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Factors influencing learners' academic performance in economics at Ilembe District

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Abstract

Economics is a vital subject within the South African curriculum, aimed at equipping learners with critical thinking skills and a deeper understanding of economic systems and financial decision-making. However, learner performance in Economics, particularly in Grade 12, remains inconsistent and often poor. This study explores the factors influencing learners' academic performance in Economics within the Mandeni Circuit of the iLembe District in South Africa. The qualitative method of research was employed, primarily through one-on-one interviews and group discussions with teachers from eight schools in order to provide deep insights into various factors that influence learners' performance. Findings such as curriculum alignment and quality, accessibility to education, the impact of educational policies, technological integration, time management in curriculum delivery, and socio-economic challenges were revealed as factors contributing to the decline in Grade-12 Economics performance. The study recommends the stakeholders to address socio-economic barriers, improve access to teaching and learning resources, enhance learner engagement and support as well as review the curriculum to allow for deeper conceptual understanding of the subject.

Keywords: Academic, Curriculum, Economics, Factors, Findings, Grade-12, Performance.

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1. Introduction

Economics is a vital subject within the South African curriculum, aimed at equipping learners with critical thinking skills and a deeper understanding of economic systems and financial decision-making. However, the continuous decline in the pass rate of Economics subject in Grade 12 within secondary schools in the Mandeni circuit, under the iLembe District, remains a significant concern for educational stakeholders. Despite efforts by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) to provide resources and support to both teachers and learners, the issue persists. According to the 2021 School Subject

Report, the pass rate for Economics has shown a downward trend over three consecutive years (2019, 2020, and 2021), with iLembe District ranking poorly compared to other districts in KwaZulu-Natal. This declining performance highlighted the need for targeted interventions to address the factors impacting learners' academic performance in Economics. Presumably, it is suspected that inadequacies in school provisioning may equally be a contributing factor to learners' poor academic performance in Economics at Grade 12.

Boyd, et al. [1] stated that the most important educational resource is a teacher. According to Sellah, et al. [2] the teacher's manner of teaching economics produces problems in the classroom. When it comes to teaching economics in secondary schools, it was found that government ignores several important environmental issues. Thaba-Nkadimene [3] points out that lack of textbooks, strategic learning and teaching materials are contributing factor to poor performance of learners. This study is in line with Lekgothoane and Thaba-Nkadimene [4] study which discovered that lack of educational technologies and internet for teachers and learners in public schools are contributing factors too. Visser, et al. [5] alluded that there were no new skills in schools and that they lacked technology that could assist them acquire knowledge. Nevertheless, these reports are contradictory because the Department of Basic Education in South Africa makes reasonable attempts to improve Grade 12 results by introducing interventions aimed at assisting learners.

According to Goldhaber and Ronfeldt [6] the preparedness of the teacher was found to be strongly related to the ability of the learner to acquire basic concepts and skills. Findings reveal that the teacher's lack of preparedness is highlighted as a factor leading to poor grasping of information by the learners. This can also be tested through the class activities, as Arends, et al. [7] referred to as the association between the achievements of the learners and the exercises chosen by their tutors in the classroom. Thus, teachers should go to class prepared for the lesson as a process of overcoming a particular subject for learners better understanding. The findings contrast those of Githaiga [8] study which reveals that most teachers are prepared well enough to teach the subject.

Moreover, the study by Ajayi and Osalusi [9] emphasize that parents should play significant roles in the education of their children and wards, notwithstanding the fact that they pay school fees and other levies, buy textbooks, uniforms and other materials required by their children and wards. In addition to this, they are expected to supervise their children's academic works and give them good moral training. They are also expected to make periodic visits to schools to see how their children and wards are behaving to take corrective measures and action as needed. However, failure of parents to play these roles may have a negative impact on learners' academic performance, as Obioma and Ijeoma [10] assert that lack of parental encouragement of learners largely affects learners' performance. Additionally, there are some external factors pointing to school and family learning environments, including instructors, teammates, pedagogical strategies, family preferences, and learning subjects [11]. According to Zhao [12] pedagogical activities in and outside the classroom influence the effects of peer pressure. Kuku [13] discovered and added that the cause of poor academic performance among learners is poor study habit. Hence the need to embark on this study to further explore gaps related to the factors affecting Grade 12 learners' performance in Economics subject, as highlighted previously.

