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Empowering Through Feedback: Economics Teachers' Motivations for Assessment Practices in Public Schools

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Abstract: Research on assessment feedback practices in economics education within South African public schools has been limited, particularly in terms of teachers' motivations and approaches. This study addresses this gap by exploring the reasons and motivations behind Grade 10-12 Economics teachers' use of assessment feedback in three public schools in South Africa. A qualitative case study design was employed, involving three teachers at different career stages. Data was collected through semi-structured individual interviews and document analysis of feedback samples. Thematic analysis, informed by the concept of feedback literacy, was used to analyse the data. The findings revealed two primary motivations: using assessment feedback for academic growth and providing feedback for real-world application. Teachers viewed feedback as a crucial tool for enhancing students' understanding of economic concepts and preparing them for future academic and professional challenges. The study concludes that teachers' feedback practices align with contemporary educational theories and demonstrate a commitment to contextualising economics education within the South African environment. Recommendations include implementing targeted professional development programs to enhance feedback literacy, revising curricula to incorporate opportunities for meaningful feedback, and conducting further research across diverse educational contexts. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of assessment practices in Economics education and has implications for teacher professional development and curriculum design in South African public schools, ultimately aiming to develop economically literate and critically engaged citizens.

Keywords: Assessment feedback, economics education, teacher motivations, feedback literacy, public schools, qualitative research.

1. Introduction

Assessment feedback is integral to the educational process, functioning as a significant mechanism to enhance student learning and achievement (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Carless & Boud, 2018). Nevertheless, the implementation and efficacy of assessment feedback within economics classrooms are profoundly influenced by the teachers who apply these strategies (Maistry, 2017; Ndlovu et al., 2022). In the context of economics education in South African secondary schools, the landscape is undergoing rapid transformation, driven by the imperative to equip students for an increasingly complex global economy (Maistry & David, 2018; Spaull & Jansen, 2019). The significance of feedback in the learning process has been extensively documented across various educational contexts (Wisniewski et al., 2020). However, the distinctive challenges and opportunities associated with economics as a discipline, particularly within the South African educational framework, merit a more rigorous examination. Economics, characterised by its amalgamation of theoretical constructs and practical applications, necessitates feedback strategies capable of bridging the divide between abstract economic principles and their real-world implications.

In this study, assessment feedback is conceptualised as a multifaceted educational tool that goes beyond mere correction of errors. It is viewed as a crucial bridge between abstract economic principles and their practical applications, aiming to foster critical thinking and analytical skills

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essential for understanding complex economic phenomena. This research considers feedback a cornerstone in shaping students' understanding and application of economic concepts, particularly within the unique context of South African public schools. The study recognises that effective feedback practices in economics education must be context-sensitive, addressing both the theoretical underpinnings of the subject and its real-world implications in South Africa's evolving economic landscape. By exploring teachers' motivations and approaches to feedback, this research seeks to uncover how feedback can be leveraged as a transformative practice in economics education, potentially addressing educational inequalities and contributing to broader economic empowerment.

In South Africa, where economic literacy is crucial for addressing socio-economic challenges and promoting informed citizenship, the role of economics teachers becomes even more pivotal (Van Wyk & Alexander, 2021). These educators are tasked not only with imparting knowledge but also with fostering critical thinking and analytical skills essential for understanding complex economic phenomena. The feedback they provide serves as a cornerstone in this educational process, shaping students' understanding and application of economic concepts. Despite the recognised importance of assessment feedback, there remains a significant gap in our understanding of how and why economics teachers in South African public schools implement these practices. This study aims to address this gap by exploring the following research question:

- What factors drive and shape the use of assessment feedback by Grade 10-12 economics teachers in three South African public schools?

By examining teachers' motivations and reasons for engaging in assessment feedback practices, this research aims to elucidate the intricate interplay between pedagogical beliefs, institutional contexts, and the distinct demands of teaching economics in diverse South African classrooms. The study's focus on public schools is particularly significant, as these institutions often encounter resource constraints and diverse student needs that can influence the effectiveness of feedback delivery.

