

Exploring The Role of Government in Supporting Economics Teachers in South Africa Secondary Schools

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Citation: Ngwenya, S., Gamede, B. T. and Ezennia, J. C. (2025). Exploring The Role of Government in Supporting Economics Teachers in South Africa Secondary Schools. *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 31(2) 432-441

Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v31i2.10906

ARTICLE INFO**ABSTRACT**

The study investigates the role of government in supporting economics teachers in South Africa secondary schools. Here, the Department of Basic Education is referred to as the government since they are the department in-charge of the sector in the government setup. Despite the growing importance of Economics in understanding national and global economic systems, many teachers face daunting challenges such as inadequate subject-specific training, limited teaching resources, and insufficient professional development. The study adopts qualitative research approach, using semi-structured interviews and document analysis to explore the perspectives of Economics teachers, subject advisors, and Department of Basic Education officials. The study explores the roles that can be played by the Department of Basic Education in assisting Economics teachers within the Mandeni Circuit in iLembe District. The study reveals varying degrees of support from subject advisors and school management teams, emphasizing the need for consistent and effective support mechanisms. Recommendations from the study include integrating personalized learning approaches, addressing resource constraints, and fostering engagement by understanding diverse learner needs on the subject and otherwise.

Keywords: Department of Basic Education, Economics, Roles, Teachers, Grade-12, District

1. Introduction

The declining pass rates in Grade 12 Economics class within secondary schools in Mandeni circuit under iLembe District have become a significant concern for educational stakeholders. Despite efforts by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) to enhance positive educational outcomes through resource allocation and teacher support initiatives, the pass rates have shown persistent decline over the past three years (2020-2022). This issue is underscored by iLembe District's ranking, which placed it 8th out of 12 districts in Kwazulu-Natal Province in 2021, highlighting an urgent need for improvement in positive academic performance. Therefore, out of 10 schools who were offering Economics under Mandeni circuit, only two schools phased out Economics in Commercial stream, regardless of the effort being made by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in introducing resources that will help teachers and learners in studying the Economics subject, but they were still struggling to cope. Teachers attend workshops to improve the pass rate in schools. Currently, only eight schools in Mandeni circuit are offering Economics under iLembe District. If this situation does not change many schools will face problem of Post Provision Norms (PPN). The aim of the PPN is to make sure that all schools are staffed adequately and run optimally (Veriava, 2017).

2. Literature Review

2.1 The roles played by government to improve learners' academic performance

Economics education prepares learners to live meaningfully in a changing and challenging economic world (Gotip, Ede and Oleabhiele, 2020). Therefore, the Department of Education has the responsibility to make sure that Economics is delivered well to learners for this objective to be fulfilled. The Department of Basic Education (DBE) in South Africa provides substantial support to teachers of Economics through a structured and multifaceted approach designed to enhance their pedagogical skills and improve learner outcomes. This

support is encapsulated in several key initiatives:

- **Professional Development**

In South Africa, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) recognizes the importance of professional development in improving the quality of Economics education. The DBE organizes regular workshops aimed at enhancing the content knowledge and teaching methodologies of Economics. These workshops cover various aspects of the curriculum, assessment techniques, and the integration of technology into teaching. The workshops are usually conducted during school days and holidays to ensure maximum participation without always disrupting the academic calendar (Department of Basic Education, 2020). Professional development workshops are integral to the continuous improvement of teachers' instructional skills and subject knowledge. In the context of Economics education, these workshops are particularly vital due to the dynamic nature of the subject, which requires educators to stay updated on current economic theories, policies, and global economic events. Additionally, Professional development workshops serve multiple purposes. They provide a platform for teachers to enhance their pedagogical skills, update their knowledge base, and learn innovative teaching methodologies. According to Desimone (2009), effective professional development is characterized by content focus, active learning, coherence, duration, and collective participation. These elements ensure that professional development initiatives are directly applicable to classroom practice and aligned with educational standards.