2. Literature Review

Academic performance was described by Ganail and Ashral [14] as the capacity to acquire knowledge or the level of proficiency in academic task, which is typically assessed by standardized examinations and expressed in grades or units based on learners' performance. Continuous evaluation and the results of examination are used as academic performance indicators. Class exercises, practice examination and external examinations are additional metrics used to gauge academic performance. To evaluate learners' academic performance, different combinations of these metrics are frequently utilized, depending on the educational level [15]. Economics is a branch of social sciences that examines how to measure, analyse, and select from among finite resources that are in competition with one another [16]. The objectives of teaching the subject include providing learners with the necessary knowledge about the various reforms, changes, and adjustments in the country's economic system. It also includes inculcating the interest and the needed foundation in the learners to encourage them to become professionally qualified economists and further to comprehend the material to do well on academic exams in Economics to achieve the specified goals.

Throughout history, educators, academics, and politicians have closely examined students' academic performance to better understand and improve the elements that lead to good learning outcomes. The numerous elements that affect learners' academic performance are reviewed, along with how they have changed over time and how theoretical frameworks have influenced our understanding. Academics, pondered the nature of learning and the circumstances that promote intellectual progress in ancient societies like Greece and Rome just like Aristotle and Plato. A more methodical approach to education did, however, emerge throughout the renaissance, highlighting the significance of individual aptitude and the role of teachers in influencing learner academic performance. Further, the Industrial Revolution had a tremendous impact on how education institutions developed in the 18th and 19th centuries, changing how schools were set up. During this time, the popularity of standardized testing showed a move towards measures of academic competency that could be measured. Psychological theories also came into being during this time, and pioneers like Dewey, et al. [17] and Skinner [18] helped to advance our knowledge of how psychological and environmental factors affect learning.

However, numerous elements influence the intricate and multidimensional process of education. One of the most important measures of how well educational institutions are working is the academic achievement of students [19]. The need to explore different factors influencing academic performance to improve educational outcomes is increasingly being realized by educators and researchers. This study examines the significance of these factors and how they impact learners' academic achievement. Tatiana, et al. [20] posit that the educational landscape is full of variables that affect students' performance, ranging from learning styles, technology integration and psychological factors to socio-economic influences.

2.1. Historical Background of Factors Influencing Academic Performance of Learners

The academic success of learners is influenced by several factors, including their financial backgrounds, the educational attainment of their parents, the number of siblings they have, and their role models. Gobena [21] in a study conducted on how socio-economic factors affect the family towards pupils' academic performance revealed that the family's educational attainment accounted for about 40.96% of their resources towards academic achievement. Other factors are discussed below.

2.1.1. Socio-Economic Factors

Researchers assert that learners from poor or socially vulnerable families are more likely to have low academic performance than learners from more privileged household. Nevertheless, families can play a protective role against negative contextual influences Vautero, et al. [22]. Gwabeni and Seleke [23] conducted a study on the impact of socio-economic status of parents on academic performance of learners in an economics classroom, Chris Hani East District, South Africa. The findings from the study revealed that learners' academic performance is strongly influenced by the socio-economic status of their parents, with key factors being financial support, access to resources, and parental involvement contributing positively to their success. However, Bunting, et al. [24] posit that there is a relationship between positive parental perceptions of school climate and greater parental involvement in school. This means that when parents have more positive view of the school climate, they tend to be more involved in the school-related activities. It shows how favourably parents view the school's atmosphere in terms of safety, communication, relationships, respect and support. On the other hand, greater parental involvement in school refers to how actively parents participate in their children's education, such as attending meetings, volunteering, communicating with teachers, and helping with homework. This is in line with a similar study conducted by Karue and Amukowa [25] which revealed that factors contributing to poor performance of learners are home environment, family background, as well as minimal parental involvement in their children's education.

