

Challenges Facing Implementation of Economics Curriculum: The Experiences of Francis Baard District Teachers

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Abstract High school economics academic achievement has been poor or at best, mediocre in the Frances Baard District and in South Africa at large. This empirical study explores lesson planning, resources and pedagogical content knowledge as the challenges experienced by Frances Baard Economics teachers in their endeavour to implement the Economics curriculum. Curriculum implementation can be defined as how teachers plan and deliver instructions through the use of specified resources provided. Curriculum implementation is reliant on the teacher's ability to plan, choose and use available resources. This study makes use of Mediated Learning Experience (MLE) parameters of intentionality, reciprocity and mediation as a theoretical framework. These parameters act as a guide for how Economics curriculum should be implemented. Anchored in the qualitative phenomenological multiple case study, the study is operationalised by three purposefully selected Economics teachers, with varying levels of qualifications and experiences, from different schools which belong to different quintiles. Document analysis, observations and semi structured interviews were used to gather data after which the data were thematically analysed while member checking was used for validation. Although an effort was made to get a representative sample of schools in the Frances Baard District, the results of this study should be generalised with caution since only three schools formed part of this study. The findings of this exploration reveal

that some Economics teachers encounter challenges with lesson planning, content knowledge, availability and use of resources. In mitigation to these challenges, the study recommends that the Department of Education should periodically organise workshops where teachers are empowered in terms of the Economics curriculum content, and use of various teaching strategies. It is also recommended that the Department of Education provide current and relevant resources and collaborate with different economics stakeholders.

Keywords Economics Education, Curriculum Implementation, Mediated Learning Experience

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, the teaching and learning of Economics has been gaining attention from various stakeholders across the globe, South Africa included. This attention is premised on the fact that the subject is critical to the realisation of the much-needed economic growth and development of nations [1]. It is therefore imperative that the implementation of the Economics curriculum should enable citizens to contribute meaningfully to the economy.

Cabauatana & Dacles [2] postulate that Economics

focuses on how individuals and governments are involved in formulating wealth and eventually using that wealth to improve their standards of living. In agreement with this assertion is [3] who states that Economics is concerned with how individuals, businesses and government use scarce resources in a more efficient and equitable manner in order to satisfy their endless needs and wants. The functioning of world economies demands citizens who are able to properly utilise the continuously depleting scarce resources and are conversant with critical thinking, problem solving and decision-making skills. It is imperative to mention that informed decisions can only be made by someone who is abreast with the operations of the economy and has been equipped with economics knowledge and skills. These knowledge and skills, as [4] opine, resonate with the aim of the Economics curriculum which is to produce citizens who are positive contributors to the growth and development of an economy. Every nation is in need of these qualities to move their economies further and solve the ever-present economic challenges. Now more than ever, economics knowledge and skills are needed to lift the global economies from the affliction of the Covid-19 pandemic which ravaged global economies due to forced lockdowns.

Given the importance of economics knowledge and skills to global economies, there has been a growing interest in Economics curriculum implementation in many countries [1,3,5,6]. This is premised on the pedestal that in order to produce citizens with problem solving, critical thinking and decision-making skills, there is a need for proper and effective Economics curriculum implementation. It is the contention of [7] that effective curriculum implementation can only be realised if teachers are deliberate in their planning, they are experts in their subject area, and there are adequate resources availed. Economics curriculum implementation means putting the prescribed economics syllabus into actual practice [4].

Seemingly, effective Economics curriculum implementation is yet to be realised in South Africa and many other countries. For instance, in a study conducted in the Philippines by [8] the scholars investigated whether there is a relationship between problem-based learning approach and the development of critical thinking skills. This study concluded that there is a positive relationship because problem-based learning approach resulted in the development of critical thinking skills.

In Malaysia, [9] conducted a study on the effect of Google classroom assisted learning. Their study focused on how online learning platforms can enhance Economics curriculum learning through collaboration. The findings of this study highlighted that the teacher's teaching environment and approaches can motivate and ignite learners' interests in economics learning. It confirms that the use of technology has a positive influence on learners' academic achievement.

In another study conducted in Nigeria by [4] on Economics curriculum implementation, the study found that there is dearth of qualified Economics teachers, increase in school enrolment, mathematical phobia and curriculum overload. The study suggested that government should improve the working conditions of teachers, build more schools or extend the existing schools and improve the teacher learner ratio. Another related study was conducted a year later in Nigeria as well by [10] on effective implementation of senior secondary school Economics. The results of this study revealed that resources teaching and learning materials were inadequate for proper Economics curriculum implementation. As a result, teachers went to classes not adequately equipped to meet the demands of the Economics curriculum.

Moreover, [11] conducted a study in South Africa on the challenges experienced by learners in dynamics of market structures and found that teachers lacked the pedagogical content knowledge to teach market structures. This finding corresponds with what [12] discovered in their study on opportunities to learn imperfect market structures. The latter discovered that some teachers lacked mathematical and graphing skills to properly implement the graphing and mathematical skills embedded in imperfect market structures.