The relevance of this research extends beyond the immediate context of the three schools under investigation. As South Africa continues to confront educational inequalities and the imperative for economic empowerment, understanding effective teaching practices in economics becomes essential. The insights derived from this study hold the potential to inform policy decisions, enhance teacher training programs, and ultimately contribute to the improvement of economics education quality nationwide.

Furthermore, this research contributes to the broader discourse on educational quality and equity in South Africa. By illuminating the nuances of assessment feedback in economics classrooms, we can begin to address the challenges of preparing students for active participation in the economy while simultaneously fostering critical thinking and economic literacy. As we approach three decades of democracy in South Africa, it is crucial to critically examine and enhance our educational practices, particularly in subjects such as economics, which are vital for national development. This study represents a step toward deepening the understanding of and improving the pedagogical approaches employed in economics education, with a specific emphasis on the often-overlooked domain of assessment feedback. Through an in-depth exploration of economics teachers' perspectives and practices, this research aims to uncover valuable insights that can guide future educational initiatives and inform evidence-based improvements in economics instruction. By focusing on the underlying reasons and motivations behind teachers' utilisation of assessment feedback, the study seeks to contribute to the development of more effective, context-sensitive approaches to economics education within South African public schools.

1.1 Conceptualising Teachers' motivations for using assessment feedback in Economics

Assessment feedback plays a crucial role in the learning process, serving as a bridge between teaching and learning (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). In the context of economics education, feedback is particularly important due to the subject's blend of theoretical concepts and real-world applications (Maistry & David, 2018). This study is framed by the concept of feedback literacy, as proposed by Carless and Boud (2018), which emphasises the importance of developing students' capacity to understand, interpret, and act on feedback.

Feedback literacy in economics education involves not only the ability to comprehend and apply economic principles but also to engage critically with economic phenomena and their societal implications (Ndlovu et al., 2022). This aligns with the broader goals of economics education in South Africa, which aims to develop economically literate citizens capable of participating effectively in the country's economic development (Van Wyk & Alexander, 2021). The concept of feedback literacy is particularly relevant in the South African context, where economics education must bridge significant socio-economic divides and prepare students for a rapidly changing economic landscape (Spaull & Jansen, 2019). Effective feedback in this context goes beyond mere correction of errors; it should foster critical thinking, promote the application of economic theories to real-world scenarios, and develop students' analytical skills (Maistry, 2017).

Furthermore, the notion of feedback literacy intersects with the concept of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), as described by Shulman (1986). In economics education, teachers must combine their subject expertise with effective teaching strategies, including the provision of meaningful feedback. This involves not only identifying misconceptions in economic understanding but also guiding students toward more sophisticated economic reasoning (Maistry & David, 2018).

The implementation of feedback practices in economics classrooms is influenced by various factors, including teachers' beliefs about learning, institutional constraints, and the specific demands of the economics curriculum (Ramdhani & Maistry, 2020). Understanding these factors is crucial for developing effective feedback strategies that can enhance students' economic literacy and prepare them for the complexities of the modern economy.

This study adopts a sociocultural perspective on feedback, recognising that feedback practices are shaped by and embedded within specific educational and cultural contexts (Ajjawi & Boud, 2017). In the South African context, this means considering how feedback practices in economics education are influenced by the country's historical, social, and economic realities, as well as by current educational policies and priorities (Chisholm & Wildeman, 2023). By examining teachers' motivations for providing feedback through the lens of feedback literacy and considering the unique context of South African economics education, this study aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of feedback practices in economics classrooms. This understanding can inform the development of more effective and context-sensitive approaches to feedback in economics education, ultimately contributing to the broader goals of economic empowerment and development in South Africa.

