



Mediating Economics Curriculum Implementation through Meaningful Assessment

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ABSTRACT

This empirical study explored how Economics teachers mediate Economics curriculum implementation through the use of meaningful assessment. Assessment plays a significant role in learner academic achievement, and it is, therefore, imperative that teachers' practices produce creative learners, problem solvers, and reflective scholars. Despite increasing realization of the importance of assessment, teachers are either not using assessment or failing to use it meaningfully to mediate economics curriculum implementation. Assessment is a process of collecting data to have a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of learners' learning. If the assessment is used meaningfully, it has the power to inform how teaching and learning can be modified to enhance learners' understanding of concepts as opposed to being used just for certification and eligibility for further education studies. Effective Economics curriculum implementation is dependent on the teachers' understanding of the role and use of meaningful assessment. This interpretivist study was couched in Mediated Learning Experience (MLE) theory and made use of a qualitative multiple case study. Three teachers from three different schools in the Northern Cape Province were purposefully selected to generate data through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. Data was analyzed using a constructivist approach of thematic analysis. The findings of this study showed that, although there are pockets of good assessment practices within the research sites, there is still a lack of understanding of the role and use of meaningful assessment in mediating Economics curriculum implementation. In light of the findings, the study suggested the need for training Economics teachers on how to use assessment meaningfully.

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INTRODUCTION

The curriculum is the catalyst through which a country enables its citizens to acquire knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that empower them to contribute to the growth and development of a nation.¹ The effectiveness of any curriculum is dependent on how well it is implemented. Available literature

¹ N. Kabita and L. Ji, "The Why, What and How of Competency-Based Curriculum Reforms: The Kenyan Experience. Progress Reflection No. 11 on Current and Critical Issues in Curriculum, Learning and Assessment" (UNESCO/IBE, 2017).

documents multiple studies on curriculum implementation.² Curriculum implementation is when the officially prescribed syllabi are put into practice, or the real exposure of learners to the planned learning opportunities.³ Effective curriculum implementation is reliant on the availability of resources, quality of instruction, and nature of assessment.⁴ Assessment plays a crucial role in curriculum implementation as it; establishes what learners already know and what they have achieved, furnishes teachers with important feedback on the effectiveness of their teaching, and gives direction to teachers on how to plan materials and activities for future learning.⁵ Meaningful assessment is undertaken in the process of teaching and learning, and not at the end of the learning process. Assessment is tightly interrelated with curriculum instruction and therefore, should inform teaching and learning.⁶

Given the importance of assessment on learning outcomes, there is a need for effective teachers who are able to administer meaningful assessments. Teachers play an unequivocal role both as designers and implementers of meaningful assessments. Curriculum implementation places a huge responsibility on the teachers' shoulders and these responsibilities include the ability to choose appropriate assessment strategies.⁷ Moreso, the quality of assessments learners are exposed to is heavily dependent on the teachers' ability to plan and administer the assessment in their daily practice.⁸ Teachers have the power to make choices and decisions on how effectively they can use assessment to influence learning.⁹ Meaningful assessment demands teachers to design relevant tasks, gather valid information about learners' needs, and respond to it appropriately, based on the individual learner needs.¹⁰ It begs for teachers to be cognisant of what learners are doing and thinking, and to be capable of guiding them. In fact, scholars like Brown¹¹ argue that assessment is actually good teaching and not assessment. One can reasonably argue that good teachers establish what learners already know, and use the prior knowledge as a building block to develop new knowledge and skills. Teachers who constantly check their learners are able to revise and refine their practice to meet the diverging needs of learners.¹² The success or failure of assessment depends on the teachers' ability to plan, administer, and interpret assessments in their daily practice.¹³

² Aaisha Haquea and Solomon Arulraj David, "Effective Curriculum Implementation for Optimal Teaching and Learning Experience: A Study from a Private School in Dubai," *International Journal* 1 (2022): 20.

³ Katie Pak et al., "The Adaptive Challenges of Curriculum Implementation: Insights for Educational Leaders Driving Standards-Based Reform," *AERA Open* 6, no. 2 (2020): 2332858420932828.

⁴ Zi Yan and David Boud, "Conceptualising Assessment-as-Learning," in *Assessment as Learning* (London: Routledge, 2021), 11–24, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003052081-2>.

⁵ Yan and Boud, "Conceptualising Assessment-as-Learning."

⁶ Nicole Barnes, Helenrose Fives, and Charity M Dacey, "US Teachers' Conceptions of the Purposes of Assessment," *Teaching and Teacher Education* 65 (2017): 107–16.

⁷ Yan and Boud, "Conceptualising Assessment-as-Learning."

⁸ Benjamin K Koskei and Everlyne Chepchumba, "Teachers' Competency as a Cornerstone on the Implementation of Competency-Based Curriculum in Kenya. A Case of Lower Primary Schools in Nakuru County," *International Journal of Education and Research* 8, no. 2 (2020): 1–10.

⁹ Katja Vähäsantanen, "Professional Agency in the Stream of Change: Understanding Educational Change and Teachers' Professional Identities," *Teaching and Teacher Education* 47 (2015): 1–12.

¹⁰ M. V. Durga and Ch Balaji Kumar, "Formative and Summative Assessment for Learning: A Review," *Journal for Research Scholars and Professionals of English Language Teaching* 20, no. 4 (2020).

¹¹ Gavin T. L. Brown, "Is Assessment for Learning Really Assessment?," *Frontiers in Education* 4 (June 28, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.3389/educ.2019.00064>.

¹² Durga and Kumar, "Formative and Summative Assessment for Learning: A Review."