Problem Statement

Despite the importance of economics in today's society, its proper curriculum implementation is yet to be realised as plainly demonstrated by the learners mediocre to poor academic achievement [6]. For instance, persistent poor Economics academic achievement by learners in Nigeria has been reported by the Chief Examiners' annual reports of the West African Senior Certificate Examinations [3]. Similarly, the same is obtained in South Africa as revealed by the Diagnostic Report for the matric exam analysis which shows that academic achievement in the subject has been below average. The Diagnostic Report revealed that only 39.9% of the 107 940 learners who sat for the Economics National Senior Certificate (NSC) Examination in 2020 achieved at 40% level and above, and that such has been the trend for the past five years. [13]. In the Frances Baard District, a similar trend like the national results was obtained as indicated by the district results which showed that most learners failed to achieve at 40% or higher in (NSC) examinations over the past five years. Challenges such as teachers not being deliberate in their planning, lack of sufficient content knowledge, lack of instructional materials, lack of competence in the use of available resource amongst other found expressions in literature [1,2,3,5,6]. The researchers experience as an Economics teacher for the past ten years relates with what is documented in literature that teachers face a myriad of challenges in Economics curriculum implementation.

Recognizing that learner academic performance acts as

an indicator on how effectively or ineffectively curriculum is being implemented, the poor academic performance points to obstacles in Economics curriculum implementation. Notwithstanding the numerous factors already enumerated in literature, there is still a need to understand the challenges faced by Economics teachers in Frances Baard District in their endeavour to implement the Economics curriculum. Pursuant of this, the study sought to explore the challenges facing Economics curriculum implementation in the Frances Baard District. In pursuit of the objective above, the following main question will be pursued;

1. What are the challenges facing Economics curriculum implementation in the Frances Baard District?

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical Background

The paper is couched in Mediated Learning Experience (MLE) theoretical framework. This theory found its roots from the social constructivism theory developed by Piaget [14]. Mediated Learning Experience theory owes its origins to Reuven Feuerstein who developed the theory over the period 1950-1963. Feuerstein, a Piaget student, was an Israelite psychologist and worked with large numbers of orphans and traumatised youths who were returning home to Israel after the Holocaust (Feuerstein, et al.,1980). Whilst many scholars of his time were concerned with what children could not do, he was more concerned with the learning potential in the learners and how this potential could be tapped to benefit the learners.

Mediated Learning Experience (MLE)

Mediated Learning Experience theory is concerned with the way in which stimuli is experienced in the environment with the help of the mediator who can be a parent, teacher or agent [14-16]. MLE theory is relevant to the 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 [17]. The learning environment refers to how teachers or mediation agents, through appropriate guidance and support, provide learners with appropriate opportunities and resources to acquire the intended knowledge and skills [14]. 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.

Feuerstein & Feuerstein [18] claim that the central theme of MLE is based on 12 criteria but only the first four are viewed to be necessary and sufficient for MLE to occur; intentionality, reciprocity, meaning and transcendence. For the purposes of this study, these parameters will be viewed as intertwined not as standalone parameters. 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. Therefore, to fathom how teachers were mediating the Economics curriculum, it was imperative to scrutinize the context in which learning occurs with respect to Economics curriculum. Mediated Learning Experience is a practice theory and as such, it gave the researcher the lens to zoom into teacher practices. The researcher believed that the context of teachers' practices could be understood through data obtained from document analysis, observation 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 following constructs; Planning, Economics Pedagogical Content Knowledge (EPCK), availability and use of Learning and Teaching Support Material (LTSM).

Literature Review

Curriculum Implementation and Economics Education

Curriculum implementation is a broad concept which can be defined in various ways, such as how teachers plan and deliver instruction through the use of specified resources provided [19]. Sharing the same view on curriculum conceptualisation is [20] who opine that curriculum implementation refers to how teachers bring content to life in their classrooms. For [4] curriculum implementation is when the officially prescribed syllabi is put into practice, the real exposure of learners to the planned learning opportunities. The key to these definitions is that curriculum implementation is an intentional and deliberate action undertaken by teachers to facilitate learning. Curriculum implementation places a huge responsibility on the teachers' shoulders and these responsibilities include the ability to choose appropriate teaching methods and resources [21]. It is prudent to state that effective Economics curriculum implementation relies heavily on the teachers' knowledge and skills to plan, present and assess the Economics content [3,22,23]. Sometimes teachers struggle with these fundamental aspects for effective Economics curriculum implementation as shown by [10] in the study on the effective implementation of the Economics curriculum. Their study revealed that effective Economics curriculum implementation is not a smooth process but can be affected by different internal and external factors such as planning, teachers' Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK), Learning and Teaching Support Material (LTSM) amongst other factors [2,4]. Successful Economics curriculum implementation is dependent on these factors which might differ according to context as illustrated by [4]. It is therefore important to understand the challenges facing Economics curriculum implementation in the Frances Baard District schools. Although the writer acknowledges that curriculum implementation involves a

wide range of facets, this study only focused on lesson planning, Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) and resources as challenges of Economics curriculum implementation. The next section considers these factors in detail.

