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Teachers' experiences on teaching Economics concepts in selected secondary schools: A case study of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

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ABSTRACT

Learners often perceive Economics as a difficult subject. This difficulty may stem from the abstract nature of key concepts, the unique analytical thinking the discipline requires, or the traditional methods by which it is taught. Within this context, certain disciplinary ideas referred to as threshold concepts are considered educationally critical for learners to develop a deep understanding of economics. These concepts are often troublesome and transformative, require both cognitive and emotional engagement, and highlight the inseparability of disciplinary learning from the learner's personal context. This study is within the interpretive paradigm and adopts a qualitative case study design. Purposive sampling was used to select ten economics teachers, who participated in semi-structured, face-to-face interviews. Data was analysed using both deductive and inductive approaches. The semi-structured face-to-face interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analysed using thematic coding to identify common patterns and themes. The findings revealed that many economics teachers have not received formal subject-specific training. In conclusion, the teaching and learning of Economics in KwaZulu-Natal Province secondary schools are hindered by structural, pedagogical, and contextual challenges. A primary issue is the inadequate training of Economics teachers, which diminishes their content knowledge and teaching effectiveness, resulting in poor learner performance. Based on these findings, the study recommends organising regular workshops and refresher courses tailored specifically for economics educators to enhance subject knowledge and pedagogical competence. This study provides a valuable contribution to the limited qualitative research on Economics education in South African secondary schools, specifically in the KwaZulu-Natal Province.

Keywords: Economics, Concepts, Experiences, Threshold Framework.

INTRODUCTION

Many students perceive Economics as a difficult subject to learn.[1] This difficulty may originate from the abstract nature of numerous economic concepts, the unique ways of thinking and problem-solving

[1] Erik Angner, *A Course in Behavioral Economics* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020).

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that the field requires, or the traditional teaching methods often used. These challenges frequently lead to high failure and dropout rates, and ongoing concerns about the quality of teaching and learning in secondary school economics courses have been consistently highlighted in international research. An approach to addressing these educational challenges is the Threshold Concepts Framework (TCF). Originating in economics education research, the TCF has since become influential in various disciplines.[2] This framework identifies certain concepts within a discipline as "threshold concepts", crucial ideas that must be understood for students to progress in the thinking style and discourse of the field.[3] These concepts are often complex and transformative, meaning that learning them requires emotional and personal involvement in addition to cognitive effort. Thus, learning economics cannot be separated from the learner's personal context.[4] The concept of threshold concepts may provide new perspectives on these ongoing challenges by highlighting particular curriculum areas where students frequently encounter difficulties. The integrative nature of threshold concepts, in which understanding requires recognising links between foundational ideas and other related notions, can be particularly challenging for students. These concepts often serve as gateways to broader conceptual or even interdisciplinary realms. When students' prior knowledge conflicts with newly introduced ideas, it can lead to confusion and the emergence of "foreign knowledge".[5] Furthermore, the specialised terminology used in economics may present an additional challenge, especially for students unfamiliar with essential terms or who struggle to understand the discipline's language.

Although Economics is part of the secondary school curriculum, many students still struggle to comprehend basic economic concepts. This raises questions about the effectiveness of teaching methods and the difficulties teachers face in conveying these ideas. In numerous secondary schools, particularly in developing regions, educators often encounter challenges such as insufficient teaching materials, a lack of professional development opportunities, large class sizes, and varying levels of student interest and preparedness. These factors greatly affect the teaching and learning of economic concepts. However, there is a lack of research that specifically examines teachers' personal experiences in teaching Economics, particularly in certain secondary schools. Understanding these experiences is essential to informing policy decisions, curriculum development, and teacher training programs that aim to improve Economics education. Teachers believe that Economics is challenging to teach in secondary schools.[6] Disciplinary difficulty is evident both internationally and locally through high failure rates and concerns about the quality of teaching and learning in secondary school economics. The high failure rate has led to a decline in students majoring in Economics in secondary schools.

This study investigated the dynamic strategies teachers use to engage secondary school students in economic concepts. Through this exploration, the aim is to uncover the innovative methods and approaches that bring economics to life in the classroom. Additionally, we intend to gain insights into the effectiveness of teachers in conveying economics concepts to secondary school students.