¹³ Durga and Kumar, "Formative and Summative Assessment for Learning: A Review."

Despite the importance of assessment in the teaching and learning process, research consistently shows that there is unsatisfactory use of meaningful assessment in Economics Education.¹⁴ Teachers are not equipped with sufficient knowledge and skills to design and implement appropriate assessment tasks, obtain good information, and respond immediately to the performance of these assessments.¹⁵ This could probably explain why learner academic performance in Economics in the Northern Cape province has been mediocre. The Department of Basic Education (DBE) reports that, over the past five years, more than 40% of the learners who sit for the National Senior Certificate (NSC) Economics examination fail to achieve 30%.¹⁶ From his experience, the researcher shares the view that teachers are either not using assessment or not using it meaningfully to mediate Economics curriculum implementation. Very little research has been conducted on assessment in Economics, especially at the secondary school level. Most research on assessment in Economics curriculum implementation has been conducted at the tertiary level. This study seeks to contribute to the body of knowledge by exploring how Economics teachers are mediating Economics curriculum implementation through meaningful assessment. The study pursues this aim by addressing the following research questions:

1. How do Economics teachers understand the role of meaningful assessment in mediating Economics curriculum implementation?
2. What meaningful assessment practices are Economics teachers using to mediate Economics curriculum implementation?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The paper is informed by the Mediated Learning Experience (MLE) theoretical framework. This theory has its roots in the social constructivism theory developed by Piaget.¹⁷ Mediated Learning Experience theory owes its origins to Reuven Feuerstein, who developed the theory over the period 1950-1963. Mediated Learning Experience theory is concerned with the way in which stimuli are experienced in the environment, with the help of the mediator who can be a parent, teacher, or agent.¹⁸ The MLE theory is relevant to this study as it is premised on the principle that a correlation exists among learning, thinking, understanding, and the learning environment in which these take place.¹⁹ The learning environment refers to how teachers, as mediation agents and through appropriate guidance and support, provide learners with appropriate opportunities and resources to acquire the intended knowledge and skills.²⁰ When applied to this study, it means that the mediational efforts by Economics teachers play a pivotal role in Economics curriculum implementation and the quality of academic achievement

¹⁴ Carlos J. Asarta, Rebecca G. Chambers, and Cynthia Harter, "Teaching Methods in Undergraduate Introductory Economics Courses: Results From a Sixth National Quinquennial Survey," *The American Economist* 66, no. 1 (March 30, 2021): 18–28, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0569434520974658>.

¹⁵ Christopher DeLuca, Allison Chapman-Chin, and Don A. Klinger, "Toward a Teacher Professional Learning Continuum in Assessment for Learning," *Educational Assessment* 24, no. 4 (2019): 267–85.

¹⁶ Department of Basic Education, *National Senior Certificate Examination Report* (Pretoria: Government Printers, 2019); Department of Basic Education, *National Senior Certificate Examination Report* (Pretoria: Government Printers, 2020); Department of Basic Education, *National Senior Certificate Examination Report* (Pretoria: Government Printers, 2021).

¹⁷ David Tzuriel and Adina Shamir, "The Effects of Mediation in Computer Assisted Dynamic Assessment," *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning* 18, no. 1 (2002): 21–32.

¹⁸ Tzuriel and Shamir, "The effects of mediation in computer assisted dynamic assessment."

¹⁹ Katherine H. Greenberg, *The Cognitive Enrichment Advantage Teacher Handbook* (KCD Harris & Associates Press, 2005).

²⁰ Tzuriel and Shamir, "The effects of mediation in computer assisted dynamic assessment."

Feuerstein et.al., note that MLE is based on 12 criteria, but only the first four are viewed to be necessary and sufficient for MLE to occur.²¹ These are intentionality, reciprocity, meaning, and transcendence. For the purpose of this study, these parameters were viewed as intertwined not stand-alone. These parameters demand consideration of both the teachers' and learners' roles in the learning process in which the teacher should be a facilitator of learning and the learner an active participant. To establish how teachers were mediating the Economics curriculum implementation through meaningful assessment, it was imperative to scrutinize the context in which learning occurs with respect to the Economics curriculum. Mediated Learning Experience is a practice theory, and as such, provided the researcher with the lens to zoom into teacher assessment practices. The researcher believed that the context of teachers' practice could be understood through data obtained from classroom observations and semi-structured interviews.

In formulating the observation checklist, document analysis checklist, and interview protocols; the researcher drew from MLE to come up with the intentionality, reciprocity, meaning, and transcendence parameters. As the researcher analyzed data, the researcher was cognisant that the mediational effect plays a crucial role in the achievement of learning activities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Few studies have been conducted in the area of assessment in Economics Education. One of the few studies conducted in this area is that of Rajaram and Bordia²² on teaching econometrics using formative assessment. The study results revealed that incorporating project-based learning in the econometrics course raised learners' level of academic achievement.

In their case study, Ojo and Jeannin²³ bemoaned the nature of Economics assessment that university students were exposed to. They argued that Economics assessments were more concerned about students mastering models rather than basing assessments on the capacity of students to critically analyze the economic problems economies were facing using appropriate data and aggregates. To them, this was more appropriate as it fed into the ultimate goal of Economics teaching, which is premised on equipping learners to be independent thinkers who can come up with solutions to the economic problems bedeviling society and the world at large

Yidana and Anti Partey conducted research on high school Economics teachers' conceptions of the purposes for undertaking classroom assessment. The results of their study revealed that most teachers indicated that classroom assessment leads to improvement in the teaching and learning process. The study recommended that teachers make use of assessments in their daily practice.²⁴

A study conducted by Marire, to determine whether graph-intensive Economics curriculum and assessment promoted better comprehension of economic theory, found that graph-intensive assessment hindered students' access to economic theory. The study revealed that graphs did not facilitate learning,

²¹ Reuven Feuerstein, Pnina S Klein, and Abraham J Tannenbaum, *Mediated Learning Experience (MLE): Theoretical, Psychosocial and Learning Implications* (Freund Publishing House Ltd., 1991).