Planning for Economics Lessons

A lesson plan is a record of a teacher's thought processes on what will transpire in the lesson as it involves decisions about pedagogical dimensions the lesson will take [24]. Similarly, [25] claimed that a lesson plan is a written document capturing what, how and when learners will learn as well as the methods and materials they will learn from. Key to these definitions is that a lesson plan is an intentionally pre-planned document which creates ideas on how to deliver a lesson, considering the content, learners' needs, interests and problems. Scholars such as [26] argue that an effective lesson plan contains clearly written objectives to be achieved at the end of the learning process. A lesson which lacks properly formulated objectives is aimless and learners' behavioural changes cannot be ascertained. Moreover, [25] argue that a lesson plan gives confidence and direction to the teacher as it acts as a guide on what needs to be done at what stage of the lesson. However, despite the importance of lesson planning, some teachers face challenges in this practice. There is evidence in literature [27,28] that some teachers partly adhere to this practice. In trying to explain the above assertion, [25] submit that teachers view lesson planning as an extra burden on their already overwhelming workloads as it requires a lot of a teacher's professional time.

Without adequate planning, Economics curriculum implementation is negatively affected as teachers might waste time trying to figure out what content to teach and which activities to give to the learners [29]. In contention is [24] that without lesson planning, the teacher will not be able to cater for different learner needs in terms of material and teaching strategies and this results in the intended knowledge and skills not being achieved as learners would have been excluded from the learning process. In support of the above scholars is [18] who posits that lack of teacher preparedness is a huge stumbling block to successful curriculum implementation. Given the arguments forwarded above, poor planning means that the intended objectives and learning experiences will remain a far-fetched dream if teachers cannot adequately plan for their lessons.

Economics Pedagogical Content Knowledge (EPCK)

PCK is defined by [31] as a combination of content knowledge (subject matter) and the know-how of delivering the content through different strategies (pedagogical knowledge). This view is also shared by [32] who opine that PCK refers to the specific knowledge and skills that teachers need in order to effectively deliver a lesson. Teachers should possess content knowledge (CK)

and the pedagogical knowledge (PK) for effective curriculum implementation [10,33]. When applied to Economics, it implies that teachers should have the Economics Pedagogical Content Knowledge (EPCK) in order to effectively implement the Economics curriculum [10]. The key aspects important in EPCK are competency levels of the teachers in terms of Economics Content Knowledge (ECK). It also involves the teaching methods /strategies employed by the teacher (PK) and the ability of the teacher to adapt the content and assessments to the level of the learners [3,34]. This is important because it will enable the Economics teacher to choose appropriate strategies, deliver the content as espoused in the Economics curriculum and properly mediate where learners have challenges in comprehending the Economics content as identified and reflected upon by [2,4]. Furthermore, [10] submit that teachers should be subject specialists who can effectively make use of instructional materials. EPCK pertains to teachers' mastery of the Economics content and understanding of what makes the content abstract or easy to learn. It is undoubtedly clear that instructional competences on the part of the teacher are the pedestal for effective instruction and improved learner academic achievement [35].

Literature seems to suggest that some teachers grapple with the content matter they are supposed to teach [27,36,37]. It is the submission of [4] that in Nigeria, the lack of Economics content matter is as a result of dearth of qualified teachers. The lack of content knowledge seems to be evident even in developed countries like the United Kingdom as evidenced by [38] who submit that inadequate subject content knowledge is a challenge amongst teachers in the United Kingdom. Likewise, in Philippines public schools, Economics teachers confessed that they were unfamiliar with microeconomics subject content matter [2]. On PCK there is evidence in literature that teachers rely on chalk and talk method [39]. The over reliance of this traditional way of teaching compromises the learning environment, thereby negatively impacting Economics curriculum implementation [1].

Teachers with inadequate pedagogical content knowledge are incapable of mediating Economics subject matter incisively [1]. More so, teachers with inadequate pedagogical content knowledge are incapable of choosing appropriate strategies and this will negatively impact learner academic achievement. Literature reveals that limited PCK on the part of teachers usually results in poor quality education and learner achievement.

Availability and Use of Learning and Teaching Support Material (LTSM)

Learning and Teaching Support Material refers to all resources that are employed by teachers and learners in the teaching and learning process [7]. To Frimpong [41] LTSM refers to teaching aids that facilitate teaching and learning. These may take different forms such as textbooks, workbooks, worksheets, charts, videos, audio

material, computer or cell phone-based materials and materials on the internet and resource persons [42]. It is also worth noting that some materials not designed for instructional use such as TV, magazines, and newspapers can still have a powerful influence on Economics curriculum implementation.