This research is significant for several reasons, as it seeks to explore and document the firsthand experiences of Economics educators in secondary education. The expected outcomes are likely to benefit the following groups: Teachers will find value in identifying the obstacles and strategies they employ in teaching economic concepts; this study may encourage shared insights and professional development. Additionally, it might offer practical strategies that educators can implement to enhance their teaching methods. Educational Policymakers and Curriculum Developers can gain insights from this research that could influence decisions related to teacher training, resource allocation, and curriculum adjustments. Understanding the real-life experiences of teachers can aid in formulating policies that enhance the effectiveness of Economics education.

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[2] George A Akerlof, "Sins of Omission and the Practice of Economics," *Journal of Economic Literature* 58, no. 2 (2020): 405–18.

[3] Daniel M. Hausman, "The Inexact and Separate Science of Economics," in *The Historiography of Economics* (Routledge, 2013), 492–95.

[4] Akerlof, "Sins of Omission and the Practice of Economics."

[5] Sophie Hill, "The Difference between Troublesome Knowledge and Threshold Concepts," *Studies in Higher Education* 45, no. 3 (2020): 665–76.

[6] Akerlof, "Sins of Omission and the Practice of Economics."

School Administrators can use the findings to better support their teaching staff through professional development opportunities, teaching resources, and classroom management strategies that promote effective Economics instruction. Teacher Training Institutions may use insights from the study to align their programs more closely with the practical needs and realities of secondary school classrooms. Researchers and Academics will find that this study contributes to the limited body of literature focusing specifically on Economics education at the secondary level. It opens opportunities for further research on teaching practices, student outcomes, and curriculum effectiveness in Economics. Students will ultimately benefit, as improving how Economics is taught directly impacts their understanding and interest in the subject. Better teaching strategies and a supportive learning environment can lead to improved educational outcomes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A variety of interconnected factors, including their knowledge of the subject, teaching resources, curriculum design, and the degree of student engagement, shape teachers' experiences of teaching economics in secondary schools. Research indicates that educators often encounter challenges such as technical terminology, limited teaching time, and insufficient instructional materials, which can hinder the effective delivery of economic concepts.[7] Some teachers express uncertainty about their understanding of complex economic concepts, which further affects their ability to present content clearly to students. Bridging the gap between theoretical concepts and students' real-life experiences often complicates contextualisation of lessons, reducing student interest and comprehension. Moreover, disparities in school environments, such as access to current textbooks, teacher training opportunities, and administrative support, lead to varied teaching experiences. Educators in well-resourced schools generally report better outcomes due to access to technology and interactive teaching methods. Conversely, teachers in underfunded schools often rely on rote memorisation techniques that limit students' critical thinking and application skills. To address these challenges, continuous professional development and the integration of real-world case studies into economics curricula are recommended. Ultimately, teacher preparedness, institutional support, and educational flexibility are crucial in improving the teaching and understanding of economics concepts in secondary education.[8]

The international literature on economics education is extensive and covers a wide range of topics, methodologies, and perspectives. Contributions to the field come from both traditional academic economists and education specialists, many drawing on their own instructional experiences and insights.[9] An impact analysis of the most referenced articles in economics education journals by Mixon and Upadhyaya emphasises the focus on quantitative research aimed at identifying key factors influencing student performance.[10] However, the field also includes significant qualitative, normative, and philosophical debates, especially regarding what should be taught in economics and how it should be taught.

Recent qualitative research highlights consistent challenges faced by secondary school Economics teachers, particularly those without formal specialisation in the subject. Williams and Khalo conducted semi-structured interviews in South Africa and found that non-specialist teachers frequently struggle with limited content knowledge, low confidence, and a lack of pedagogical support, all contributing to poor learner performance.[11] Similarly, Amao-Adeleke and Akorede in Nigeria report that while teachers generally find most Economics topics manageable, they face particular difficulty teaching mathematically intensive concepts like elasticity, utility theory, and national income

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[7] E. Ngwenya, "Challenges Faced by Teachers in the Teaching of Economics at Secondary School Level," *African Journal of Educational Studies* 8, no. 2 (2020): 45–58.

[8] Ngwenya, "Challenges Faced by Teachers in the Teaching of Economics at Secondary School Level."

[9] Emmanuel Oluseun Ojo, "On Teaching Economics 1: A Qualitative Case Study of a South African University" (University of the Witwatersrand, Faculty of Humanities, 2016).