Professional development of teachers includes content-specific focused workshops that must address theoretical and practical aspects of economics as a subject. Topics such as macroeconomic policy, microeconomic behaviour, and international trade are essential. As Darling-Hammond, Hyler and Gardner (2017) emphasized that professional development must be content-specific to be effective, particularly in subjects like Economics, where staying current with economic issues and trends is crucial. The workshops also incorporate active learning strategies that engage teachers in the learning process. And this includes collaborative activities, simulations, and problem-solving exercises that teachers can later adapt for their learners. Guskey (2002) revealed the importance of practicality in professional development, asserting that professional development should be practical and provide teachers with strategies that can be promptly implemented in the classrooms. It may include training on the use of case studies, economics models, and data analysis tools, to make the subject more interactive and engaging. Moreover, research has shown that professional development workshops significantly impact teaching practices and learner outcomes. For example, Yoon et al. (2007) found that sustained and intensive professional development is more likely to have a positive impact on learners' academic achievement.

- **Programs to enhance pedagogical skills**

Staff development programs are vital for strengthening the pedagogical skills of Economics teachers, providing continuous professional growth opportunities tailored to the specific needs of educators. Recent research emphasized that continuous professional development is essential for improving both teaching quality and learner outcomes. According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), effective continuous professional development directly influences teachers' instructional practices and learners' positive academic achievement. For Economics teachers, it is crucial that staff development programs focus on pedagogical content knowledge. The focus should be on deepening the teachers' understanding of economic concepts, theories, and current global economic trends. As Chinnappan and White (2015) argued that teachers must possess specialized content knowledge that is distinct from their general subject matter knowledge to effectively teach complex subjects.

Staff development programs should include practical training sessions where teachers can apply new methodologies and techniques in a controlled environment. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) alluded the importance of active learning in professional development and posit that teachers benefit from the programs that evolve them in practical, hands-on activities which can translate directly into the classroom practices. Incorporating technology into staff development programs is increasingly essential for modernizing the teaching of Economics. Literature emphasizes the importance of Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) in teacher development. Petko, Mishra and Koehler (2025) emphasize that teachers need to be adept at integrating technology with pedagogy and content knowledge to create effective learning environments. Effective staff development programs have direct impact on learners' positive academic achievement. According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), sustained and intensive professional development is associated with significant gains in learner positive academic performance. In Economics, this translates to better-prepared teachers who can deliver complex content more effectively, thereby improving learners' understanding and enhance academic performance.

- **Collaboration with Higher Education Institutions**

Collaboration with universities and other higher education institutions is key to enhancing the quality of staff development programs. These partnerships ensure that the content is academically rigorous and reflects current research in Economics. Van Driel and Berry (2012) highlighted that partnerships between schools and universities foster a deeper understanding of content and pedagogy, which is critical for the professional growth

of teachers. By focusing on content knowledge, practical application, and the integration of technology, these programs equip teachers with the skills needed to deliver high-quality education. Continuous professional development ensures that Economics teachers remain proficient and capable of fostering a deeper understanding of economic concepts among the learners. In South Africa, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) has implemented staff development programs specifically aimed at improving the teaching of Economics. These initiatives include workshops, short courses, and formal qualifications that focus on curriculum content, pedagogical strategies, and the use of ICT in education (Department of Basic Education, 2022).

2.2 Importance of resource provision and curriculum guides in economics

Resource provision and curriculum guides are essential in equipping teachers with the tools necessary to deliver high-quality Economics education. Research underscores the significance of these resources in ensuring that educators can effectively convey complex economic concepts and foster critical thinking among learners. According to Kawuryan et al. (2021), well-resourced educational environments significantly enhance the quality of instruction and enable teachers to better support diverse learning needs of learners.

• Alignment with National Curriculum Standards

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) provides comprehensive curriculum guides and resource materials that are aligned with national curriculum standards. These resources, including textbooks, lesson plans, and digital content, are designed to assist teachers in delivering and engaging in effective lessons (Department of Basic Education, 2022). Darling- Hammond et al. (2020) emphasized that teaching materials must be up-to-date and aligned with curriculum standards to ensure that learners are learning relevant and applicable economic principles.