1.2 Understanding assessment feedback in South African Economics education

Assessment feedback plays a crucial role in the learning process, serving as a bridge between teaching and learning (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). In the context of economics education, feedback takes on particular importance due to the subject's blend of theoretical concepts and real-world applications (Maistry & David, 2018). This study is framed by the concept of feedback literacy, as proposed by Carless and Boud (2018), which emphasises the importance of developing students' capacity to understand, interpret, and act on feedback.

While research specifically on assessment feedback in economics education is limited, studies in related fields provide valuable insights that can inform our understanding of feedback practices in economics classrooms. For instance, in mathematics education, Fyfe and Rittle-Johnson (2016) found

that feedback can enhance students' conceptual understanding and problem-solving skills, particularly when it encourages students to explain their reasoning. In science education, Voerman et al. (2012) demonstrated that specific and detailed feedback—especially when focused on progress rather than just correctness—can significantly improve student learning outcomes. These findings from related disciplines suggest that similar principles might apply to economics education, where complex concepts and real-world applications are central to the curriculum.

Furthermore, research in business education, which shares some similarities with economics, has shown that feedback that encourages critical thinking and application of theories to practical scenarios can enhance students' learning and engagement (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Although these studies are not specific to economics, they highlight the potential importance of feedback that goes beyond mere correction and instead fosters a deeper understanding and application of concepts—a principle that may be particularly relevant in the context of economics education in South Africa.

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2. Research Design and Approach

This study employed a qualitative approach to explore and understand economics teachers' reasons for and motivations for using assessment feedback in rural South African schools. Qualitative

research is particularly well-suited for examining individuals' experiences, perceptions, and decision-making processes in depth (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). This approach allowed for a rich, contextual understanding of the complex factors influencing teachers' feedback practices in Economics education. The qualitative methodology provided the flexibility needed to adapt questioning and delve deeper into emerging themes during data collection, capturing the nuanced nature of teachers' assessment feedback practices. It enabled the exploration of not only what feedback practices teachers use but also why they choose these practices and how they perceive their impact on student learning in Economics.

From this qualitative approach, a multiple case study design emerged as the most appropriate strategy for addressing the research question. Yin (2018) argues that multiple case study research is valuable when examining contemporary phenomena within real-life contexts, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident. In this study, the phenomenon of interest—teachers' motivations for using assessment feedback in Economics—is deeply intertwined with the context of rural South African schools. The case study design allowed for an in-depth exploration of each teacher's unique context and practices. It also enabled cross-case analysis to identify common themes and divergences in their approaches to assessment feedback. This design was particularly suited to capturing the complexity of feedback practices in Economics education, considering the interplay between individual teacher beliefs, school contexts, and broader educational policies in rural South Africa.

2.1 Participants in the Study

The study utilised purposive sampling to select three Grade 10-12 Economics teachers from three different rural public schools in South Africa. According to Patton (2015), purposive sampling involves selecting information-rich cases that can provide in-depth insights into the phenomenon under study. The selection criteria for these teachers included:

- Currently teaching Economics in Grades 10-12 in a rural public school
- A minimum of two years of experience teaching Economics
- Willingness to participate in an in-depth study about their assessment feedback practices
- Recommendation from school principals or department heads regarding the teacher's engagement with assessment practices.

These criteria were designed to ensure that the selected teachers had relevant experience and insights to share about assessment feedback in Economics education. The initial contact with potential participants involved a brief conversation to explain the study's purpose and confirm their willingness to reflect on their assessment feedback practices. This approach facilitated the selection of participants likely to provide rich, detailed information about the research topic without pre-judging their specific abilities or practices.

To ensure a diverse perspective, I selected teachers with varying years of experience: one early-career teacher (0-5 years), one mid-career teacher (6-15 years), and one experienced teacher (over 15 years). This sampling strategy enabled me to gather in-depth information about assessment feedback practices across different career stages, potentially revealing how experience influences teachers' approaches to feedback in Economics education. The diversity in teaching experience also provided an opportunity to explore how teachers' motivations and reasons for using assessment feedback might evolve over the course of their careers.