[10] Franklin Mixon and Kamal Upadhyaya, "Scholarly Impact of Core Econometrics Journals: A Catalog and Citations-Based Ranking," *International Econometric Review* 13, no. 4 (2021): 118–31.

[11] Thandile Williams and Xolani Khalo, "Challenges Faced by Economics Teachers Who Did Not Receive Specialised Training in the Subject," *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research* 22, no. 8 (2023): 135–45.

accounting challenges exacerbated by inadequate training and the abstract nature of the content.[12] These difficulties often compel teachers to rely on peer collaboration and ad-hoc coping strategies, such as conducting termly seminars or pooling resources to address knowledge gaps. In differing contexts, these findings suggest an urgent need for targeted professional development, ongoing specialist support, and curriculum adjustments to bridge the gap between teacher preparedness and the demands of Economics instruction.

Recent research highlights that teaching without subject expertise remains a significant challenge. A South African study by Williams and Khalo involving interviews with Economics teachers who lack specialisation showed that many were deficient in profound content knowledge, encountered difficulties with the English language, dealt with overwhelming workloads, and received minimal support from colleagues and subject advisors, problems directly contributing to poor student achievement.[13] Comparable findings were reported in Limpopo, where teachers tasked with teaching commercial subjects like Economics without specialisation noted insufficient pedagogical content knowledge, leading to decreasing pass rates and even the discontinuation of Commerce streams.

Similarly, research on agricultural Economics teaching in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa highlighted teachers' lack of preparation for new content, insufficient training in agricultural economics, and their dependence on peer networks to alleviate resource shortfalls. These studies stress the importance of Shulman's Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) theory when examining experiences of teachers teaching subjects outside their expertise, as non-specialist educators face difficulties in integrating theoretical knowledge with classroom practice.

Beyond specialisation, curriculum design and student preparedness also influence teachers' experiences. A case study from Uganda revealed that the Economics curriculum is highly theoretical, compounded by low student engagement, poor reading habits, absenteeism, and inadequate English skills, further burdening teachers to deliver abstract content effectively. Additionally, the integration of technology into South African Economics classrooms encounters significant hurdles. A systematic review employing the TPACK framework discovered that although teachers recognise the advantages of incorporating ICT, inadequate infrastructure, insufficient professional development, and weak institutional support constrain their ability to use digital tools effectively to improve conceptual understanding and student participation.

These content and pedagogical questions are closely linked to broader concerns about the quality of learning in economics, making them particularly relevant for this study. Much of the literature focuses on introductory modules and economics majors, with comparatively little research devoted to intermediate study levels. This indicates a significant gap in the literature, especially given evolving global economic conditions and changing educational contexts, particularly in countries like South Africa.

Research on the quality of economics education in South Africa is limited. Nonetheless, there is evidence that South African learners face challenges similar to those seen internationally. The discipline's reputation for difficulty is locally reflected in low enrolment numbers, poor academic performance, low throughput, and high repeat rates among secondary school learners.[14] Performance in matriculation (school-leaving) examinations, especially in Mathematics and English, has been shown to significantly affect success in economics.[15] Additionally, students whose first language is English tend to perform better, while the influence of demographic factors such as age, race, and gender remains inconclusive.[16] Emerging qualitative insights from exploratory research with first-year economics

[12] Lukmon Amao-Adeleke and Serifat F Akorede, "Teachers and Students' Perception of Difficult Topics in Senior Secondary Schools Economics in Lagos State, Nigeria," *African Journal of Behavioural and Scale Development Research* 6, no. 1 (2024): 76–87.
[13] Williams and Khalo, "Challenges Faced by Economics Teachers Who Did Not Receive Specialised Training in the Subject."
[14] Jen D. Snowball and Chrissie Boughey, "Understanding Student Performance in a Large Class," *Innovations in Education and Teaching International* 49, no. 2 (May 18, 2012): 195–205, https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2012.677658.
[15] Kudayja Parker, "The Effect of Student Characteristics on Achievement in Introductory Microeconomics in South Africa," *The South African Journal of Economics* 74, no. 1 (March 2006): 137–49, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1813-6982.2006.00054.x.
[16] Dean van der Merwe, "Preparing Pre-Service Teachers to Guide and Support Learning in South African Schools," *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 12, no. 1 (2022): 1–10.

students at a traditional South African university echo many concerns found in the international literature. These include challenges in conceptual understanding, compounded by weak mathematical foundations and the difficulty of studying in English as a second language.[17] Despite these preliminary findings, our understanding of the qualitative aspects of student learning experiences in South Africa remains underexplored and deserves further investigation.