Instructional materials play a key role in determining how well the Economics teachers make their lesson explicit to the learners [5,7,10]. Supporting this view is [3,4] who postulate that although there is a shortage of LTSM in Nigerian secondary schools, the use of LTSM has been associated with improved academic performance. Learning and Teaching Support material allow learners to have an opportunity to have hands on experiences with the content [41]. The inference is that the effectiveness of teaching and learning could be affected by the resources availed to support it and the manner in which these resources are utilised. The LTSM employed by Economics teachers should support motivation, competence and self-directed learning [38]. The chosen instructional materials should be meaningful and relate to the learner's lived experiences and create interest of the subject.

When there is an inadequate or inappropriate use of LTSM, teaching and learning are compromised as learners are not exposed to real opportunities to learn Economics concepts [3]. This would mean that the lesson objectives are not met as learners' opportunities to learn are diminished. Inadequate Economics LTSM could compromise the quality of lesson delivery even if the teacher has adequate PCK simply because of the constrained resources provided to the teacher. Lack of LTSM results in a lack of variety in learner activities and this demotivates learners and may result in learners perceiving Economics content as abstract [43]

2. Materials and Methods

Methodology

The aim of this study is to explore lesson planning, resources and Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) as the challenges facing Economics curriculum implementation in the Frances Baard District. This needs the participants to share their own interpretation and subjective lived experiences [44] hence the study used the constructivist-interpretive paradigm. This paradigm acknowledges that there are multiple realities and truths based on people's beliefs, values, experiences and contexts [45]. The researcher used a qualitative multiple case study methodology in order to explore multiple bounded systems (cases). A multiple case design is a research methodology where several instrumental and bounded cases are explored using more than one data collection method [46]. This method allowed the researcher to analyse data; both within and across

situations, that is, each teacher's way of curriculum implementation in their individual contexts in the selected schools [48]. Thus, the rationale for adopting a case study approach was based on the researcher's awareness that participants do not share the same reality on the phenomenon of Economics curriculum implementation.

Ethical Consideration

Before commencing the research, the researcher sought clearance from the ethics Committee of the University of the Free State (UFS-HSD2021/1088/21). The researcher also sought and was granted permission by the Northern Cape Department of Education and principals of schools where the research was to be conducted. It is an ethical practice to ask permission from authorities before conducting the study [47]. The participants also gave their consent to participate in this study and were assured of their anonymity and were given pseudo names. It was also made clear that participation is voluntary and purely academic, and not for financial gain and that they could withdraw from the research anytime without repercussions.

Selection of Participants

The population of the study were all Frances Baard District Economics teachers. However, three schools were purposefully selected as sites where the study was conducted as the sites had participants who could furnish rich information and knowledge about Economics curriculum implementation. The selection of the schools was based on the fact that two of the three schools, where teachers A and C were teaching, were deemed as underperforming schools and teacher B's schools was a performing school, obtaining a pass percentage of 85% and above every year. In South Africa, a school is deemed to be underperforming if it fails to obtain a pass percentage of 75% and above. The schools were also within the proximity of the researcher given the limitation of resources [47]. The chosen schools were also diverse and from different locations and at different school classifications. Within the SA context, schools are classified into what are referred to as quintiles; quintiles one and two are the "poorest" schools where learners do not pay school fees and are less resourced. Quintile three schools are better resourced than the first two quintiles, followed by quintile four and lastly quintile five, which are the 'rich' schools and parents pay huge amounts of school fees [4]. The participants selected for this study included three Economics teachers from quintiles one two and five within the Frances Baard District. The three participants were profiled as follows:

Teacher A is a novice male teacher at a quintile one school. He holds a Bed in EMS and Economics and has two years of teaching experience. He teaches EMS grades 8-9, Economics grades 10-12 and Life Orientation grade 8.

Teacher B has 20 years of teaching experience and teaches at a quintile 5 school (commonly known as former model C schools). This teacher holds a Bed in Economics and EMS and an Advanced Diploma in Education Management. He is also a deputy principal and teaches Economics grades 10-12. Teacher C is a female teacher with 15 years of teaching experience. She teaches at a quintile two schools and holds a certificate in Education specialising in Business Studies and an Advanced Certificate in Education specialising in Inclusive Education. She teaches EMS grades 8 and 9, Business Studies grade 10 and Economics grades 10-12.

Data Generation

Compatible with a qualitative study, data were generated through multiple sources. The researcher first asked the participants for their teacher files which he went through to get an understanding on how they were planning /0 their lessons. Thereafter, the researcher observed the teachers' lessons to ascertain how the teachers were implementing the Economics curriculum. Lastly, semi structured face-to-face interviews were conducted to gather data from the three Economics teachers' detailed narrations of their lived experiences. The researcher digitally recorded the talk during the interviews where the teachers were constructing their stories from their experiences. Where the researcher was not satisfied or needed clarity on the participants' responses, follow up questions were posed based on the themes of planning, EPCK and LTSM. Credibility was attained by triangulating different sources of data [50]. Through inductively working from the particular to generalised perspectives, data was coded, categorised and overarching themes were identified. In order to authentify and validate the generated data, member checking was employed before thick rich descriptive narratives were reported on [50]. Whilst generating data, the researcher enclosed his natural predispose and biases to enable the phenomenon to be experienced without any bias [51]. Emanating from these descriptions, Economics teachers' experiences in curriculum implementation were narrated.