²² Kumaran Rajaram and Sarbari Bordia, "Culture Clash: Teaching Western-based Management Education to Mainland Chinese Students in Singapore," *Journal of International Education in Business*, 2011.

²³ Emmanuel Ojo and Loïse Jeannin, "The Way Economics Is Taught Needs an Overhaul: A South African Case Study," *Unpublished Master's Dissertation, Johannesburg, University of the Witwatersrand. WIREDSpace. <https://Businessstech.Co.Za/News/Finance/145109/the-Way-Economics-Is-Taught-Needs-an-Overhaul-a-South-African-Case-Study>*, 2016.

²⁴ Mumuni Baba Yidana and P., Anti Partey, "Economics Teachers' Conceptions of Classroom Assessment," *International Journal for Innovation Education and Research* 6, no. 10 (October 31, 2018): 153–74, <https://doi.org/10.31686/ijer.vol6.iss10.1176>.

and recommended that instructors avoid overburdening their assessments with graphs, and only use graphs when it is absolutely necessary.²⁵

In a study conducted by Asarta et al. on teaching and assessment methods in undergraduate Introductory Economics courses in the USA, results revealed that activities and references that addressed diversity were almost never used. This meant that the type of assessments used ignored learners' contextual factors, abilities, and preferences.²⁶

However, as has been stated earlier, the success or failure of assessment depends on the teachers' ability to plan, administer, and interpret assessments in their daily practice. The subsequent sections will discuss curriculum implementation and meaningful assessment in the teaching and learning of Economics.

Curriculum Implementation

The curriculum is the agency through which a nation equips its citizens with the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that enable them to function well both for personal and national development. The curriculum is found in three phases; the intended, implemented and attained.²⁷ The focus of this study was on curriculum implementation. Curriculum implementation is how teachers bring content to life in the classroom.²⁸ Concurring with the above assertion are Oleabhielle and Oko who postulate that curriculum implementation is concerned with how teachers put the officially prescribed syllabi into practice.²⁹ Key to these definitions is that curriculum implementation is the actual exposure of learners to the intended learning opportunities where the teacher delivers instruction and assessment. In the curriculum implementation phase, teaching, learning, and assessment are integrated and cannot exist independently of each other.³⁰ The effectiveness of curriculum implementation heavily relies on the teachers, who are the interpreters and implementers of the policy, assessment guidelines, and other official documents.³¹

Meaningful Assessment in the Teaching and Learning of Economics

Meaningful assessment helps teachers to interpret the learning abilities of the learners so that teachers can make decisions on learners' future academic achievement.³² Meaningful assessment demands teachers to intentionally design relevant tasks that enable them to gather valid information about learners' needs and appropriately respond to those individual learner needs.³³ It is intentional teaching,

²⁵ J. Marire, "Does a Graph-Intensive Economics Curriculum Promote Epistemological Access to Economic Theory?," *South African Journal of Higher Education* 32, no. 1 (March 2017), <https://doi.org/10.20853/32-1-1651>.

²⁶ Asarta, Chambers, and Harter, "Teaching Methods in Undergraduate Introductory Economics Courses: Results From a Sixth National Quinquennial Survey."

²⁷ Erica A Nevenglosky, "Barriers to Effective Curriculum Implementation" (Walden University, 2018).

²⁸ Pak et al., "The Adaptive Challenges of Curriculum Implementation: Insights for Educational Leaders Driving Standards-Based Reform."

²⁹ Eric Oziegbe Oleabhielle and Nnaemeka O Oko, "Economics Curriculum Implementation at the Senior Secondary Education Level," *Journal of Economics and Environmental Education* 3, no. 1 (2018): 10–20.

³⁰ Carina Granberg, Torulf Palm, and Björn Palmberg, "A Case Study of a Formative Assessment Practice and the Effects on Students' Self-Regulated Learning," *Studies in Educational Evaluation* 68 (March 2021): 100955, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2020.100955>.

³¹ Ezinne Orié Idika, "Students' and Teachers' Factors Hindering Effective Teaching and Learning of Economics in Secondary Schools in the Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State," *Journal of Culture and Values in Education*, July 1, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.46303/jcve.2020.4>.

³² Nkoja C Khechane, Mamocheta C Makara, and Awelani M Rambuda, "Primary Mathematics Teachers' Assessment Practices in the Context of the Integrated Primary Curriculum in Lesotho," *African Journal of Research in Mathematics, Science and Technology Education* 24, no. 1 (2020): 41–52.