• Curriculum Guides for Effective Teaching

Curriculum guides serve as structured frameworks that outline the essential content, and skills learners must acquire. These guides help educators plan lessons, assessments, and activities that meet educational objectives. Shulman's concept of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) remains critical, with Gess-Newsome et al. (2019) study where the author highlights that PCK integrates subject matter knowledge with effective teaching strategies crucial for subjects like Economics.

• Resource Provision on Learner Outcomes

High-quality resources and well-designed curriculum guides have a significant impact on learner achievement. Hattie (2021) reaffirms that resource provision, when combined with effective teaching strategies leads to substantial improvements in learner outcomes. In the context of Economics, this translates into learners being better equipped to understand, analyse, and apply economic concepts in real-world scenarios. However, DBE in South Africa has intensified efforts to enhance resource provision and develop comprehensive curriculum guides for Economics education. These initiatives include providing textbooks, digital resources, and updated curriculum guides that align with both national standards and the latest economic research (Department of Basic Education, 2022). Van der Berg and Spaull (2020) highlighted that these resources are essential for addressing the educational challenges in South African schools, particularly in resource-constrained environments. Notwithstanding the resource provision and distribution, there exist challenges.

Despite all the efforts, challenges such as resource scarcity and unequal distribution continue to affect the quality of Economics education. Moloi and Salawu (2022) emphasizes the need for equitable access to resources across all schools, noting that disparities in resource allocation can significantly impact learners' academic throughput. Addressing these issues requires concerted efforts from the stakeholders to ensure that all learners have access to the resources they need for academic success. Resource provision and curriculum guides are pivotal in supporting the teaching and learning of Economics. The provision of these relevant materials and structured teaching frameworks enables educators to deliver effective instruction to foster deeper understanding of economic concepts among learners. Continuous improvement and equitable distribution of resources are essential towards ensuring all learners excel in Economics subject.

2.3 Timetable and Curriculum Support in Economics Education

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) provides guidelines for structuring timetables to ensure comprehensive coverage of the Economics syllabus. This includes recommendations for balancing theoretical instruction with practical activities, fostering an interactive and engaging learning environment (Moloi and Salawu, 2022).

• Effective Timetable Support

Effective timetable support is crucial for optimizing Economics education delivery. A well-structured timetable ensures that sufficient time is allocated to core economic concepts, practical applications, and revision, thereby enhancing learner understanding and retention of material. Research by Hattie (2021) highlighted that the

allocation of instructional time can significantly impact learner outcomes, emphasizing the need for well-designed schedules that support both theory and practice. Further, economics education requires a balance between theoretical instruction and practical application. Timetable support should include dedicated periods for hands-on activities such as data analysis, case studies, and economic simulations. Al-Omari et al. (2024) argued that integrating practical applications into the curriculum helps learners connect theoretical knowledge with real-world scenarios, thus deepening their comprehension and analytical skills.

- **Curriculum Support Framework**

Curriculum support involves providing teachers with structured frameworks that outline content and learning outcomes for each grade level. Shulman (1986) emphasized that pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) combines understanding the subject matter with knowing how to teach it effectively. Curriculum guides for Economics should detail key concepts, skills, and assessments, providing teachers with clear instructional roadmaps. According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2020), curriculum support must align with national standards to ensure consistency and rigor across educational settings.

- **Technology Integration in Timetable and Curriculum Support**

Incorporating technology into timetable and curriculum support enhances Economics education. Petko, Mishra and Koehler (2025) noted that the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework highlights the importance of integrating technological tools in teaching. Timetables should include periods for computer-based activities, such as using economic simulation software and accessing online resources, to make learning more interactive and engaging.

- **Facilitating Teacher Collaboration**

Timetable and curriculum support also facilitates teacher collaboration. Owen (2014) indicated that collaborative Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) can significantly improve teaching practices and learner outcomes. Timetables should allocate time for teachers to collaborate, plan lessons, share resources, and discuss strategies for addressing learner needs in Economics. Research indicates that structured timetable and curriculum support positively impacts learner academic achievement. Walberg (2010) found that clear instructional goals, organized teaching schedules, and a coherent curriculum contribute to higher learners' academic performance. In Economics, this means that learners are better equipped to understand complex theories and apply them to practical real-life situations.