2.1.2. Family and Home Environment

Burger and Naudé [26] posit that family have significant influence on learner's academic progress. Silva, et al. [27] added that parental education, the quality of parental relationships, and parental support are also seen to have impact on learner's academic performance. In South Africa, most students entering the higher education institutions are from families with lower socioeconomic backgrounds which receive less support from family as a result of that and this makes students get disengaged from their studies and lack motivation [26]. Other negative influence such as diseases, death or a family breakup poses enough threat to the family that may negatively affect learner's wellbeing and academic performance [27].

Fundamentally, home environment is a vital component or element in learners' learning achievement. That is to say that the home environment has a great influence on the academic achievement of learners. Obeta [28] revealed in his study that there are some children who do not perform well because of poor home environments which directly influence their learning capability. This is crucial according to a study on the impact of home factors on junior high school girls' academic performance in peri-urban areas by Mensah, et al. [29]. The findings from the study revealed that learners are involved in household chores such as fetching water, household income-generating activities, looking after their siblings, the aged and food preparation hence the need for to balance the household responsibilities and their academic pursuits. Further, Muola [30] revealed that achievement of the learners depends on conducive home environment and parental encouragement equally has significant relationship with academic achievement. Ngussa and Gundula [31] found that it is vital for parents to participate in their children's academic life to achieve success. This means that parents must be dedicated to monitoring their children's academic progress while providing all other necessary support.

2.1.3. Parental Education

It can never be over emphasized that parental education is vital and would be helpful in a family, especially towards learners' positive performance achievement. Egunsola [32] asserts that parental educational qualification, economic status and occupation influence learners' learning achievement. Parental educational influence and family background has been suggested to propel or go a long way in channelling the child to what s/he becomes tomorrow. The fact remains that the child's education starts from the homestead or family. It makes the child to cling to s/he family and to participate actively in the affairs of the family and community. Obeta [28] alludes that parents should make sure that their children, according to their age, aptitude, and ability, receive good education. In other words, parents must ensure that children do attend school regularly and parents must work hand in hand with their teachers to better for better learning outcomes. Nonetheless, Olaifa, et al. [33] posits that Parents Teachers' Association (PTA) is an important and intervention strategy that has improved the quality and standard of education in Nigeria

Invariably, self-confidence in studying is lacking in rural school learners due to poor family background or structure epitomized by single parenting, poor parent support and deprived economic status, which gives rise to poor academic achievement by learners. Mtshali, et al. [34] posit that academic achievement is not only about learners' behaviour and their perceptions of learning, but also about school management and the involvement of parents in school matters. Ajayi and Osalusi [35] alluded to the fact that parents play significant roles in the education of their children and wards apart from paying school fees, buying textbooks, uniforms and other levies for their children and wards. Additionally, they are expected to supervise their children's academic works and give them good moral training and upbringing.

2.1.4. Parental Involvement

Parents should be seen to be involved practically in the education of their children. Parents are expected to make periodic visits to schools to see how their children and wards are behaving to take corrective action as needed. However, failure to play these roles may have a negative impact on learners' academic performance [36]. As Obioma and Ijeoma [10] alluded that lack of parental encouragement for learners largely affects learners' performance. This includes lack of parental involvement in learners' activities, poor motivation and supervision which may lead to poor learners' throughput. The authors further indicated that parents' lack of encouragement has significant impact on their children's performance and the parents' absence from their children's supervision of classwork/activities has a significant impact. Low motivation and inadequate monitoring of the learners may be a factor to failure rate of learners in exams. This implies that parents must be greatly involved and continue playing significant roles in the learners' positive performance achievement.

Moreover, it has been revealed that learners' academic achievement is longitudinally influenced by their parents' involvement or participation [37] and learners who update their parents about their school activities receive support and encouragement, which improves their academic performance [38]. Furthermore, learners value their studies more when they are aware of the importance and their parents support for valued education [39]. It is not uncommon to say that learners whom their parents get involved in their education achieve more than the learners who their parents do not involve themselves with their children's education.

2.2. Factors Impacting on the Academic Performance of Learners

The academic performance of learners is impacted by series of factors that can be categorized into several broad areas. Understanding these factors can provide insights into improving educational outcomes and tailoring interventions to meet specific needs. Here are some of the key factors that impact on academic performance of learners.