³³ Durga and Kumar, "Formative and Summative Assessment for Learning: A Review."

as teachers should use the data gathered from assessments to continuously modify their teaching approaches and strategies to meet the varying needs of their learners.³⁴ When learners are actively involved in the assessment of their learning, they tend to be motivated and aim higher.³⁵

Given the complex global changes taking place in the world economies, Economics learners are expected to acquire creative, critical, and problem-solving skills, which will enable them to function meaningfully in the global economy.³⁶ These skills demand greater input from teachers. Every Economics teacher should be equipped with different assessment techniques to cater to the different cognitive demands of the subject. To achieve this, there is a need for competent, well-trained, thoughtful, and adaptive teachers, who are able to use meaningful assessment strategies in the mediation of the Economics curriculum.³⁷

METHODOLOGY

This study was structured within the constructivist-interpretive paradigm and used a qualitative multiple case study methodology to answer questions on Economics teachers' understanding of the role of meaningful assessment, and their meaningful assessment practices in mediating Economics curriculum implementation.³⁸ A multiple case study design allowed the researcher to analyze data; both within and across situations, that is, each teacher's understanding of the role of meaningful assessment and their practices with regard to assessment, in their individual contexts in the selected schools.³⁹ The three Economics teachers selected for the study were profiled as follows: Teacher A was a novice male teacher at a quintile one school. Teacher B had 20 years of teaching experience and taught at a quintile 5 school. Teacher C is a female teacher with 15 years of teaching experience. She taught at a quintile-two school.

In compliance with the ethical considerations, permission was obtained from the Northern Cape Department of Education and the University of the Free State (UFS-HSD2021/1088/21). Consent was granted by the participants by signing the consent forms. Participants were assured that their identities would not be disclosed, and that participation was voluntary, and as such, they could withdraw anytime they felt uncomfortable.⁴⁰

Semi-structured interviews and observations were used to generate data. Thematic analysis was used to analyze qualitative data using Wolcott's three-part model of description, analysis, and interpretation.⁴¹ The data from the semi-structured interviews and observations were transcribed, coded, and arranged into themes that responded to the questions.⁴²

³⁴ Yan and Boud, "Conceptualising Assessment-as-Learning."

³⁵ Aysenur Alp Christ et al., "Learning Processes and Their Mediating Role between Teaching Quality and Student Achievement: A Systematic Review," *Studies in Educational Evaluation* 75 (2022): 101209.

³⁶ Micheal M van Wyk, "Narrating Deputy Principals and Heads of Departments' Experiences of Assessment Practices in Curriculum Delivery," in *Investigating the Roles of School Management Teams in Curriculum Delivery* (IGI Global, 2021), 78–94.

³⁷ Bernard Yaw Sekyi Acquah and Mutendwahothe Walter Lumadi, "Assessment of Trainee–Economics Teachers' Effectiveness: Senior High School Economics Students' Perspective," 2014.

³⁸ Samar Rahi, "Research Design and Methods: A Systematic Review of Research Paradigms, Sampling Issues and Instruments Development," *International Journal of Economics & Management Sciences* 06, no. 02 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.4172/2162-6359.1000403>.

³⁹ John W Creswell and J David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Sage publications, 2017).

⁴⁰ Harsh Suri, "Ethical Considerations of Conducting Systematic Reviews in Educational Research," in *Systematic Reviews in Educational Research* (Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden, 2020), 41–54, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-27602-7_3.

⁴¹ Harry F Wolcott, *Writing up Qualitative Research* (Sage Publications, 2008).

⁴² Philip Adu, *A Step-by-Step Guide to Qualitative Data Coding* (Routledge, 2019).

FINDINGS

The aim of the study was to explore how Economics teachers were mediating Economics curriculum implementation through meaningful assessment. The findings of the study revealed five categories of responses. These were then subsumed into two main themes, namely; teachers' understanding of the role of meaningful assessment, and meaningful assessment practices used by teachers in mediating Economics curriculum implementation.

Theme 1: Teachers' understanding of the role of meaningful assessment in mediating the Economics curriculum

Assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning, and it is of paramount importance that teachers are knowledgeable about the role that meaningful assessment plays in their daily teaching.⁴³ Meaningful assessment helps teachers to ascertain where learners are in terms of their learning, direct how teaching should take place, and give feedback on whether meaningful learning took place.⁴⁴ Without a proper understanding of the role of assessment, teachers are not able to mediate the Economics curriculum through the use of assessment.

In responding to the first question the following themes emerged:

It informs and differentiates teaching

Assessment provides valuable information for teachers, based on what learners can or cannot do. Equipped with this information, teachers are better positioned to modify their teaching strategies and provide extra support, where it is needed.⁴⁵ Teachers can use pre-tests or oral questions to diagnose knowledge gaps and misunderstandings among their learners. When no meaningful assessment is implemented, the teacher is not able to decide on the course of action to take since the teacher will not be aware of the learners' abilities.

Through interviews, the participants were in agreement that meaningful assessment is used to ascertain what learners know and what learners can do so that teachers know how to go about building on learners' prior knowledge. For instance,

Teacher A stated: *"Meaningful assessment helps me to establish what prior knowledge my learners have so that I can build new knowledge on their prior knowledge."*

Teacher C supported the above assertion and went further to postulate that: *"For me, meaningful assessment forms the basis of my teaching, it will determine how I approach the lesson based on what I would have obtained from pre-assessment."*

Corroborating the other two participants, teacher B added that: *"I do not only use assessment to establish what my learners already know but to also decide on different strategies to employ in my lesson so that I can reach all my learners"*

The participants' assertions were supported by what the researcher observed during classroom observations. It was common practice in all the classes observed that the participants started by establishing the learners' prior knowledge before they could introduce a new topic. This assisted teachers with how to pitch their lessons. What came out clearly is that teachers used assessment to establish learners' prior knowledge, and decide the course of action to take, based on what they would

⁴³ Yan and Boud, "Conceptualising Assessment-as-Learning."

⁴⁴ Jitske A de Vries et al., "The Impact of an Assessment for Learning Teacher Professional Development Program on Students' Metacognition," *School Effectiveness and School Improvement* 34, no. 1 (2023): 109–29.