Nonetheless, the Department of Basic Education offers extensive timetable and curriculum support to enhance Economics education. The DBE's curriculum guides provide detailed instructions on lesson planning, assessment strategies, and the integration of technology (Department of Basic Education, 2022). Additionally, the DBE provides timetable guidelines to ensure all essential topics are covered within the academic year. Timetable and curriculum support are crucial for the effective delivery of Economics education. By providing structured frameworks and allocation of time to both theoretical and practical instruction, these supports enhance teaching efficacy and learner outcomes. Continuous improvement and adaptation of these supports, aligned with educational standards and technological advancements which are essential for fostering comprehensive understanding of Economics among learners.

2.4 School management involvement in enhancing economics education

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) highlights the importance of School Management Teams (SMTs) in supporting Economics education. This includes regular monitoring and evaluation, providing feedback, and fostering peer collaboration. SMTs are encouraged to create an environment conducive to professional growth through mentoring and support networks (Bush and Glover, 2016).

- **School Management in Supporting Economics Teachers**

Effective and efficient school management is crucial for enhancing the quality of Economics instruction. SMTs play key role in ensuring that Economics teachers have the necessary resources, professional development opportunities, and a supportive environment. According to Bush and Glover (2016), effective school leadership is strongly linked to improved teaching practices and learner outcomes. SMTs can support Economics teachers by providing access to updated textbooks, teaching aids, and digital resources, and by organizing workshops and training sessions on current economic theories and methodologies. School management is responsible for fostering positive and supportive learning environment that enhances learners' engagement and academic achievement. Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2020) indicate that effective school leadership significantly influences school climate and learner learning outcomes. SMTs can implement policies that encourage active participation in Economics classes, such as promoting project-based learning, organizing economics debates, and supporting extracurricular activities like economics clubs.

- **Development and Mentoring**

Professional development is vital for the continuous improvement of teaching practices. School management can facilitate this by organizing regular professional development programs for Economics teachers, including workshops on economic trends, instructional strategies, and technology use. Mentoring programs where experienced Economics teachers support their colleagues with less experience to achieve excellent throughput. Darling-Hammond, et al. (2017) emphasize that mentoring and induction programs are crucial for helping new teachers develop their skills and confidence. Effective monitoring and evaluation by school management ensure that the Economics curriculum is delivered effectively for learners to achieve the desired outcomes. Groenewald et al. (2023) assert that instructional leadership involving regular monitoring and feedback has a significant impact on learners' achievement. SMTs can conduct classroom observations, provide constructive feedback, and use learner assessment data to inform instructional improvements.

Further, SMTs should foster a culture of collaboration and innovation among Economics teachers. Collaborative professional learning communities (PLCs) enable teachers to share best practices, discuss challenges, and develop innovative teaching strategies. SMTs can support PLCs by providing time and resources for collaboration and encouraging continuous improvement. Equally, Hattie and Hamilton (2018) indicate that evaluation is crucial for improving educational outcomes, allowing data-driven decisions to enhance teaching methods and learner engagement. In Economics, evaluation may involve assessing learners' understanding of complex theories and their ability to apply these concepts in real-world contexts.

• **Evaluation and Feedback Mechanisms**

Evaluation and feedback are fundamental for improving teaching effectiveness and learner outcomes. Formative assessments, such as quizzes and peer reviews, provide continuous feedback and guide instruction. Clark and McGaw (2020) argue that formative assessments help identify learning gaps early, allowing for timely instructional adjustments. Summative assessments, like end-of-term exams, evaluate overall performance and mastery of the Economics curriculum. Wiliam (2019) asserts that summative assessments should align with learning objectives, and measure learner achievement comprehensively.