3. Findings

In responding to the question on what challenges are facing Economics curriculum implementation, the researcher identified the following sub themes after transcribing the data from document analysis, observations and semi structured individual interviews respectively. This was done in conformity to [52] assertion that qualitative research uncovers themes and sub themes through a thematic process. In this study, the following sub themes were identified: lesson planning, EPCK, availability and use of LTSM

In the next section, focus turns to the challenges

experienced by teachers in lesson planning.

Lesson Planning as a Challenge on Economics Curriculum Implementation

Through lesson planning, a teacher can ensure that lesson time is utilised productively to the benefit of the learners [25]. In the process of planning, the teacher reflects on what objectives the lesson seeks to achieve, the strategies to be used, learners' abilities and interests and the content to be taught [29]. This ensures effective Economics curriculum implementation as the teacher goes in the class fully prepared. In order to diligently plan, teachers should possess knowledge on how to formulate objectives, knowledge on how to plan and have a structured format of planning and know the cognitive abilities of their learners [26]

Teachers were asked the following question: *What challenges do you face in Economics lesson planning?* Two sub themes emerged on lesson planning.

Lack of Knowledge on How to Plan

There were varying levels of competences on planning amongst the three teachers. The researcher discovered through document analysis that in Teacher A's file for instance, there were lesson plans that showed the previous year's dates which was an indication that the teacher used pre planned lesson plans which might not suit the context of the learners. Moreso, when the researcher observed the lesson of Teacher A, the researcher had a sense that he was not properly prepared as the researcher struggled to ascertain the theme/ objectives of his lesson. The researcher then followed it up with him on what were the objectives he had sought to achieve in his lesson and without any iota of hesitation, he confessed that he was not sure on how to design a lesson plan with proper SMART objectives. He had this to say:

I am still new and trying to find my feet, I don't know how to design my own lesson plans with proper SMART objectives.

Without proper objectives set, it is difficult for the teacher to evaluate whether meaningful learning took place and this makes the lesson plan redundant.

Similarly, a perusal of teacher C's file revealed that she did not use her own lesson plans but rather relied on using lesson plans from other areas that are not contextually relevant to the school environment that she was teaching. Through observation of her lesson, the researcher discovered that she never used the activities and YouTube video links which were documented in her lesson plans. The researcher followed it up with her in the post lesson interview on why she was using pre- planned lesson plans which did not suit her context and why there was no use of videos as stipulated in her lesson plans. This was her response:

...it's difficult for me to do lesson planning for

Economics, I was never trained to prepare Economics lesson plans. I am a Business Studies and Life Orientation teacher

Contrary to teachers A and C, the researcher discovered that teacher B was diligently planning for his lessons. The document analysis showed different activities which had differentiated activities for different learners based on their abilities. As the researcher observed teacher B's lesson, the researcher witnessed learners being given activities as per the lesson plan. The teacher constantly took a glance at his lesson plan as the lesson progressed. He exuberated confidence on how to formulate objectives in his lessons. He reiterated that:

I am confident in formulating objectives which are achievable in a lesson.

With proper planning, the teacher has a guide on what to cover in a lesson and this enhances Economics curriculum implementation as the teacher focuses on the important aspects as documented in the official documents. The teacher is also able to set and measure whether the intended objectives were met or not.

Lesson Plan Content

One of the issues that came out strongly was the confusion on what content to include on the lesson plans. All the three teachers A, B and C had problems with what information needed to be reflected when planning Economics lessons. They bemoaned the fact that there was no universal template for an Economics lesson plan to guide teachers on the contents of a lesson plan. Teacher A attested that:

The problem is that there is no format or structure which we should follow when planning.

His assertion explains why document analysis had shown that he did not design lesson plans of his own. This was corroborated by teacher C who even went further to say that:

Without guidance from Economics departmental officials, lesson planning will continue to be a nightmare.

This is probably the reason why the teacher was not designing her own lesson plans as shown in her teacher files through document analysis. As if that was not enough, Teacher B went on further to say that:

We are confused. Head of Departments in our schools require this and when subject coordinators come, they have their own way they want us to design lesson plans

When I asked teachers A and C on how they were trying to overcome the challenges of lesson planning, Teacher A had this to say:

I use lesson plans which were designed by the previous teacher, I only change the dates

Teacher C, said:

I download lesson plans from other provinces

By analysing the novice teacher and experienced teachers' responses, and the lesson plans contained in their files, it is clear that although teachers are trying to improvise on lesson planning, it is undoubtedly clear that they are finding it difficult to adequately plan for their lessons. This is attributed to lack of knowledge on how to formulate appropriate and measurable objectives for their lessons, lack of knowledge on how to plan for different learner abilities and the uncertainty on the format of the lesson plan. This negatively affects curriculum implementation as teachers are then unable to deliberately and intentionally plan for their lessons.