This approach to sampling had significant implications for the comparative aspects of the study design. While it facilitated a rich cross-case analysis that illuminated potential differences in feedback practices and motivations across various career stages, it also introduced an additional variable—years of experience—that warrants consideration when interpreting the similarities and differences between cases. This complexity not only enhanced the depth of the analysis but also necessitated

careful consideration to differentiate between factors related to individual school contexts and those potentially influenced by the teachers' career stages. The three rural schools varied in terms of resources, student demographics, and school culture, thereby providing a rich array of contexts for the study. These variations permitted an examination of how different rural school environments might influence feedback practices in Economics education.

To safeguard the identities of the participants and their respective schools, pseudonyms are employed throughout the study when presenting and discussing excerpts from the information provided by the teachers. This practice ensures confidentiality while allowing for a detailed and authentic representation of the teachers' voices and experiences.

2.2 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations were of paramount importance throughout the research process. Prior to the initiation of the study, I obtained gatekeeper permission from the relevant provincial Department of Education, which facilitated access to the schools and teachers involved. This process entailed the submission of a comprehensive research proposal that delineated the study's objectives, methodology, and anticipated contributions to the field of Economics Education in South Africa. Furthermore, I secured institutional ethical clearance from my university's Ethics Committee, ensuring that the study conformed to rigorous ethical standards in educational research.

Following the attainment of ethical approval, I composed letters addressed to the school principals, formally requesting access to their institutions and the opportunity to conduct research with their Economics teachers. These letters articulated the purpose of the study, the expected time commitment from participants, and the potential benefits of the research for Economics Education in South African public schools. All participating teachers signed informed consent forms prior to their involvement in the study. Drawing on Hammersley and Traianou's (2012) ethical guidelines for educational research, I ensured that participants were thoroughly informed about the study's objectives, their rights to withdraw at any time without repercussions, and the measures implemented to safeguard their confidentiality. The consent forms also delineated the methods of data usage, storage, and eventual disposal, thereby ensuring transparency throughout the research process.

To foster a conducive environment for open and honest discourse, I conducted all interviews within the respective schools of the teachers, utilising private rooms to ensure confidentiality. This approach not only facilitated participants' comfort in a familiar setting but also minimised disruptions to their daily routines. By conducting interviews within the school environment, I was able to obtain contextual insights that might not have been evident in an off-site location. Throughout the research process, I remained acutely aware of the power dynamics inherent in researcher-participant relationships. I adopted a reflexive stance, continually scrutinising my biases and assumptions, and striving to accurately and respectfully represent the perspectives of the teachers. This ethical commitment extended to the data analysis and reporting phases, wherein I was careful to present findings in a manner that honored the voices of the participants while maintaining their anonymity.

2.3 Data collection methods

To explore and understand Economics teachers' assessment feedback practices within a qualitative research framework, I employed semi-structured individual face-to-face interviews as the primary data collection method. This approach, as Brinkmann (2014) notes, enables researchers to delve into participants' perspectives while allowing for the exploration of emerging themes. The semi-structured format provided a balance between consistency across interviews and the flexibility to pursue unique insights offered by each participant.

I developed an interview guide with open-ended questions focusing on teachers' experiences with assessment feedback, their motivations for using specific feedback strategies, and their perceptions of the role of feedback in Economics education. The guide was informed by the literature on assessment feedback and Economics education but remained flexible enough to explore unexpected themes that emerged during the conversations.

The interviews lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes each, with the actual duration determined by the depth of the teachers' responses and the number of follow-up questions. This extended time frame allowed for an in-depth exploration of the teachers' experiences and perspectives, providing rich, detailed data for analysis. To ensure accurate data capture, I used digital audio recording devices to record the interviews, with the participants' consent. This allowed for repeated listening and thorough analysis of the teachers' responses, ensuring that nuances in tone and emphasis were not lost in the transcription process. In addition to the interviews, I collected samples of feedback provided by the teachers on student work.