2.2.1. Poverty

Poverty has been referred to be one of the main obstacles and problem to academic success, especially in African continent. This is due to factors like underfunded schools, food insecurity, unstable housing, and lack of resources such as books and uniforms, all of which create a high-stress environment that hinders a child's cognitive and emotional development. Some studies have suggested that learners in poverty situation are more likely to do worse academically and below acceptable grade level, which have negative impact on their academic performance. Greever [40] suggests that other factors that affect learners' performance include effort, hope-and-growth mindset, cognition, relationships, health and nutrition, vocabulary and distress. Learners who live in poverty are more likely to consume food that has little to no nutritional value which affects cognitive functioning and negatively impact positive academic performance.

However, Jensen [41] stated that depressed symptoms are associated with learners' failure to achieve academically due to low socioeconomic level. Significant financial problems are being faced by those who live in the conditions of poverty and backwardness. Living with very low-income precipitates poverty and inability to settle living expenses, such as food and nutrition, health care services and other necessities of life, including educational and school needs. Poverty has been one major problem that impact academic success of learners. Consequently, they may not be able to raise their grades because they have been severely impacted by the lack of necessary resources to advance their studies. Hence, struggle ensues academically and otherwise by learners.

2.2.2. Lack of Interest in Academics

Studying seem uninteresting when there is nothing drawing you closer to academics. Ismail, et al. [42] suggest that learners' motivation level increases when they participate actively and consistently in the classroom. This is because motivation has a significant impact on learners' academic achievement and enables them to feel contented with their academic activities and academic success. And when learners become academically uninterested, the academics become unenthusiastic to them, and they start finding learning unenjoyable and stop to engage in schoolwork. Then, the worst-case scenario sets-in which may lead to learners' school dropout. Further, child labour contributes to lack of interest in academics of learners. This happens where child labour is encouraged by the parents and the society which deprives the learners from going to school. It is a fundamental right of every child of school age to be in school and being subjected to child labour.

Another factor that leads to learners' lack of interest in studying is inadequate learning conditions and resources. If the conditions are not conducive enough for learning and resources are limited, achieving positive academic performance will be difficult therefore, reducing the chances of academic interest of learners. Inadequate resources, particularly shortages of essential learning materials such as books and functional laboratories create poor learning conditions and can minimize interest of learners in academics. Furthermore, ineffective teaching methods equally diminishes interest for studying. It implies where the instructor is failing to convey what is being taught to learners in an understandably manner without stress. This includes using a language that learners understand and communicate with and using other forms of teaching to properly convey the information intended to the learners. However, unqualified and demotivated teachers may be an issue because some teachers lack the necessary qualifications, leading to poor teaching quality, learners' low morale and engagement. Learners can become bored with the learning process if the teacher and teaching methods are uninspiring and lacks engagement.

2.2.3. Bullying

It is suggested that learners who perform poorly in class and lack self-confidence choose bullying as a coping strategy [43]. Bullying may include verbal abuse, physical abuse, sexual harassment and so on. Then, learners who are experiencing

bullying or being bullied often find it difficult to concentrate in class due to feelings of anxiety, fear, or depression [44]. This reduces concentration and can lead to less engagement in learning activities, consequently affecting academic positive outcomes. Several studies have indicated a negative correlation between bullying victimization and academic achievement. For instance, Nansel, et al. [45] reveals in a study that learners who reported being bullied experienced lower scores in academic achievement compared to their non-bullied peers. It has equally been reported that bullying can cause learners to skip class to get away from their bully, which can result in repeated absence in class or truancy.