In the following section, focus will be on Economics Pedagogical Content Knowledge

Economics Pedagogical Content Knowledge and its Impact on Curriculum Implementation

The success and effectiveness of Economics curriculum implementation depend to a greater extent on the EPCK of the teachers [53,54]. Teachers should possess both the knowledge on the content matter and the skills to choose strategies which will capture the learner's attention and simultaneously ensure that there is quality learning [2]. Without proper ECPK, teachers cannot teach certain concepts, cannot choose proper teaching strategies and cannot properly assess learners [10]. Consequently, learners will be deprived the opportunity to acquire the requisite knowledge and skills as teachers cannot mediate what they don't understand themselves.

In responding to challenges on EPCK, two key issues emerged which were around lack of Economics Content Knowledge and teaching strategies and methodologies. The following section focuses on these two sub themes

The following question was asked on ECK: *Which sections of the Economics curriculum poses challenges for you?*

Lack of Economics Content Knowledge (ECK)

Literature on Economics Content Knowledge points that Economics teachers seem to have a challenge on content knowledge especially in micro economics [27,2,13,37]. If teachers don't have ECK, they cannot mediate Economics concepts in order for learners to comprehend the concepts. Consequently, effective Economics curriculum implementation cannot be achieved as some concepts are left untaught or they are just brushed on the surface. It also means that learners will not be able to perform well in the Economics examinations.

On ECK, the results reveal that some Frances Baard Economics teachers possess inadequate ECK. Economics content is divided into two major modules, Macroeconomics and Microeconomics. Microeconomics constitutes 50% of the examinable content in the NSC

Economics papers. When asked about which section of Economics curriculum poses challenges to them, teachers A and C confessed that they had challenges in some Microeconomics content which included graphs and calculations. Teacher C had this to say

“Eish ..., these graphs [sighs] mona these calculations le di graphs make my life miserable I never liked mathematics and graphs even at school until university, ke nightmare

Her phobia for graphs and calculations was confirmed by how the teacher conducted one of the lessons which the researcher observed. The teacher avoided drawing the graph of the monopoly opting to give learners copies of the graph and never explained the calculation of the profit which was depicted on the graph.

On the day the researcher went for lesson observation in teacher A’s class as agreed with the participant prior, the teacher did not teach the concept Oligopoly as reflected in the lesson plan but rather apologised to the learners that the teacher he had asked to come and help with the topic had excused himself at the last minute. He then gave learners an activity to do on the previous topic they had covered. After the lesson, we had a discussion where the researcher wanted to understand why he had to ask someone to teach the topic. He had this to say

These topics on microeconomics with the graphs and calculations are abstract for me, I am not comfortable to teach them

This assertion explains what the researcher observed in teacher A’s class that he could not teach what was contained in his lesson plan. This puts more pressure on both the learners and the teachers to make up for the loss of time as a result of the teachers lack of ECK. It also compromises Economics curriculum implementation as sometimes the content might be given little attention or not taught at all due lack of content knowledge as was the case with teacher A.

The ECK competence of the teachers in this study evokes some questions on the quality of their teaching. This is based on the notion that if a teacher is not adequately equipped with the content matter of the subject, they cannot adequately implement the Economics curriculum as espoused by the curriculum designers. Possessing ECK alone is not enough for effective Economics curriculum implementation, the teacher should be able to choose appropriate teaching strategies. The next section therefore focuses on the findings on teaching strategies.

Teaching Strategies and Methodology

The way the content is delivered to the learners can hinder or enhance the learner’s ability to comprehend what is being taught [3]. The subject requires that teachers take into consideration the level and intellectual

development of the learners in their choice and use of teaching strategies [43]. Furthermore, Economics demands that interactive teaching strategies are employed in order to create a platform for learners to develop the requisite analysis, decision-making and problem-solving skills [56,57]. The choice and appropriate use of methodology and teaching strategies largely determine the failure or success of a lesson [57]. Given the importance of teaching strategies to Economics curriculum implementation, the researcher was curious to know what teaching strategies the participants were using in their daily practice.

The following question was posed to the participants. *How do you teach the subject?*

There were varying teaching strategies which Frances Baard teachers were implementing in their practice. For instance, Teacher B said:

I mix the teaching strategies like case study, group work, lecture amongst others because that’s what the ATP document requires.

Teacher A had this to say:

I don’t know which one is the best strategy to employ, however mostly I use chalk and talk and make copies of notes from the textbook

Teacher C was not different in her approach to the other two participants as she had this to say:

I explain concepts, use pair work and write notes on the chalkboard.

Although the participants were using various teaching strategies, it came out strongly that they were struggling in choosing the appropriate strategies to use. For instance, when the researcher probed them further on what informed their choice of teaching strategies, there were mixed reactions. Teacher C for instance posited that:

I have difficulties in choosing which teaching strategies would be suitable for the subject and the mixed abilities of learners in my class

This attestation confirmed what the researcher had initially observed in her class. The lesson was more teacher centred as she did most of the talking besides one or two instances where she would ask learners rhetoric questions like *“Do you understand?”* or *“Are we together?”*. For the later part of the lesson, Teacher C was busy writing notes on the chalkboard which were not written by most learners. It came out clearly that the teacher was not contextualising her lessons to suit her learners’ needs. Some resources were not used as had been reflected in the pre-planned lesson plan.