• **Peer and Self-Evaluation**

Peer evaluation involves learners assessing each other's work, which promotes diverse perspectives and collaborative learning. According to Zhang et al. (2025), peer assessment fosters deeper understanding and engagement. Self-evaluation encourages learners to reflect on their progress and set personal goals. Vasileiadou and Karadimitriou (2021) posit that self-assessment helps learners develop self-regulation and deeper understanding of their learning process. Effective evaluation systems require transparent and well-defined assessment criteria. Ling (2025) highlighted that clear rubrics and assessment criteria help learners understand expectations and improve performance. For Economics subject, these criteria should align with curriculum standards and real-world applications of economic theories.

However, the DBE focuses on enhancing evaluation and feedback mechanisms in Economics education. The department provides guidelines for assessment and feedback to ensure alignment with national standards (Department of Basic Education, 2023). These efforts support teachers in delivering effective instruction and providing meaningful feedback to learners. Understandably, school management involvement is crucial for enhancing the quality of Economics education. Hence, by providing support and resources, fostering positive learning environment and encouraging professional development and collaboration, SMTs can significantly improve teaching practices and learners' positive academic achievements. Effective evaluation and feedback mechanisms further contribute to improving educational practices and supporting learners' success in Economics subject.

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, comprises 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. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data collected. The data collected 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 Biographical Profile of the Participants

Table 4.1: Participants' Demographic Information

Participant	Gender	Qualification	Age	Teaching experience
T1	Female	Honours in Education	41	11 years
T2	Female	Degree in Education	53	35 years
T3	Female	Honours in Education	36	10 years
T4	Female	PGCE	35	9 years
T5	Female	Degree in Education	29	5 years
T6	Male	Honours in Education	30	3 years
T7	Female	Degree in Education	37	11 years
T8	Female	Honours in Education	37	8 years

The table above presents the demographics of the eight participants interviewed for the study. These teachers participated in providing their perspectives on teaching and learning of Economics subject in the study chosen secondary schools. Accordingly, greater percentage of the participants represented female gender of the distribution (8 out of 9), 4 of the participants have honours in education, 3 have degree in education, while only one participant has PGCE. Majority of the participants (6-participants) fall within the age bracket of 29years to 39years, while the remaining 2 participants are 41years and 53years of age respectively. In terms of teaching experience, 5 of the participants have had experience between 0-10yers, 2 participants have teaching experience of between 11years-20years, while only one participant has teaching experience of above 21 years.

4.2 Findings of the study

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) plays critical role in supporting Economics teachers by ensuring resource availability like up-to-date textbooks and technological tools, to enhance teaching effectiveness. There should be standardization of processes and review of policies to address disparities between provincial and national exams to foster consistency and fairness in assessments, while upholding academic integrity. Regular and sufficient professional development programs to equip teachers with updated pedagogical strategies and content knowledge. Thus, the study findings and participants' responses are below.

• Ensuring Resource Availability

During the interview, participants mentioned pointed to resource shortages, such as the availability of study guides and other teaching materials, as a significant issue, which affected the quality of education being delivered. Equally, the issue of insufficient teaching aids and other resources, such as photocopying/printing materials was raised. These are some of the participants' responses below.

T1: "Department, yes it provides study guides, of which now, they are not enough. There's a shortage, more material should be provided and surely these learners might develop a culture of studying".

T3: "We don't have enough teaching aids; we don't have enough resources... sometimes you find that the school does not have ink".

DBE (2022) posits that it is DBE's responsibility to guarantee that educators have access to excellent resources for teachers and learners' assistance. This entails making textbooks, statistical data, and up-to-date economic journals available. Every learner should have access to necessary materials like textbooks and stationery, and educators should have a range of reference materials available to them. Therefore, the above study findings attest to this partially, but more is still needed to ameliorate the challenges. Further, participants highlighted the issue of overcrowded classrooms as a general challenge that affects the teaching of Economics. Resource limitations, the lack of sufficient resources and the need for better accommodation for large classes were also highlighted. They responded thus.

T4: "Classes are overcrowded... learners become distracted. We asked for mobile classes, the department promised to bring them but till now..."

T5: "We have limited teaching resources... it is difficult to teach learners with limited resources".