2.2.4. Conflicts and Disputes

There are countless situations in which families are to be blamed for learners' poor academic performance. There have been instances of families who frequently had arguments and confrontations. Conflicts and disagreements are viewed as significant roadblocks on the path of academic success. That notwithstanding, parents seek out the finest opportunities for their kids, ensuring that they receive good education, and provide them with all the necessities and chances for a happy life. However, research has shown that parents with low levels of education, lower level of employment, and living in underdeveloped areas are more likely to experience conflicts and disputes with one another, which discourages their kids from pursuing their academics for positive performance achievement. In some cases, learners from such families where conflicts and disputes are being experienced struggle with mental health which infringe on their performance ability. Poor mental health can significantly affect a learner's motivation and ability to engage with s/he studies. Similarly, the presence of conflicts and disputes in the homestead may result in parents not supporting the learners adequately. When home becomes toxic, parents may start to exhibit lack of meaningful academic support and feedback on learners' progress, then, academic dropping-out may ensue.

2.2.5. Fear of Examination

Fear of examination also referred as test anxiety, can significantly impact academic performance of learners via interfering with concentration, memory and cognitive functions. This form of stress may lead to physical and emotional signs like headaches, fatigue, anxiety, and depression, producing a vicious cycle where poor performance increases anxiety, further hindering learning and leading to negative performance achievement. According to Aremu and Sokan [46] the main causes of learners' poor academic performance are learners' poor study habits, issues with psychological adjustment, lack of interest in the curriculum, low memory retention, affiliation with unhelpful peers, lack of accomplishment motivation and emotional issues. According to Mohan and Athira [47] another factor that contributes to learners' fear of examination is procrastination, which has to do with time management issues. Visser, et al. [5] assert that procrastination is a complex behaviour that involves cognitive and emotional elements, as well as evaluation of one's ability.

Nonetheless, examination distress and anxiety springs from learners' mindsets that they will not pass the examination or have better results to compare with other learners which includes friends and siblings. The examination fear may provoke the brain's fight-or-flight response, which inhibits higher-level cognitive functions necessary for complex problem-solving and deep learning. Examination distress is very common in every level of study, but the essential thing is that an individual learns how to manage it and get over it for academic success. Examination distress is an emotional state that interferes with focus, memory, attention, and thought, therefore, when a learner keeps performing below expectation, s/he will be worried that continued poor performance would negatively impact the examination result.

3. Research Methodology

Interpretivist philosophy was adopted, and qualitative research methodology was employed for the study. The interpretivist paradigm views the world through the perceptions and experiences of the study participants. Qualitative data was collected via interviews to capture different perspectives of the subject matter from the study participants who have their own interpretation of their experiences through teaching and learning of Economics in Grade-12. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the study participants to be interviewed who are the educators that teach Business Studies for semi-structured interviews. The sample size which is eight comprise of one teacher per school offering Economics in Mandeni Circuit. To balance the responses for the study, four teachers were selected from the rural schools while the other four were selected from urban schools. The focus group comprised a sample of all Grade 12 Economics teachers from the Gingindlovu Circuit. The Gingindlovu Circuit was selected because it is next to Mandeni circuit and located in the iLembe District. Focus group and interviews were used to help uncover the root causes of the phenomenon under investigation. Further, thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data collected. The collected data was reviewed numerous times to improve the comprehension of the participants' responses. Study themes were created for the finding's presentations and discussion. Audio-recorded responses were transcribed and coded. The study participants were assigned the codes T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, T7 and T8 to enhance the analysis process.

4. Data Analysis

4.1. Factors Influencing the Teaching of Economics for Grade-12 Learners

The findings from the study revealed that 22% of the participants agreed that the teaching of Economics is influenced by content knowledge, 44% of the participants agreed that school environment influences the teaching of economics while 34% of the participants believe that the factors influencing the teaching of economics for grade-12 is learners-related. Below is the discussion on the issue.

4.1.1. Teachers' Content Knowledge

Content knowledge plays a vital role when teaching Economics especially at grade-12 level, therefore, teachers should have a proper Economics content for the grade-12 learners to achieve positive performance. During the interview, participants indicated different forms of experience that suggest teachers' lack of content knowledge.

4.1.1.1. Novice Teachers

Participants revealed during the interview that negative performance of learners may be due to new teachers who are struggling with teaching the subject, as well as taking control of the classroom ensuring discipline. They find it challenging to deliver the content knowledge. A participant responded.