These samples were selected using specific criteria to ensure a representative and diverse range of feedback examples. The selection criteria included:

- Variety of assessment types: Samples were chosen from different types of assessments (e.g., tests, essays, projects) to capture a broad range of feedback practices.
- Time frame: Feedback samples were collected from the current and previous academic term to ensure recency and relevance.
- Student performance levels: Samples were selected to represent feedback given to students across different performance levels (high, average, and low achieving) to examine potential variations in feedback approaches.
- Grade levels: Feedback samples were collected from Grades 10, 11, and 12 to capture potential differences in feedback practices across grade levels.

For each teacher, 5-7 feedback samples that met the specified criteria were collected, with all identifying information redacted. This document analysis, as proposed by Bowen (2009), yielded concrete examples of the teachers' feedback practices and served to corroborate the interview data. The document analysis encompassed a variety of feedback formats, including written comments on assignments and rubrics utilised for assessing economics projects. This multi-method approach augmented the richness and credibility of the data, facilitating triangulation between the teachers' stated practices and their actual feedback artefacts.

2.4 Data analysis technique

To analyse the semi-structured interviews and document samples, I employed thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2021). This method involves identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data, offering a flexible yet rigorous approach to qualitative data analysis. The analysis process consisted of six interconnected phases, each building upon insights gained in the previous stage.

The first phase, familiarisation with the data, involved immersing myself in the collected information. I repeatedly read the interview transcripts and examined the feedback samples, making initial notes on potential codes and themes. This deep engagement with the raw data ensured a comprehensive understanding of the content before moving to a more structured analysis. In the second phase, generating initial codes, I systematically worked through the entire data set, assigning codes to relevant segments of text. These codes captured both semantic content (explicit meanings) and latent content (underlying ideas and assumptions), providing a rich basis for subsequent thematic development. I used qualitative data analysis software to facilitate this process, allowing for efficient organisation and retrieval of coded data. The third phase, searching for themes, involved collating codes into potential themes. I looked for patterns and relationships among the codes,

considering how different codes might combine to form overarching themes. I created thematic maps to visualise these relationships, helping to identify main themes and sub-themes within the data. In the fourth phase, reviewing themes, I refined the initial themes, checking their validity in relation to both the coded extracts and the entire data set. This process involved re-reading the entire data set to ensure the themes accurately represented the data and addressed the research questions. Some themes were combined, others were split, and some were discarded if they lacked sufficient supporting data. The fifth phase, defining and naming themes, involved further refinement and clarification of each theme. I wrote detailed analyses for each theme, considering how it fits into the broader narrative of the research and its implications for understanding Economics teachers' use of assessment feedback. Clear, concise names were developed for each theme to capture their essence. In the final phase, producing the report, I selected compelling extract examples that vividly illustrated the themes. The analysis was related to the research question and literature on assessment feedback in economics education, producing a scholarly report that went beyond mere description to offer interpretive insights.

Throughout the analysis, I paid particular attention to how teachers discussed their motivations for using specific feedback strategies, their perceptions of the role of feedback in Economics education, and the challenges they faced in implementing effective feedback practices. This approach allowed me to uncover the complex factors influencing teachers' feedback practices in Economics education within the South African context. By employing this analytical framework, I aimed to reveal the intricate motivations driving Economics teachers to invest in providing quality assessment feedback. The analysis shed light on teachers' perceptions of the value of feedback in enhancing student understanding of economic concepts, their practical reasons for engaging in specific feedback practices, and how their aspirations for student success intersected with the challenges of teaching Economics in South African public schools.

3. Findings and Discussion

This section explores the motivations and reasons that drive Economics teachers to engage in assessment feedback practices. The main theme identified is "Providing Assessment Feedback for Student Empowerment," which reflects why the participants view assessment feedback positively. From analysing the information provided by the participants and the document analysis, two sub-themes emerged:

- Using assessment feedback for academic growth.
- Providing assessment feedback for real-world application.

