly, the findings align with the [Goodluck's \(2019\)](#) study that students' attitudes and the inability of teachers to be skilled in mathematics are also some of the challenges teachers face in the teaching of economics. This finding revealed that the teachers too are not literate mathematically.

5.3. Theme 2: Strategies for Mitigating Teachers' Challenges in Economics Pedagogy

I interviewed the respondents further on strategies to overcome the above-enumerated challenges. The majority of the teachers (respondents) believe that the contents of the economics curriculum must be well-explanatory and written in simple language with good pedagogy and resources well-spelled out. The action words or goals of the economics curriculum content must be realistic and achievable. One teacher said:

I believe there should be subject-specific pedagogies that are appropriate for the teaching of economics (T4).

Another respondent said:

The integration of Information Communication and technologies (ICT) will help overcome most of the challenges because ICT enhances teachers' pedagogies and helps teachers become better teachers despite their qualifications and teacher education (T12).

5.4. Summary and Discussion of Findings in Theme 2

In this theme, the findings revealed that the contents of the economics curriculum must be well-explanatory and written with simple language. According to [Umalusi \(2014\)](#), the contents of the economics curriculum must be very deep and comprehensive with increased depth to intensify content and a high level of content subject-specific with pedagogies that are relevant to each topic inside the curriculum. [Damilie \(2018\)](#) purported that the curriculum of economics should have clear prescriptions.

The integration of ICT into the teaching of economics will assist in solving the problems bedeviled in the teaching of economics. [Adu and Zondo \(2022\)](#) and [Ogbonnaya et al. \(2020\)](#) viewed ICT integration as another mitigating strategy to enhance teachers' pedagogies. These authors further argue that the Department of Basic Education (DBE) needs to develop a support document that demonstrates specific integration possibilities to enlighten teachers on how best they can teach economics in schools.

5.5. Theme 3: Transforming Economics for Tackling Teachers' Challenges in Teaching Economics

The above theme focuses on how teachers can be creative in transforming the teaching of economics towards tackling the challenges and sustaining the solutions provided. Economics is a living and dynamic subject. All the teachers believe that the subject of economics should provide solutions to the socioeconomic problems of the recipients and the nation. Therefore, the teachers' expertise in this subject is very important. The instructor should

claim knowledge of all subjects in economics by employing various instructional practices to improve the delivery of knowledge in the classroom.

Few of the respondents have the following perceptions:

As an economic teacher for more than a decade, I came to realise that I should make the teaching of economics more interesting by using different contemporary examples during my teaching and relating them to my learners' environment. I should indigenize my teaching using learner-centred methods and constantly re-evaluate the curriculum (T3).

Similar to the above in terms of pedagogy and delivery of the contents, another teacher said:

To use economic teaching to solve the challenges, I need to look beyond the cognitive domain and focus more on the affective domain which is value and attitude. I should make my learners claim ownership, have residual knowledge of what I am teaching them and apply it to their real-life problems. I should also update myself on the current needs of my learners because I believe in the slogan "You can only give what you have" (T11).

Another teacher said:

I can make the teaching of economic more fascinating by promoting virtual classrooms. Since we are in the 21st century, I need to be technologically inclined and inculcate that in my learners. The use of ICT is capable of promoting and attracting learners. This will allow me to maximize learning and shift the dynamics from passive to active learning (T7).

Similarly, another teacher thought of a pedagogical approach to transformation thus:

I need to relate what I am teaching to the contemporary situation of my learners because they will learn better if they can relate to what they are learning and see how studying economics can help them understand the complexities of their world. I will also employ the use of resources that are relevant to the society to which the learners belong to widen their knowledge (T10).

5.6. Summary and Discussion of Findings in Theme 3

Economics is a social and dynamic subject. Its teaching and applications have the potential for total transformation and enhance a paradigm shift from a challenges-driven to a transformation-driven subject. The findings revealed various ways in which *economic teaching* can tackle the challenges being faced by teachers. Some of these findings include using contemporary examples that are related to learners' environments while teaching. The continuous use of the learner-centred method and the concentration on the affective domain (which includes values and attitudes) can lead to transformation in the teaching of economics. According to [Adu and Olowu \(2022\)](#), learners should be taught in a manner in which they will be useful for themselves, society and solving their real-life problems. The focus of teaching should not only be on assessment and performance but also on positive attitudes and classroom activities.

Moreover, the promotion of virtual classrooms and the knowledge of ICT can enhance the shift from passive dynamics to active ones. These findings are supported by [Ojo and Jeannin \(2016\)](#) who believed that the solution to pedagogical problems is the ability of teachers to develop online learning platforms for information sharing using ICT. This will enable the discipline of economics to be more attractive to learners.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper investigated the challenges economics teachers face in teaching and learning, the mitigating strategies for addressing teachers' challenges in economics pedagogy and how economics teaching can be transformed to tackle these challenges. The paper finds some striking challenges especially the imprecise economics curriculum contents and the inability of the learners to show interest in the subject due to some statistics and data components of the subject. One of the strategies postulated to address these challenges includes teachers' attendance at professional development for an update and the teacher's use of appropriate pedagogy based on the learners' knowledge of the subject matter.

The paper revealed that the teacher needs to focus more on the affective domain of the learners to enhance positive attitudes and values and develop their society by addressing how economics teaching can be transformed

to tackle these challenges. The amazing thing revealed from this research is the teacher's failure to use a suitable blended approach to disseminate the contents of economics to the learners and use their immediate contemporary examples from their environment. Economics is a living and dynamic subject that involves real-life situations for both teachers and learners. The subject is expected to be given adequate consideration during curriculum, formulation, cascading and implementation. Teachers are expected to be at the forefront of disseminating the contents of the subject appropriately because a teacher can only give what he or she has. Teachers should be proactive and current with the recent developments in the nation and be technologically compliant. The policy implication of this study is that an economics teacher can provide a certificate that shows knowledge and background in mathematics and a Professional Development certificate (on-the-job training) on being computer literate or ICT compliance.

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INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD STATEMENT

The Ethical Committee of the University of Fort Hare, South Africa has granted approval for this study (Ref. No. REC-270710-028-RA Level 01).

TRANSPARENCY

The author confirms that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interests regarding the publication of this paper.

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