T1: "This is my first time teaching, let alone teaching grade 12, so I find it very difficult for me to deal with disciplining the learners at the same time I need to deliver content, I spend about 10-15 minutes trying to discipline them before I can actually deliver the lesson"

The findings are in line with Bertram [48] study that revealed inexperienced teachers frequently lack the skills needed to properly control behaviour in the classroom. Learners may find it challenging to concentrate on the delivery of the content, as a result disruptions may emanate to impair the learning environment. Another study Madibana [49] confirms the fact that the emotional health and learning motivation of learners may be impacted by inexperienced teachers' incapacity to provide supportive learning environment. Learners' academic performance is further hampered by a chaotic classroom environment, which frequently causes them to become nervous. Further, another participant alluded to the fact of being a novice on teaching grade-12 responded by saying.

T3: "I have been teaching for quite some time now but it's my very first time teaching 12. So, I am still familiarising myself with grade 12 content. It makes it very difficult for me because my pace is a bit slow if compared to well experienced teachers. I noticed that during our workshop when the subject advisor was asking about how far are we with the scope coverage...I think it will get better with time".

This finding corroborates the report of Adu [50] which reveals that the breadth of teachers' knowledge of economic ideas and concepts is essential. Strong content knowledge is better and able to explain complex economic ideas, which enhances learners' understanding and performance. However, a study carried out by Hendriks and Dunn [51] found that experienced teachers frequently refuse to teach grade-12 because senior management puts pressure on learners to perform. Subject advisor noted that some teachers in underperforming schools use improper approaches that compromise effective learning because they lack a sufficient conceptual understanding of the subject curriculum content.

4.1.2. School Environment

School environment is a critical factor in learners' academic performance with resource availability and class size being key determinants [52]. Sufficient educational resources support effective teaching and learning, while smaller class sizes enable personalized attention and better engagement. An enriched environment promotes improved academic outcomes.

4.1.2.1. Resource Availability

According to the study findings, some participants made mention of resource availability as one of the contributing factors towards learners' academic performance in Economics grade-12. Hence, these participants responded to allude to the fact that resources availability hampers positive performance achievement.

T2: "the thing is most of my learners they don't have the relevant material because even with the books, those books are not enough to cover the rest of the class. Learners share textbooks and when you ask them to open them during the lesson they will tell you they did not bring them since books are heavy and they walk a very long distance. Material that is relevant is Economics notebooks, the school is always out of ink to make copies of the note books....so it's beyond my control".

T4: "I don't have all resources. Lack of modelling instruments we don't have enough textbooks and we are all relying on one textbook, because we do not have a functioning school library. In Economics there is a lot of work that needs research it is hard for learners to research using their phones some of them do not have phones and visiting a public library is also not possible because during weekends grade 1 is supposed to be at school."

The above finding concurs with that of Mkhize, et al. [53] where the authors explained that effective teaching is greatly influenced by having access to teaching resources, such as technology and textbooks. Limited resources and textbook supply delays can impede instructional efforts and hinder learning. According to Siyaya [54] basic resources such as textbooks are prerequisite for the teaching and learning to take place.

4.1.2.2. Classroom Size

The size of classrooms matters a lot in delivering lessons to learners for ease of comprehension and absolute teacher's control of the classroom. One of the study participants asserts that classroom size in term of number of learners, is a very

significant factor hindering academic performance of learners, as overcrowded classrooms limit teachers' ability to provide individualized attention. Large or overcrowded class often lead to increased disruptions and reduced engagement, negatively impacting learning outcomes. The participant responded thus:

T5: *"I have a challenge that I need to treat them as they are all on the same level as I can't divide them according to their performance, there are learners who need a special attention above other learners but its so unfortunate that the class size is too big as a results I do a one size fit all....."*

Then, focus group:

"these learners are a mix of passed and progressed learners, in the actual fact they are not supposed to be treated equal but they are."

The above study results indeed confirmed the findings of a study by Siyaya [54] at iLembe that large class sizes limit individual attention from the teacher, posing a challenge to addressing diverse learner's needs effectively. This often results in lower engagement levels and poorer academic outcomes.