Equal Education's report of 2024 asserts that the department of basic education should consider a future infrastructure plan that takes migratory patterns and population expansion into account. Strategies for enrolling

and transporting students who have challenges finding space in nearby schools should be part of this plan. The author posits that by anticipating future needs, the DBE may prevent overcrowding before it becomes critical. Hence, the findings are in line with the above statement. Furthermore, another outcry was noted during the interview about the lack of adequate technological tools/resources, such as tablets and laptops which hinder effective teaching. The participant strongly believed that the department should provide both teachers and learners with necessary resources that will enhance the performance of learners in Economics grade-12.

T6: "I think at this time, we should have tablets or laptops for even learners so that we can even Google some of the information, surely that might help most learners to pass."

According to Moleleki (2020), digital technologies and platforms that support interactive learning should be encouraged by the DBE. For instance, learners can better understand theoretical concepts through practical applications by using online simulations of economic models or research databases. Therefore, the finding is in line with the author's statement.

• **Alignment of Provincial with a National exam**

Many participants across their responses acknowledged notable discrepancy between the levels of provincial and national exams. This highlighted concerns about the consistency and alignment of assessment standards across different exam formats. Others believe that learners should write a national paper from the start to ensure consistency and fairness. A participant added that the transition from provincial to national exams was seen as problematic, with suggestions to balance this by having national papers more frequently throughout the year. However, another participant suggested that learners should be exposed to national examination papers earlier to reduce anxiety. The responses are below.

T1: "My view, I believe that they should write a national paper from the beginning. Because the national paper, when you compare it with provincial paper, provincial paper is very easy".

T2: "I think the Department of Education, nationally, needs to look at that element... Maybe it's better that from the first time, we should write a national paper".

T3: "I would personally think that learners should at least write their national paper twice a year... because learners they are scared at the national paper when they see it for the first time in the final exam".

T4: "Maybe... it will ease them when it comes to the anxiety to have a national paper throughout the whole year".

The above findings are like a few studies already conducted, including Pournara et al. (2015). The authors alluded that provincial examinations and national assessments differ significantly in terms of difficulty, which raises questions regarding the validity of these tests as gauges of learner's success. It is a widely accepted notion that learners may not be sufficiently prepared for the demands of national tests by having sat for provincial exams, which could cause anxiety and poor performance. However, Motshekga (2023) suggested that exposing learners to national exam papers early in their academic careers may help them feel less anxious and better prepared for the final exams. Learners would be able to become acquainted with the format and kinds of questions they would encounter. Learners often face difficulties adjusting to the higher standards and expectations of national assessments, which can impact their confidence and performance.

• **Professional Development: Workshops to enhance the teaching of economics**

Most participants recognize that the Department of Basic Education provides some level of support, particularly through workshops. On the other hand, some participants highlighted that although the Department of Basic Education provided workshops, these workshops are not sufficient because sometimes they only take place once a year. However, more frequent workshops might be beneficial according to the participants. The response is as follows:

T4, T5 and T6: "these workshops would be very beneficial if they were conducted frequently".

Indeed, the above conforms with a study by Noben et al. (2021) who found out that teachers who take part in professional development programs feel more confident about their ability to teach. They get better at teaching lessons and meeting the various learning demands of their learners in the classroom as they gain new abilities and information.

Focus group

Mixed responses regarding the effectiveness and adequacy of support received from the Department of Basic Education, particularly in terms of providing sufficient workshops and resources. Some participants found the

workshops sufficient and beneficial for professional development. Others express a desire for more frequent workshops and greater interaction with education officials beyond the subject advisor. It was agreed that the support differs from school to school.

• **Strengthening quality assurance mechanisms in assessment**

Most participants and the focus group assert that the major contributing factor to poor academic performance of learners in Economics grade-12 in 2023 was as a result of downward adjustment of Economics final exam results. Hence, this impacted the teaching of Economics in a negative way as it has demotivated Economics teachers in grade-12. However, Participant T3 and Focus Group shared concerns about the downgrading of learners' marks, which is perceived as demotivating for learners. This issue highlights the impact of grading practices on learner's motivation and academic confidence. The focus group complained about their hard work, yet at the end of the year when they achieve high-marks, uMalusi (The body in-charge) decides to downgrade those marks, while in other subjects they get an upgrade. Formal assessment tasks must be written as an exam paper and should be examined like a provincial paper.