Teachers play a vital role in the delivery and management at the school level, where they are primarily responsible for conveying content and assisting learners in improving academic achievement. Addressing the specific challenges faced by different student communities also requires sensitivity to contextual inequalities. Naicker, Chikoko, and Mthiyane advocate for assessing educational circumstances at the most localised level possible to avoid overgeneralization and more accurately capture the effects of poverty and disadvantage in a country with wide socioeconomic disparities.[18]

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study uses the theory of Threshold Concepts as its Framework. The Threshold Concepts Framework (TCF) offers a powerful theoretical lens for understanding how students engage with complex disciplinary knowledge.

The TCF also highlights the emotional and psychological aspects of learning. As students navigate threshold concepts, they may enter what is known as a liminal space, a transitional state in which understanding is uncertain and in flux. In this space, learners often experience confusion, discomfort, or frustration, but with the right support, they can eventually achieve a more cohesive and integrated understanding of the discipline.[19] This intersection of cognitive and emotional factors underscores the need for teaching strategies that respond to students' conceptual challenges, particularly in subjects like economics, where abstract and counterintuitive ideas are common.

TCF has proven to be a productive line of inquiry for improving students' understanding of this common disciplinary content. The TCF has its deepest roots in the 'student learning perspectives' research strand but also contributes to discussions around teaching methods and curriculum content. The TCF was chosen to frame this study for several reasons. The idea of threshold concepts emerged from studies of teaching and learning in economics and appeared to fit well with the path and features of disciplinary learning as we understood them from our own years of experience teaching economics to undergraduates. Because TCs are discipline-based, we were able to engage immediately with the approach, despite my formal training being in economics rather than education practice (as predicted by Cousin, and Lucas & Mladenovic).[20] The TCF incorporates relevant ideas from various learning theories and other disciplines, which it integrates into a coherent view that can be used to illuminate the complexity of learning. The framework could therefore accommodate the learning inquiries we were interested in, and provide insights beyond quantitative success factors or assessments of progress in understanding, to generate a holistic and qualitative perspective. The theory of threshold concepts originated from the economics strand of a UK-wide research project (Enhancing Teaching and Learning Environments in Undergraduate Courses).[21]

[17] Ojo, "On Teaching Economics 1: A Qualitative Case Study of a South African University."
[18] Vitallis Chikoko, Inbanathan Naicker, and Siphiwe Mthiyane, "School Leadership Practices That Work in Areas of Multiple Deprivation in South Africa," *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* 43, no. 3 (2015): 452–67.
[19] Hausman, "The Inexact and Separate Science of Economics."
[20] Glynis Cousin, "Neither Teacher-Centred nor Student-Centred: Threshold Concepts and Research Partnerships," *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education*, no. 2 (2010); Ursula Lucas and Rosina Mladenovic, "The Potential of Threshold Concepts: An Emerging Framework for Educational Research and Practice," *London Review of Education* 5, no. 3 (2007).
[21] Jan Meyer and Ray Land, "Threshold Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge: Linkages to Ways of Thinking And," *Princeton: Citeseer*, 2003.

METHODOLOGY

This research study falls within the interpretive framework, chosen because it allows the researcher to explore the varied understandings teachers have about teaching economic concepts effectively. The study used a qualitative research method, which is a structured plan that details how the research will be conducted. The qualitative approach seeks to gain a thorough understanding of the multiple perspectives individuals possess, providing a view of the situation through the participants' perspectives. The research used a case study design. Welman and Kruger describe a case study as a detailed investigation of a limited number of analysis units, such as individuals, groups, or institutions.[22] The selection of a case study was motivated by the opportunity it offers to present a clear and comprehensive image of the context, enhancing the reader's understanding. According to Mweshi and Sakyi, it involves a deep examination from various angles of the complexity and uniqueness of a specific system, program, organisation, project, or policy.[23] In this research, teachers serve as the case. They are charged with implementing and supporting the curriculum.