⁴⁵ Yan and Boud, Conceptualising Assessment-as-Learning

have established, which included using differentiated teaching strategies to suit the diversity in their classrooms.

It is used to engineer meaningful class discussion

Meaningful assessment is, not only limited to pen-and-paper activities and tests but also makes use of oral questioning pitched at different cognitive levels.⁴⁶ Oral questioning ignites discussions that allow the teacher and learners to engage in meaningful class discussions. Through these discussions, not only are teachers able to guide the learners towards acquiring new knowledge, but also to provide an opportunity for learners to help each other and learn from each other.

From the data gathered through interviews and observations, it was noted that teachers used meaningful assessments to engage their learners in class. In one of the interviews,

Teacher A postulated that: *“I use assessment to ignite class discussions, assessment helps to minimize my dominance in the classroom.”*

In support of the above assertion, Teacher B indicated that: *“It helps me to engage my learners so that they get to understand better”*.

Of the same line of thought was teacher C who said: *“Mmm, teaching and learning is a two-way process, and for me to be able to achieve the learning intentions, I have to involve my learners through activities, oral questions, etc.”*

It was evident from the classroom observations that teachers were deliberate about how they used assessment to stimulate class discussions. The oral questioning was used to probe learners' responses and initiate discussions and debates. It should, however, be stated that the researcher also observed that some of the questions teachers asked did not promote deep and critical thinking. The three participants understood how assessment could be used to ignite meaningful class discussions. Most of the questions asked in the lesson observed paved the way for an interactive classroom environment.

It provides learners and teachers with feedback

When used properly and meaningfully, the assessment provides quality feedback to learners about their progress, which Economics learners can use to close the gap between the actual level of the learners and where they are expected to be.⁴⁷ Feedback is more effective if it is provided immediately, and is related to learning goals. Moreover, feedback can be obtained through written, oral, demonstrations, self and group (peer) assessments.⁴⁸ The purpose of feedback can be summed up as that of trying to mediate between the subject material and the learner.

The participants believed that assessment can be used to provide information to both the teacher and the learner on the learning progress.

Teacher B had this to say: *“The class activities, homework, and informal tests I give to my learners give me an idea of where my learners are in terms of their learning.”*

Similarly, Teacher A concurred with Teacher B, but went further to indicate that assessment provided feedback to all the education stakeholders. He said: *“Meaningful assessment provides the*

⁴⁶ Christ et al., “Learning Processes and Their Mediating Role between Teaching Quality and Student Achievement: A Systematic Review.”

⁴⁷ Khechane, Makara, and Rambuda, “Primary Mathematics Teachers' Assessment Practices in the Context of the Integrated Primary Curriculum in Lesotho.”

⁴⁸ de Vries et al., “The Impact of an Assessment for Learning Teacher Professional Development Program on Students' Metacognition.”

department of education, teachers, parents, and learners with information on how well or bad learners are doing in their school work.”

For Teacher C, feedback was important to teachers and learners more than any other stakeholder. Teacher C said: *“Feedback is important to learners as they get to know where they are in terms of their learning, and also to the teacher since I will be able to evaluate the effectiveness of my teaching.”*

The data obtained from the interviews was backed up by what the researcher obtained through classroom observations. Teachers used the feedback they obtained during the lesson to either emphasize a concept that learners were finding abstract or to adjust their teaching strategies.

From the data gathered, it is clear that teachers were aware of the role of feedback in their daily teaching. They appreciated that feedback was part of meaningful assessment, and played a great role in mediating Economics curriculum implementation.

Theme 2: Meaningful assessment practices used by teachers in mediating Economics curriculum implementation.

Learner assessment is an integral part of teaching. Teachers play a pivotal role in this process. For this reason, their knowledge and competencies in assessments are crucial.⁴⁹ Teachers are the pivots for meaningful learning. Based on this, it is vital to understand teachers’ practices, especially how they use assessment to mediate Economics curriculum implementation.

The focus is on teachers’ practices with respect to meaningful assessment. The practices are divided into teacher-focused and learner-focused meaningful assessment practices.

Teacher-focused meaningful assessment practices

The focus of this theme is meaningful assessment practices that teachers used the most in the teaching and learning of Economics

Pre-assessment and sharing of learning intentions and success criteria

Assessment can occur before learning (diagnostic) so that teachers can ascertain what learners already know.⁵⁰ This helps teachers to decide on the strategies to employ based on the findings of their pre-assessment. Besides establishing learners’ prior knowledge, it is also important to share the learning intentions and success criteria with the learners. Learners need to know what is expected of them and how they would be assessed.⁵¹ This motivates them as they see the link between their learning and how they will be assessed. Without sharing clear learning intentions and success criteria with learners, learning might be ineffective as learners will not have a clearer picture of what they are expected to know and how they will be assessed.

The data drawn from interviews and observation of lessons revealed that teachers first established learners’ prior knowledge on a given topic before introducing new knowledge. The participants mentioned that it was critical to first establish what learners could do and then build on their prior knowledge and skills. True to their assertion on the pre-interviews, the researcher witnessed, in the lesson observations, teachers starting their lessons by establishing learners’ prior knowledge. For instance, Teacher A’s lesson started in the following manner: *“Today we want to look at Business*

⁴⁹ Durga and Kumar, “Formative and Summative Assessment for Learning: A Review.”

⁵⁰ Rebecca Walker, Rhonda Oliver, and Ross Mackenzie, “Group Differences in Secondary School Students’ Perceptions of Feedback,” *Issues in Educational Research* 31, no. 1 (2021): 309–26.