During the interview, Teacher B had this to say when the researcher asked him about his reflection on the effectiveness of the group work strategy, he had employed.

I find it difficult to control group work in large groups, the problem was the rowdiness of these kids and the

size of my groups.

Corroborating with the other two teachers was Teacher A who said:

My problem is on establishing how to use a textbook as a teaching strategy, I end up just reading from the textbook.

From the perusal of documents such as lesson plans, Teacher C's strategies were not in line with the interactive teaching strategies which the subject demands. More so, through document analysis, it emerged that those participants that chose appropriate strategies still experienced challenges on how to effectively employ the chosen strategies as was the case with Teacher B. His lesson plans showed that he made use of a variety of teaching strategies, however, the observations and interviews showed that although he used a variety of strategies, he could not use them appropriately as exemplified by the way he employed group work. The groups were large that the teacher could not direct and control what was happening in the lesson. Similarly, Teacher A's documents showed chalk and talk, textbooks amongst other strategies, however the textbook was not used effectively as the teacher confessed to just reading from the textbooks.

On the next section focus turns to the impact of LTSM on Economics curriculum implementation

Impact of LTSM on Economics Curriculum Implementation

Resources can be materials that can be seen or felt, could be places or persons that create conditions that facilitate the acquisition of knowledge and skills [57]. These materials should help enhance learning by optimising the learning experiences of the learners. It is the position of [41] that not only should LTSM be made available, but that they should be meaningfully and effectively be used in the teaching and learning process. The availability, accessibility, relevance, adaptability and accuracy of LTSM afford learners an opportunity to develop the intended knowledge and skills in the economics curriculum [57,58]. The absence, minimal or poorly designed and unstructured use of LTSM negatively affects Economics curriculum implementation as in many cases teachers will then resort to the over use of talk and chalk [57] This strategy might result in learners losing interest in the subject and therefore resulting in failure to achieve Economics objectives.

Availability and Use of LTSM

On the question: *What resources are available for you to use in Economics curriculum implementation?*

Teacher A said:

Mostly I make use of textbooks prescribed by the department of education

A similar response from teacher B was obtained as he had this to say:

The main resource I use is the textbook

Teacher C

Textbooks are my source of information; however, they are limited in number due to increased learner enrolment.

All the three teachers indicated that they make use of textbooks as their main resource. The teachers went further to state that there were challenges on the use of the textbooks such as limited numbers and outdated textbook content as indicated in the following response by teacher A for instance who said

The textbooks we are using are outdated, they no longer cater for all the changes implemented in the subject.

This assertion was corroborated by teacher B who had this to say

Some of the content in the textbooks is now obsolete even the type of questions and activities in the textbooks that do not match the questions learners are asked in the final examinations.

During observation, Teachers A and C's schools were sharing textbooks in pairs and in some cases three learners were sharing one textbook. The Balance of payments (BOP) in the learners' textbooks, for example, is outdated.

It was however interesting to note that teachers had solutions to this challenge as indicated by teacher C when she said

To supplement the textbooks, we make use of notes prepared by department of education from our province and other provinces as well

The teachers' solutions to augment outdated and insufficient textbooks were defeated by lack of resources. This was attested by teacher A who had this to say

We receive one copy of notes on all the topics to be covered which the teacher has to duplicate for the learners. It is frustrating that most of the time the copier machine is not working

In collaboration with teacher A was teacher C who posited that

The problem is photocopying paper here at this school, the school rarely has copying paper available.

When checking whether the teachers were using the internet to supplement what is in the textbooks and notes, the following were some of the responses teachers gave. For instance, Teacher A said

I would love to download other resources but the problem is that we don't have access to the internet at this school, it is only the principal who has a router which has limited data

Teacher C concurred with teacher A as she said:

The computers here have software problems, they have been locked in the storeroom, we only rely on the secretary's computer to print and download materials

When the researcher probed her further on how this was impacting Economics curriculum implementation, she attested:

Badly, I mean I need to give these kids notes and activities, how do I do that? I can't write on the chalkboard that will waste teaching and learning time.

The researcher then asked further if they are using any materials outside the classroom and probed them if they had links with professional institutions whether government based, business based or colleagues in other schools. The following were the teacher's responses:

Teacher A

I don't know whether it is allowed to bring people like SARB or Stats SA for instance, I am still new in the profession, However I asked the principal for permission to invite a senior Economics teacher in a neighbouring school to help with micro economics

Teacher B

I don't know who to contact at institutions such as SARB and Stats SA, these people could be helpful as they have first-hand information on many Economics concepts in the curriculum.