The population of this study comprised secondary Economics Teachers, selected through purposive sampling, with the researcher intentionally choosing 10 economics teachers to participate, equally divided between male and female educators.

Data generation involved semi-structured face-to-face interviews with economics teachers and focus groups. Naz, Gulab, and Aslam suggest that semi-structured interviews allow for detailed responses, as respondents can clarify their answers.[24] Data analysis combined both deductive and inductive approaches. The Threshold Concepts Theoretical Framework guided the deductive method. It helped to form themes based on the theory. The inductive approach was used when new themes emerged from the data obtained through the aforementioned tools.[25] These semi-structured face-to-face interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analysed using thematic coding to identify common patterns and themes.

All ethical protocols were adhered to during the study. These included anonymising participants and schools using pseudonyms or codes. Consent was obtained from all involved school principals and participants, and university ethical clearance was secured before starting the research. Participants' privacy was respected during and after interviews. Both harming participants and offering monetary incentives were avoided. Interviews took place in settings where participants felt secure and at ease. Data generated from schools were treated confidentially and stored on a password-protected device accessible only to the researcher.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The findings from this study highlight critical concerns related to teacher competence, curriculum relevance, resource availability, and assessment practices in the teaching of Economics in secondary schools in KwaZulu-Natal Province. These findings resonate strongly with existing empirical literature and are further illuminated through the lens of the Threshold Concepts Framework (TCF), which serves as the study's guiding theoretical model.

Lack of Specialised Training and Teacher Content Knowledge

The discussion of findings reveals that many Economics teachers in the KwaZulu-Natal province lack formal specialisation in the subject, contributing to ineffective lesson planning, inaccurate content delivery, and flawed assessment practices. This deficit significantly hampers learner achievement, as

[22] Johannes Christiaan Welman and Stefanus Johannes Kruger, *Research Methodology for the Business and Administrative Sciences*, *(No Title)* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press Southern Africa, 2001).

[23] Geoffrey Kapasa Mweshi and Kwesi Sakyi, "Application of Sampling Methods for the Research Design," *Archives of Business Review–Vol* 8, no. 11 (2020): 180–93.

[24] Nuzhat Naz, Fozia Gulab, and Mahnaz Aslam, "Development of Qualitative Semi-Structured Interview Guide for Case Study Research," *Competitive Social Science Research Journal* 3, no. 2 (2022): 42–52.

[25] Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Toward Good Practice in Thematic Analysis: Avoiding Common Problems and Be (Com) Ing a Knowing Researcher," *International Journal of Transgender Health* 24, no. 1 (2023): 1–6.

evidenced by consistently low performance rates (only 2% achieving above 60%). These findings are consistent with the international and local literature. Ngwenya underscores the recurring difficulties teachers face due to limited economic knowledge and confidence, which are compounded by abstract and mathematically intensive content such as utility theory and elasticity.[26]

Williams and Khalo reinforce this pattern in South Africa, emphasising that non-specialist educators frequently struggle with pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), language barriers, and institutional neglect.[27] These limitations prevent teachers from effectively navigating complex economic concepts and hinder students' transition through threshold concepts, the critical points where understanding shifts from superficial to deep.

From a theoretical perspective, the TCF suggests that learners cannot engage meaningfully with disciplinary knowledge unless their teachers are equipped to scaffold these threshold concepts. Teachers lacking the epistemological and pedagogical mastery to demystify abstract content cannot assist learners in transitioning through the liminal spaces of confusion and cognitive dissonance.[28]

Inadequate Support and Resources

The study identifies inadequate institutional support, limited access to teaching resources, and restricted opportunities for professional development. Literature by Ngwenya and Williams and Khalo affirms that teachers often resort to self-teaching or informal peer learning networks to cope.[29] The dependence on makeshift strategies, such as termly seminars or pooled materials, reveals systemic underinvestment in teacher development.

According to the Threshold Concepts Framework, this lack of support for teachers directly impacts their ability to guide students through complex, transformative learning. Teachers require sustained professional development not only in content but in pedagogical strategies that promote epistemological shifts in learners. Without structured support, educators are not prepared to foster the conceptual breakthroughs required in Economics, limiting learners' ability to internalise threshold concepts such as opportunity cost, economic systems, or marginal analysis.