These sub-themes will be presented and discussed separately, accompanied by relevant quotes from participants and examples from the document analysis. Each sub-theme will be followed by a discussion, allowing for a more focused examination of the findings and their implications for Economics Education.

3.1 Providing assessment feedback for student empowerment

The information gathered from interviews with teachers and document analysis shows that all three participating teachers in this study believe that providing assessment feedback enhances students' understanding of Economics and prepares them for future academic and professional challenges. The findings also highlight the reasons some teachers remain committed to delivering detailed and timely feedback despite facing challenges such as large class sizes and time constraints (Steinberg & Sartain, 2021).

3.1.1 "When you give detailed feedback, it's like opening a door to their economic understanding"

When teachers in the current study talked about the primary reasons they provide assessment feedback, they usually referred to its role in enhancing students' understanding of economic concepts and principles. Below are some of the teachers' responses that represent this sub-theme:

> "*I see feedback as a key that unlocks students' potential in Economics. When you give detailed feedback, it's like opening a door to their economic understanding. It's not just about right or wrong answers, but guiding them to think critically about economic principles.*" (Teacher A)
>
> "*Providing feedback is my way of scaffolding their learning. Each comment I make is a building block, helping them construct a solid foundation in economic theory and analysis. It's rewarding to see how students grow in their understanding when they engage with the feedback.*" (Teacher B)
>
> "*In Economics, concepts build on each other. My feedback aims to create connections between ideas. When I point out how a student's analysis of supply and demand relates to market equilibrium, for example, I'm helping them see the bigger picture of how the economy works.*" (Teacher C)

The teachers' responses reveal a sophisticated understanding of the role of feedback in economics education, aligning with several key theoretical frameworks and recent literature in the field.

Firstly, the teachers' perspectives strongly resonate with the concept of feedback literacy as proposed by Carless and Boud (2018). Feedback literacy emphasises the importance of developing students' capacity to understand, interpret, and act on feedback. Teacher A's metaphor of feedback as "a key that unlocks students' potential" and "opens a door to their economic understanding" reflects the idea of feedback as a tool for empowerment and deeper comprehension, rather than simply a corrective measure.

The notion of scaffolding, as mentioned by Teacher B, aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory of learning, particularly the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). By viewing feedback as a means to construct "a solid foundation in economic theory and analysis," the teacher effectively uses feedback to bridge the gap between what students can do independently and what they can achieve with guidance. This approach is supported by Hattie and Timperley's (2007) model of effective feedback, which emphasises feedback that addresses the task, the process, and self-regulation.

Teacher C's focus on creating connections between economic concepts through feedback reflects the constructivist approach to learning (Bada & Olusegun, 2015). By helping students see "the bigger picture of how the economy works," the teacher facilitates the construction of knowledge, enabling students to develop a more integrated understanding of economics. This aligns with Maistry and David's (2018) argument for moving beyond rote learning towards more analytical and application-based approaches in economics education.

Moreover, the teachers' responses indicate a clear alignment with the concept of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) as described by Shulman (1986). Their feedback practices demonstrate a combination of subject expertise with effective teaching strategies tailored specifically to the nuances of economics education. This is particularly important given the unique challenges and opportunities presented by economics as a subject, as noted by Grussendorff et al. (2014). The emphasis on critical thinking, as highlighted by Teacher A, reflects the higher-order thinking skills emphasised in Bloom's Taxonomy (Anderson et al., 2001). This suggests that these teachers view feedback not just as a tool for correcting errors but as a means to promote deep learning and analytical skills essential for economics. Lastly, the teachers' approaches to feedback address the call for more culturally responsive and inclusive educational practices in economics education, as advocated by Maistry (2023). By using feedback to help students understand complex economic relationships and see the

"bigger picture," teachers are preparing students to engage with the economic realities of South Africa and beyond.