⁵¹ de Vries et al., “The Impact of an Assessment for Learning Teacher Professional Development Program on Students’ Metacognition.”

cycles. Let us remind each other about the Business cycles which you did in Grade 10. What are Business cycles?"

In a similar fashion, Teacher B started his lesson by saying:

"You did the circular flow diagram in grade 10, can someone come and draw the circular flow diagram of an open economy on the chalkboard."

The teacher's practices confirm the principles of assessment, where it is vital to first establish where learners are so that the teacher is informed on how to help learners to achieve the intended outcomes.

As the researchers were doing classroom observations, they discovered that learning intentions were conveyed to the learners at the beginning of the lesson by Teachers A and B. Teacher A actually wrote the learning intentions on the chalkboard (Figure 1).

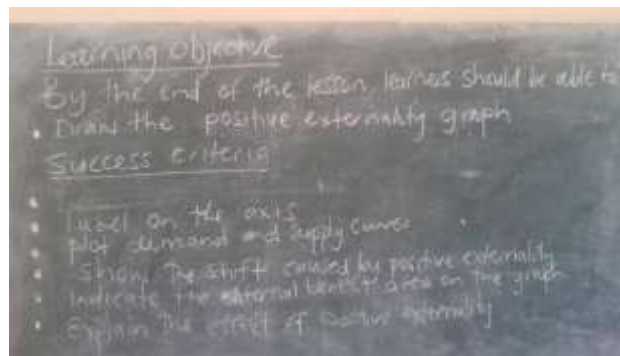


Figure 1: Learning Intention in Teacher A's Class

This made it clear to the learners what they were expected to learn, and the practice conforms to what the participants had said in the pre-interview as indicated by teacher B: *"Before I start a lesson, I make it a point that I share with my learners what they are going to learn."* Similarly, Teacher A added that: *"It is important to share the learning intentions with the learners so that they are aware of what they are the expected to be able to do after at the end of the lesson"*

However, that was not the case with Teacher C, where learning intentions were not communicated to the learners. After establishing the learners' prior knowledge, the teacher then went ahead to introduce the new topic.

Engineering meaningful discussions, tasks, and activities to ascertain learners' learning

Questioning can be used as a strategy to initiate effective classroom discussions and to involve learners in activities that elicit evidence of learners' understanding.⁵² If used properly, questioning allows teachers to ascertain learners' current knowledge and build on new knowledge.⁵³ Thus, questioning gives teachers an opportunity to diagnose learners' understanding and to direct them toward developing the intended knowledge and skills. Well-structured and scaffolded questions should prompt responses that range from simple recall of information to more abstract processes, such as application and synthesis.

⁵² Dylan Wiliam and University of London. Institute of Education, "Assessment for Learning: Why, What and How?," 2009.

⁵³ Stefan Hrastinski et al., "Identifying and Exploring the Effects of Different Types of Tutor Questions in Individual Online Synchronous Tutoring in Mathematics," *Interactive Learning Environments* 29, no. 3 (April 3, 2021): 510–22, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10494820.2019.1583674>.

During the interviews, teachers also posited that they used questioning during instruction to ascertain how learners were grasping new knowledge and to engage learners in class discussions.

The participants had this to say:

“I make use of question and answer to ascertain whether my learners are grasping the intended knowledge and skills.” (Teacher B)

“I ask questions, give short activities and ask my learners to do calculations or draw graphs as I teach to make sure they are following the lesson” (Teacher C)

Teacher A further added that: *“Asking questions allows learners to be involved in the lesson and assists them in understanding the lesson better.”*

In agreement with Teacher A, Teacher B further added : *“Through questioning, I am able to create an opportunity for my learners to develop critical thinking skills as I vary the level of difficulty of my questions.”*

What came out strongly from the interviews and observations is that teachers purposefully asked questions to engage learners. For Teacher A, questions helped to get an understanding of how learners were grasping the new concepts. Teacher C went further to administer activities besides the oral questions in an effort to engage learners in her lesson. Teacher B perceived questioning during the lesson as a strategy to ensure that learners were actively involved in the learning process and a tool to be used to develop complex skills like critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Feedback

Effective feedback possesses the power to influence learner involvement, learning, and academic achievement.⁵⁴ Feedback informs teachers and learners about the knowledge obtained and the knowledge gaps that may exist.⁵⁵ Feedback can be oral, written, or computer generated, amongst other mechanisms,⁵⁶ and can come from the teacher, peers, or self.⁵⁷ It gives an indication of whether the set goals have been achieved or not. Effective feedback tends to be associated with improved motivation and learner academic performance, as it does, not only inform learners where they are currently but also suggests the next steps learners should take in their learning.⁵⁸ Conversely, if feedback is insufficient, poorly explained, and badly distributed; it might actually negatively affect teaching and learning.⁵⁹ The timing and environment in which feedback is provided also determine how learners will receive and use the feedback to enhance their learning.⁶⁰

Oral and Written Feedback

Teachers indicated that they provided immediate feedback on the learners' work, whether it was oral questions or written work. It was clear from lesson observations that teachers gave immediate feedback

⁵⁴ Walker, Oliver, and Mackenzie, “Group Differences in Secondary School Students’ Perceptions of Feedback.”

⁵⁵ Khechane, Makara, and Rambuda, “Primary Mathematics Teachers’ Assessment Practices in the Context of the Integrated Primary Curriculum in Lesotho.”