Curriculum Challenges and Misalignment

The outdated nature of the Economics curriculum, as identified in the study, creates a disconnect between what is taught and current economic realities. Teachers advocate for incorporating contemporary issues such as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and entrepreneurship. International literature critiques the overemphasis on theoretical constructs at the expense of relevance, application, and learner engagement.[30] Similarly, research in Uganda and South Africa highlights the lack of contextual adaptation in curriculum design, which exacerbates learner disengagement, especially in under-resourced settings.[31]

The TCF posits that threshold concepts should not only be transformative and integrative but also contextually relevant. When curricula remain static and separate from real-world applications, they do not support learners in navigating liminal spaces. Without integrating lived experiences and contemporary issues, learners struggle to construct meaningful conceptual frameworks, thereby stalling their epistemological progression.

[26] Ngwenya, "Challenges Faced by Teachers in the Teaching of Economics at Secondary School Level."
[27] Williams and Khalo, "Challenges Faced by Economics Teachers Who Did Not Receive Specialised Training in the Subject."
[28] Hausman, "The Inexact and Separate Science of Economics"; Meyer and Land, "Threshold Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge: Linkages to Ways of Thinking And."
[29] Ngwenya, "Challenges Faced by Teachers in the Teaching of Economics at Secondary School Level"; Williams and Khalo, "Challenges Faced by Economics Teachers Who Did Not Receive Specialised Training in the Subject."
[30] Ojo, "On Teaching Economics 1: A Qualitative Case Study of a South African University."
[31] Chikoko, Naicker, and Mthiyane, "School Leadership Practices That Work in Areas of Multiple Deprivation in South Africa."

Assessment Practices and Pedagogical Approaches

The finding that various assessment methods are employed, such as peer assessment, presentations, and formal examinations, suggests that teachers are trying to engage learners more actively. Although these approaches align with best practices,[32] their success depends largely on the teacher's ability to align assessments with core threshold concepts. For instance, if formative assessments fail to capture students' progress through the liminal space, they risk reinforcing surface learning rather than supporting transformative understanding.

The TCF highlights the importance of assessment in diagnosing where students are along the threshold journey and providing the necessary support to facilitate progression. As Hausmann notes, students often experience emotional uncertainty during this transition. Effective assessment strategies must therefore be diagnostic, formative, and supportive of epistemological shifts, rather than purely evaluative.[33]

Impact of Language, Socioeconomic Inequalities, and Student Preparedness

The literature also discusses the broader sociolinguistic and socioeconomic barriers faced by both teachers and learners in South Africa. Parker and Boughey note that English language proficiency and mathematical readiness significantly impact learners' ability to understand Economics.[34] These barriers reinforce the findings of this study, where poor foundational skills hinder the transition through threshold concepts.

The TCF explicitly considers the emotional and psychological struggles that learners face in the liminal space. When learners are disadvantaged by language, poor academic support, and socioeconomic constraints, they are more likely to remain in this uncertain phase without advancing to conceptual mastery. This underscores the need for differentiated teaching approaches and context-sensitive interventions, as advocated by Chikoko, Naicker and Mthiyane.[35]

Synthesis and Implications

In synthesis, the study's findings align strongly with existing literature and are theoretically substantiated by the Threshold Concepts Framework. The absence of specialised training, poor curriculum design, lack of support, and unresponsive assessment practices all impede learners' epistemological development. These factors collectively hinder students' progression through the cognitive and affective dimensions of the threshold journey, resulting in persistently poor academic outcomes.

The TCF not only offers a lens to understand these challenges but also emphasises the importance of designing learning environments that support both educators and learners in mastering complex disciplinary knowledge. In this context, it becomes evident that educational reform in Economics teaching in KwaZulu-Natal must prioritise:

- **Specialised teacher training and continuous professional development** aligned with threshold concepts;
- **Curriculum reform** to include contextually relevant, interdisciplinary, and contemporary economic issues;
- **Resource provision and institutional support** to enable effective delivery of complex content;
- **Pedagogically informed assessments** that support learner progression through the liminal space.

Without these systemic changes, the potential for meaningful, transformative Economics education remains stifled. Future research should explore how targeted interventions, grounded in the

[32] Ngwenya, "Challenges Faced by Teachers in the Teaching of Economics at Secondary School Level."
[33] Hausman, "The Inexact and Separate Science of Economics."
[34] Parker, "The Effect of Student Characteristics on Achievement in Introductory Microeconomics in South Africa"; Snowball and Boughey, "Understanding Student Performance in a Large Class."
[35] Chikoko, Naicker, and Mthiyane, "School Leadership Practices That Work in Areas of Multiple Deprivation in South Africa."