4.1.3. Learner Factors

Some of the participants indicated that there are also factors pertaining to learners other than those that relating to the school environment. They mentioned different factors including the following:

4.1.3.1. Motivation and Engagement

Some participants on our engagement mentioned how motivation and engagement critically and significantly impact learners' academic performance by fostering interest and commitment to studies. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation drive effort and persistence, while active engagement enhances understanding and retention. Together, they create a conducive learning environment that supports improved outcomes. They responded thus.

T7: *"Personally, I think the fact that parents do not involve themselves in their kids work affect their performance negatively. They only come to pick their reports at the end of the term. We don't even hold an open day because that's where their parents can get see their progress and get the reason/s for the poor performance from me as a subject teacher, so even if you call a meeting, they just don't come they will tell you they are working".*

T8: *"Parents do not even want to pay for educational trips, I wrote a letter asking them to fund out trip to King Shaka international airport, where we will go and visit the IDZ, parents did not pay as a result we had to cancel the trip"*

These findings again are in line with Mkhize, et al. [53] that learners' motivation levels have a big impact on how well they do in Economics. Peer support and parental participation are very important factors as examples that might either increase or decrease a learner's interest in the subject.

4.1.3.2. Language Proficiency

Language proficiency is one of the issues raised by the participants during the process of data collection. They expressed how proficiency in language impacts comprehension, expression, and participation, influencing the overall learning process. Existence of challenges towards language proficiency hinders the comprehension of some complex economics concepts, where technical terms are used and essential analytical skills. The participants responded thus, below.

T1: *"my learners struggle because they do not understand the questions and when I analyse questions for them, they then give correct answers, the reason they perform poorly is because they don't understand the question as a result they cant give correct answers and that's very sad".*

T4: *"I strongly believe the reason why my learners perform poorly is the language barrier, I sometimes ask them the question and they will look at me as if I am speaking Greek. I will then have to analyse it for them and then they will be like ..ooohhh we know this thing it just that we did not understand the question".*

Ruegg, et al. [55] alluded to the above findings and assert that it is often difficult for learners with low language mastery or skills, to comprehend while readings and instructions. Learners' academic performance may suffer as a result of comprehension gap since it might cause confusion and make it difficult for them to interact with the study materials, let alone conveying valid meaning or interpretations.

5. Recommendations

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) has the primary responsibility to ensure that schools have adequate facilities are put in place for the learners. Provide other resources and materials for smooth running of schools both in rural and urban areas. No school should be functioning at the detriment of the other or urban at the detriment of rural schools. Basic education is a right to any child that is of school age, therefore, they ought to be in school. Carrying out this responsibility fully and appropriately will be a solid backing for all learners in school and ready to learn and towards mastering a subject better and effectively.

Teachers and school management team should establish focused interventions and strategies to enhance overall academic performance by doing thorough research and in-depth analysis to obtain important insights to resolve any academic challenge. There should be commitment towards understanding the changes in education that is necessary in providing fair and productive learning environment to deal with multitude of issues impacting on learners' positive academic achievement.

6. Conclusion

The findings from this study provide a nuanced understanding of the factors influencing the teaching and learning of Economics in Grade-12. Key factors identified include the teacher's content knowledge, the school environment, and learner-related factors. Content knowledge emerged as a critical determinant, particularly for novice teachers who often struggle with class discipline and delivering complex content effectively. Both newly engaged and experienced teachers teaching Grade-12 for the first time found pacing and content mastery challenging, impacting learners' understanding. The school environment was another major influence, with resource availability and class size being central issues. Inadequate resources, such as outdated textbooks and lack of technological tools, constrained effective teaching. Overcrowded classrooms further diminished personalized attention, hindering engagement and learning outcomes.

Learner-related factors also played a significant role. Motivation and engagement were critical fostering interest and academic commitment. However, parental involvement was notably lacking, with many parents disengaged from their children's education. Language proficiency also emerged as a barrier, with learners struggling to comprehend complex economics concepts and exam questions due to language limitations. Overall, the findings emphasize the need for comprehensive strategies to address these challenges. These include improving teacher content knowledge, enhancing resource provision, reducing class sizes, and fostering greater parental involvement. Addressing these factors could create a more conducive learning environment and significantly improve positive academic performance and outcomes in Economics.

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