⁵⁶ Kathryn Haughney, Shawnee Wakeman, and Laura Hart, “Quality of Feedback in Higher Education: A Review of Literature,” *Education Sciences* 10, no. 3 (March 5, 2020): 60, <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci10030060>.

⁵⁷ Melissa M. Patchan and Christian D. Schunn, “Understanding the Benefits of Providing Peer Feedback: How Students Respond to Peers’ Texts of Varying Quality,” *Instructional Science* 43, no. 5 (September 30, 2015): 591–614, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11251-015-9353-x>.

⁵⁸ Granberg, Palm, and Palmberg, “A Case Study of a Formative Assessment Practice and the Effects on Students’ Self-Regulated Learning.”

⁵⁹ David Carless, “From Teacher Transmission of Information to Student Feedback Literacy: Activating the Learner Role in Feedback Processes,” *Active Learning in Higher Education* 23, no. 2 (July 28, 2022): 143–53, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1469787420945845>.

⁶⁰ Walker, Oliver, and Mackenzie, “Group Differences in Secondary School Students’ Perceptions of Feedback.”

to the learners on oral questions and written classwork. Teacher B had this to say: “I walk around checking as my learners are busy with a task. This gives me an opportunity to clarify grey areas whilst learners are busy with the activity.” His assertion was corroborated by Teacher C: “*I don’t wait to give feedback at the end when we are marking even if it is written work, I provide them with feedback as they are in the process of writing the task.*”

Lesson observations confirmed the teachers’ assertions as the researcher observed teachers moving around checking learners’ work and engaging the learners experiencing challenges. The participants’ practice of providing immediate feedback was effective as learners were able to modify their thinking based on the guidance they got from their teachers. This feedback also came while the grey areas were still fresh in the learners’ minds.

Feedback on Learners’ Incorrect Responses

It was interesting to notice how teachers were using feedback to support learners and correct their misconceptions. Both Teachers A and B posited that learners’ responses were very important as they indicated the learners’ knowledge and knowledge gaps.

“Incorrect responses help me in determining the learners’ misconceptions” (Teacher A)

“When learners give me wrong answers on the content we have done, it means there are challenges on that topic and I have to teach it again.” (Teacher B)

Wrong answers provided teachers with information on the learners’ misunderstanding. It also helped teachers to have a better insight into the learners’ level of understanding, and how they could adapt their teaching based on the learners’ misconceptions and level of understanding. This was evident from Teacher C’s assertion: “*I usually think of different strategies of explaining that section in order to assist my learners to comprehend the concepts.*”

During the classroom observations, the researcher realized that teachers used learners’ errors to ascertain the learner’s level of understanding, as well as to evaluate their teaching practices. They also used it for remediation as the teachers focused more on the learners who got the responses wrong. The researcher also noticed that teachers encouraged learners to respond to questions even if they were not sure about their responses, and the teachers insisted on learners giving reasons for their responses

When the researcher probed participants in the post-interview on why they were encouraging learners to respond even if the learners seemed unsure of their responses as well as asking learners to explain their reasoning, Teacher A noted that: “*As learners give reasons for their answers, those who got wrong answers get to see their mistakes.*” This was corroborated by Teacher C who went further to state that: “*Asking learners to explain their responses gives room for discussion as learners try to explain their reasoning.*” It was interesting to discover that teachers viewed assessment and learners’ incorrect responses as an opportunity to learn. Teacher B posited that: “*As a teacher, I also learn something from learners’ wrong answers and get to think how best I can deliver the content to avoid such misconceptions.*” The teachers’ practices were in line with the dictates of meaningful assessment, where assessment is used as part of the instruction and not as an isolated activity that takes place at the end of the term. Teachers also acknowledged gaining useful information through assessment practices.

Learner-Focused Meaningful Assessment Practices

In the absence of knowledge on how to assess and regulate their own learning, learners cannot be their own agents, with the capacity of making decisions about how they can improve their learning.⁶¹ On

⁶¹ Brown, “Is Assessment for Learning Really Assessment?”

the contrary, when teachers partner with their learners to use evidence of learning to make continual adjustments to improve learning, the adjustments are most likely to be effective.

The significance of peer and self-assessment was raised by teachers during the post-interview. Teacher A, for instance, stated that: *“It is good to see that learners were using success criteria steps to evaluate their peers’ work.”* The importance of peer assessment was shared by Teacher C when she said: *“With peer assessment, the responsibility of assessment does not rely only on the teacher, learners are able to assess each other and help to clarify grey areas.”*

Classroom observation revealed that learners were involved in their learning and were motivated as the owners of their learning. They also acted as resources for one another. The most interesting observation was that learners worked in groups, correcting each other where they had failed to get the correct responses. (see Figure 2)



Figure 2: Peer assessment

It was striking to note that learners were able to self-assess using the success criteria as a benchmark. In the observation of Teacher A’s class, learners were given an activity to calculate the multiplier from a given example. As she was busy, she checked on the handouts with the success criteria they had been given and said, *“Heee eee maan”* and erased her calculations and started afresh. Through the success criteria provided, the learner realized that she had skipped one stage in the calculation of the multiplier. When the researchers probed the teacher on whether she had noticed that learners could correct their mistakes based on the success criteria, he stated: *“It is good to notice that most of my learners are able to self-assess based on the success criteria.”*

In agreement with Teacher A was Teacher B who said: *“Learners can compare their answers with the criteria and sometimes do not need me as a teacher to tell them whether their work is correct or incorrect.”*

The data gathered showed that teachers were using both peer assessment and self-assessment effectively in their classrooms. Teachers’ practices with these forms of assessment showed that they were aware of the pivotal role that self and peer assessment played in mediating Economics curriculum implementation.