TCF and sensitive to local contexts, can reshape both teaching practices and learner outcomes in economically and educationally marginalised regions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the discussion, the following recommendations are made.

- **In-Service Training:** Regular workshops and refresher courses, specifically for economics educators, should be organised.
- **University Partnerships:** Collaborate with universities to provide certification or diploma courses for non-specialist teachers.
- **Mentoring Programs:** Connect novice or non-specialist economics teachers with experienced mentors for continuous guidance.
- **Improve Access to Teaching and Learning Resources**: Provide updated textbooks, economic journals, case studies, and digital content relevant to real-world economics.
- **Technology Integration:** Equip teachers with laptops, projectors, and internet access to incorporate multimedia tools and simulations.
- **Open Educational Resources (OERs):** Encourage the use of free online economics content, such as Khan Academy or IMF resources.
- **Revise and Contextualise the Curriculum:** Update content to include topics like entrepreneurship, financial literacy, environmental economics, and the informal economy. Include local examples and case studies relevant to national and regional economies for relatable learning. Integrate economics with mathematics, business studies, and geography for interdisciplinary connections.
- **Enhance Pedagogical Strategies:** Promote active learning through group discussions, debates, role-playing, and real-life problem-solving activities. Diversify assessment projects, presentations, quizzes, and case analyses to accommodate different learning styles. Employ student-centred teaching methods, encouraging inquiry-based learning where students explore economic issues and construct their own arguments.
- **Strengthen Support and Supervision:** Employ competent and experienced subject advisors for continuous support and classroom feedback. Create collaborative platforms for economics teachers to exchange resources, experiences, and strategies. Involve school leaders in supporting curriculum implementation, scheduling, and resource distribution.
- **Utilise Technology for Teaching and Learning:** Blend physical teaching with digital platforms like Google Classroom or Microsoft Teams. Train teachers in data literacy using economic data (e.g., World Bank or national statistics agencies) teach analysis and interpretation. Employ mobile learning tools such as WhatsApp and YouTube for after-school engagement, particularly in resource-constrained areas.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, teaching and learning Economics in KwaZulu-Natal Province secondary schools are hindered by structural, pedagogical, and contextual challenges. A primary issue is the inadequate training of Economics teachers, which diminishes their content knowledge and teaching effectiveness, resulting in poor learner performance. Teachers often struggle to simplify complex economic concepts, leaving learners with a superficial understanding. Additionally, inadequate institutional support, limited resources, and outdated curriculum further impair instruction. Teachers in under-resourced schools often resort to rote learning, hampering critical thinking and conceptual understanding. Language barriers and socioeconomic inequalities also exacerbate learners' difficulties with key economic concepts. Using the Threshold Concepts Framework, the study highlighted that many learners remain in a "liminal space" due to teachers' lack of preparation. The current curriculum also fails to connect economic theories to contemporary issues such as entrepreneurship and environmental economics.

Although some teachers use various assessments, the lack of preparation and alignment with key concepts limits their effectiveness. The study concludes that significant improvements in Economics education require reforms in teacher training, curriculum development, resource allocation, and learner-focused teaching methods.

This study provides a valuable contribution to the limited qualitative research on Economics education in South African secondary schools, specifically in the KwaZulu-Natal Province. Although much of the existing literature focuses on quantitative analyses of learner performance, this research emphasises the lived experiences, perceptions, and challenges faced by Economics teachers. A key contribution is the application of the Threshold Concepts Framework to secondary school Economics, extending its relevance beyond higher education. This approach links teacher pedagogical challenges with learners' difficulties, improving understanding of transformative learning processes.

The study highlights the impact of teacher specialisation, revealing how non-specialist instruction negatively affects curriculum delivery and learner achievement. It strengthens discussions around teacher preparedness and curriculum implementation in South African schools. Moreover, the research examines the contextual factors influencing Economics education, including language barriers and socioeconomic inequalities. It contributes to crucial discussions on educational equity and social justice. The study offers practical recommendations for improving Economics education, including specialised in-service training, curriculum reform, and technology integration, serving as a resource for policymakers and educators.

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