T3: "...last year in our district, the learners' marks were being downgraded and we don't understand why".

Focus group: "Formal assessment tasks must be written as an exam paper and should be examined like a provincial paper to avoid the downgrading of marks".

According to Williams (2023), it may be discouraging for teachers to see their learners' efforts not represented in their marks. Downgrading can cause feelings of irritation and powerlessness since teachers frequently take pride in their learners' accomplishments, especially if they feel the grading system is unfair or flawed. This can contribute to burning out and even drive some educators out of the profession. On the revision of marking guidelines, two participants and the focus group highlighted the need for more flexible marking guidelines to accommodate broader range of learner responses. This perspective suggests a recognition of the diversity in learner capabilities and learning styles, advocating for assessment practices that support inclusive evaluation methods. These are their responses below.

T6: "the marking guidelines are structured for the learners not to be able to express their responses the way they want".

T8: "marking guidelines do not accommodate variety of answers, they are sometimes very strict and do not accommodate our learners from a poor background knowledge".

Focus group: "even at the marking centre, the issue of exam guidelines disadvantages our learners".

Alabi (2024) suggests that different learner's answers can be recognised with the use of flexible marking criteria that consider their unique learning preferences and strengths. This is because they can present their information in ways that suit their unique learning styles, understanding and talents, and may be assessed more accurately because of this inclusiveness. Similarly, Bowden (2025) attested to this fact that traditional marking rubrics can often be too rigid, limiting learners' creativity and critical thinking. Therefore, by incorporating flexibility into assessment criteria, educators can encourage learners to explore unique and innovative responses rather than conforming strictly to predefined answers.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

The findings highlight critical roles the Department of Basic Education (DBE) can play in supporting Economics teachers to enhance learner outcomes. One of the major themes was the availability of resources, with participants emphasizing the need for sufficient textbooks, study guides, and technological tools like tablets and laptops. Teachers noted that resource shortages, such as insufficient teaching materials and a lack of photocopying/printing resources, significantly hindered effective teaching. Additionally, overcrowded classrooms and limited physical infrastructure exacerbate these challenges. Participants expressed that proactive measures, such as providing mobile classrooms and enhancing school infrastructure, would alleviate these issues. Another area of concern discussed was the misalignment between provincial and national examination standards. Participants highlighted discrepancies in different levels, which they believed unfairly disadvantaged learners transitioning to national exams. Suggestions included introducing national exam papers earlier in the academic year and conducting these exams more frequently to familiarize learners with the format and expectations. This approach could reduce anxiety and better prepare learners for final assessments. The downgrading of learners' marks in national exams was also a key issue, with participants noting its demoralizing effect on both teachers and learners. Greater transparency and fairness in grading practices were recommended to restore confidence in the system.

The role of professional development emerged as another critical theme. While some teachers acknowledged the value of workshops provided by the DBE, others criticized their infrequency and limited scope. Participants advocated for more regular and targeted training sessions that address specific challenges faced by Economics teachers. These workshops could enhance teaching methodologies and better equip teachers to address diverse learner needs. Quality assurance in assessments and marking guidelines also received significant attention. Participants called for more flexible marking criteria that accommodate diverse learner responses, recognizing variations in background knowledge and learning styles. The rigidity of current marking guidelines was seen as limiting, with participants advocating for inclusivity to encourage creativity and critical thinking among learners. These findings suggest that revising marking policies could lead to more equitable assessments that reflect learners' true capabilities. Overall, the findings underscore the need for the DBE to adopt a more integrated and supportive approach to addressing the challenges faced by Economics teachers. By ensuring resource availability, aligning examination standards, providing regular professional development, and revising assessment practices, the DBE can foster an environment that enables both teachers and learners to thrive.

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