DISCUSSION

The teachers in this study exhibited a fair understanding of the role of meaningful assessment in the mediation of Economics curriculum implementation. Their practices were also in line with what is documented in literature as good practices with regard to meaningful assessment.

Literature shows that meaningful assessment guides and informs teachers on their practice.⁶² The findings of this study concur with what is documented in the literature, that assessment provides valuable information for teachers to adopt and adjust their practices to meet the varying needs of their learners. The participants noted that they used assessment as an instrument to determine what course of action to take with regard to their teaching practice. Assessment acted as a mediating agent that enabled learners to comprehend concepts that seemed abstract to them. Just as Yan and Boud observe, the study revealed that the teachers' understanding of assessment was that it, not being an end in itself, but rather a process embedded in their daily teaching practice.⁶³ A meaningful assessment was seen as a guide on what direction teachers should take so that Economics concepts can be comprehensible to the learners.

Christ et al. report that engineering class discussions were pivotal in mediating between concepts and learners.⁶⁴ The scholars posit that when learners are meaningfully engaged in question-and-answer sessions in class, they are able to think deeply and help each other to comprehend concepts. This study confirms the findings of the above scholars, as teachers in this study revealed that assessment helped them to engage their learners. It was also evident during interviews that teachers were alive of the fact that class discussions had to be intentionally initiated to aid learners' learning. Just as Ying states, questioning ignites class discussions, which can enhance deeper understanding.⁶⁵ Teachers in the study intentionally used questioning to facilitate rich class discussions. Some of the types of questions that teachers asked were not of high cognitive demand and did not help much to ignite meaningful class discussions

Teachers had a clear understanding of what feedback was and clearly acknowledged how critical it was in helping learners to comprehend Economics concepts. The findings reflected the thinking of Khechane that feedback provided valuable information on where learners were with regard to their learning.⁶⁶ Teachers would then use it to decide on what steps to take to fulfil their intention of helping learners to master the content matter and skills in the Economics curriculum. The information obtained from the feedback allowed teachers to adjust their teaching in order to match the learners' needs. Teachers used learners' incorrect responses to guide them to get a better understanding of the subject matter. This practice was in agreement with what is postulated by Granberg et al. when they note that feedback is used to guide learners from where they are to where they are supposed to go in terms of their learning.⁶⁷

The study also revealed evidence to suggest that teachers attempted to incorporate elements of formative assessment through meaningful assessment practices with regard to learner involvement, in line with what is documented in the literature. Teachers allowed learners to be assessed by their peers as well as to assess themselves. This practice resonates with Walker et al.'s observation that learners appreciate a learning environment where they are actively involved and are supported by the teacher and their peers.⁶⁸ The teachers understood and showed appreciation for meaningful assessment in their

⁶² Durga and Kumar, "Formative and Summative Assessment for Learning: A Review."

⁶³ Yan and Boud, "Conceptualising Assessment-as-Learning."

⁶⁴ Christ et al., "Learning Processes and Their Mediating Role between Teaching Quality and Student Achievement: A Systematic Review."

⁶⁵ Jonathan Ying, "The Importance of the Discussion Method in the Undergraduate Business Classroom," *Humanistic Management Journal* 5, no. 2 (2020): 251–78.

⁶⁶ Khechane, Makara, and Rambuda, "Primary Mathematics Teachers' Assessment Practices in the Context of the Integrated Primary Curriculum in Lesotho."

⁶⁷ Granberg, Palm, and Palmberg, "A Case Study of a Formative Assessment Practice and the Effects on Students' Self-Regulated Learning."

⁶⁸ Walker, Oliver, and Mackenzie, "Group Differences in Secondary School Students' Perceptions of Feedback."

daily classroom practices. Some learners self-corrected based on the success criteria without the help of the teacher. The provision of success criteria played a significant role in assisting learners to reflect. A good example is when a learner said “*Hee eee maan*” upon reading the success criteria and erased their wrong answer and corrected it. This shows that learners could use the success criteria given before to evaluate their work.

SUMMARY

Meaningful assessment enables learners to understand the abstract concepts embedded in the Economics curriculum. When properly used, assessment has the power to provide feedback to both the teacher and the learner. Teachers are able to evaluate and modify their teaching practices based on the assessment feedback. Learners too will know how they are doing and which areas they need to focus more on. The findings of this study reveal that Economics teachers in the selected schools, to a certain extent, are using assessment meaningfully to enhance Economics curriculum implementation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings and discussion of this study, it is recommended that assessment should be used effectively since it will enhance learners’ understanding of abstract concepts. In addition, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) should conduct more workshops, where teachers are constantly empowered to effectively use meaningful assessment in their daily practices especially through ICT as it will lessen the burden of teachers of designing and marking these formative assessments.

CONCLUSION

The study explored how Northern Cape teachers were mediating Economics curriculum implementation through meaningful assessment. The study revealed that Economics teachers understood the role of meaningful assessment in mediating Economics curriculum implementation. This understanding was reflected in some of the teachers’ practices with regard to assessment. The focus of the study was limited to teachers’ understanding of the role of meaningful assessment and the teachers’ meaningful assessment practices in mediating Economics curriculum implementation in a semi-rural context. The study focused on large classes and curriculum-related factors with respect to teachers’ understandings and practices in respect of meaningful assessment. Other contextual factors could not be adequately probed in this study. Future research should pay more attention to some elements that were not explored in the current study, such as the influence of; the lack of resources, language, and home environment of learners, amongst other factors.

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