Teacher C was no different to the other two participants as she said

I am not sure whether it is allowed to bring them [government and business-based institutions] and if yes, I don't know how to get them

From the discussion above, it is clear that teachers are not fully utilising the potential that certain institutions related to economics that could provide valuable support in Economics curriculum implementation.

The results indicate that Frances Baard teachers are facing challenges on the availability and use of LTSM. This is negatively affecting effective Economics curriculum implementation. Without proper and adequate resources, effective economics curriculum implementation cannot be achieved as LTSM plays an integral part in the teaching and learning process.

4. Discussion

This study intended to explore what challenges are facing economics curriculum implementation in Frances Baard District schools. The study found that both novice and experienced Economics teachers are confronted with numerous challenges which include inadequate planning, inadequate pedagogical content knowledge, and lack of resources.

Firstly, the study discovered that both novice and experienced teachers professed a proper understanding of

the value of planning. However, despite their understanding on the value of planning, some teachers were not being deliberate in this process as they are not acquainted on how to plan an Economics lesson and do not know what should be included in the lesson plan. Instead, some teachers have resorted to pre-planned lesson plans which did not consider the contextual factors of their learners. This is despite of the importance placed on context on the planning of Economics lessons by literature such as [25]. The use of pre-planned lesson negates MLE principles of reciprocity and mediation as content is not modified and adapted to the learners' needs, abilities, interest and contexts. The use of these generic lesson plans negatively affects effective economics curriculum implementation because the lesson plans are prepared without considering the calibre of the learners and context in which the learners find themselves. More so; the study revealed that some teachers are not competent in formulating SMART objectives. This finding confirms what is documented in literature that some teachers partly adhere to the practice of planning [27,28]. Without properly set objectives, literature such as [25] documents that the attainment of the intended competences remains a mystery. It is undisputed that without a clear intention of what is to be achieved in a lesson, mediation will be a futile exercise. Consequently, proper and effective Economics curriculum implementation will not be attained.

Secondly, the study revealed some teachers lacked content knowledge in some sections of the Economics curriculum for example microeconomics. This discovery is in unison with what literature suggests as some teachers either have phobia for mathematical and graphing skills or they were not trained to be Economics teachers yet they find themselves teaching the subject [2,38]. If teachers themselves struggle with certain concepts, it becomes difficult for them to mediate the content and make it comprehensible to the learners. Effective curriculum implementation will not be achieved as the success of curriculum implementation heavily relies on teachers being masters of the subject [22,23]. It also came clear from the study that some Economics teachers struggle with the choice and use of teaching strategies. Some teachers were not able to select appropriate strategies and those that chose the correct strategies were not able to use them properly. Instructional strategies play a pivotal role in helping to develop the skills as espoused in the Economics curriculum. This failure to select and /or use appropriate strategies which relate to the learner's context means the strategies will not help the teachers in mediating the content so that learners can comprehend abstract concepts.

Thirdly, both print material and electronic resources were discovered to be in short supply in most schools. Just like many countries especially in developing countries, teaching aids and learning materials are cited to

be negatively affecting curriculum implementation. This finding is not out of line with previous studies and challenges where lack of resources is cited as deterring effective economics curriculum implementation [4,10] Learning and Teaching Support Materials are supposed to be made available to enable the teacher to effectively implement the Economics curriculum and for learner to have an enhanced understanding of economic content. Participants in the study also raised concern on their inability to properly use resources such as textbooks and ICT. This inability to use critical resources only points to ineffective curriculum implementation as these resources are of paramount importance in trying to mediate Economics curriculum for easy comprehension. The study also reveals that there is a shortage of resources in some schools as some learners were sharing textbooks and lack of ICT was also common. This shortage of resources has a negative impact on Economics curriculum implementation as resources play a significant role in the mediation of learning.

Lastly, there is no proper stakeholder involvement between schools and institutions such as Stats SA and SARB amongst others. This lack of stakeholder involvement that goes against what literature was like [41] suggests on the significance of collaboration of schools and other stakeholders in the teaching and learning of learners. This lack of stakeholder involvement only serves to negate the efforts by teachers to mediate the Economics concepts for easy comprehension and for learners to achieve higher academic achievement. It should however be hastened to mention that some teachers were making an effort to collaborate with teachers from other schools to help in achieving effective economics curriculum implementation.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the participants' voices, there is a need for periodic empowerment workshops where teachers are trained on how to plan context-based lesson plans. Another recommendation emanating from the findings of the study is that teachers need to be constantly workshopped on certain curriculum content and how to use different teaching strategies in their daily practice. The use of obsolete textbooks was another serious concern raised by Economics teachers. The Department of Education should prioritise the issuing of new textbooks which match the revised Economics curriculum and way of questioning that matches the Examinations which learners sit for. Stakeholder involvement is also recommended as this can enhance learners' understanding of the subject through resource for people from government and business-based institutions. The Department of Education is advised to up its efforts in trying to equalise the distribution of resources in schools as huge inequalities exist amongst schools of different

quintiles. It is also recommended that the Department of Education should hire properly qualified teachers to teach the subject.

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