These findings suggest that the teachers have a nuanced and theoretically grounded understanding of the role of feedback in economics education. Their approaches align with contemporary theories of effective feedback practices and underscore the potential of feedback as a powerful tool in economics education within the South African context. This is particularly relevant given the ongoing challenges in South African education and the need for economic empowerment, as highlighted by Spaull (2013) and Van der Berg et al. (2022).

Document analysis revealed consistent patterns in the teachers' feedback practices. For instance, in a Grade 11 Economics assignment on monetary policy, Teacher A's feedback included comments such as:

> "*Good analysis of interest rates, but consider how this relates to inflation targeting. How might the Reserve Bank's decisions impact consumers and businesses?*"
>
> "*You've explained the concept of monetary policy well. Now, can you think about how changes in the repo rate might affect employment levels in different sectors of our economy?*"
>
> "*Your discussion of quantitative easing is thorough. Consider this: How might such a policy impact the value of the Rand in international markets? What could be the implications for our exports?*"

Teacher B's feedback on a Grade 10 assignment about market structures included:

> "*Excellent description of perfect competition. Now, think about why this model rarely exists in reality. What factors in the real world prevent markets from being perfectly competitive?*"
>
> "*You've listed the characteristics of oligopolies correctly. Can you provide an example of an oligopoly in the South African economy? How does this market structure affect consumers?*"

Teacher C provided the following feedback on a Grade 12 essay about economic growth:

> "*Your explanation of the factors contributing to economic growth is comprehensive. However, consider this: Are all types of economic growth equally beneficial? What are the potential downsides of rapid economic growth for a developing country like South Africa?*"
>
> "*You've discussed the role of foreign direct investment well. Now, think about the potential risks of relying too heavily on foreign investment. How might a country balance the benefits and risks?*"

The document analysis reveals a consistent pattern of feedback practices that align with several key educational theories and contemporary approaches to economics education. These findings provide valuable insights into how teachers operationalise their feedback philosophies in practice. The feedback examples demonstrate a clear application of Bloom's Taxonomy (Anderson et al., 2001), particularly regarding higher-order thinking skills. The teachers consistently push students beyond mere recall and understanding towards application, analysis, and evaluation. For instance, Teacher A's question about how changes in the repo rate might affect employment levels requires students to apply their knowledge of monetary policy to a real-world scenario and analyse its potential impacts. This approach aligns with the concept of deep learning as described by Marton and Säljö (1976). By encouraging students to consider broader implications and interconnections, such as linking interest rates to inflation targeting or perfect competition to real-world market factors, the teachers promote a deeper understanding of economic concepts rather than surface-level learning. The feedback also reflects the principles of constructive alignment (Biggs, 1996). The teachers' comments assess knowledge while aligning with the learning objectives of developing critical thinking and analytical skills in economics. This is evident in questions that prompt students to consider real-world applications and implications of economic theories.

Moreover, the feedback demonstrates a strong focus on contextualising economic concepts within the South African environment. This aligns with situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991), which emphasises the importance of learning in context. By asking students to consider the impact of economic policies on South African consumers, businesses, and industries, the teachers help students see the relevance of economic theories to their lives and communities. The teachers' feedback also reflects the principles of scaffolding (Wood et al., 1976). They acknowledge students' current understanding ("Good analysis," "Excellent description") and then guide them toward more complex thinking. This approach supports Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development, helping students bridge the gap between their current understanding and more advanced economic reasoning.

Furthermore, the feedback demonstrates an application of critical pedagogy in economics education, as advocated by Maistry (2023). By encouraging students to question the potential downsides of economic growth or the risks of foreign investment, the teachers foster a critical approach to economic theories and policies, rather than presenting them as unquestionable truths. The consistent pattern of asking students to consider real-world implications and challenges to economic models aligns with the call for more analytical and application-based approaches in economics education (Maistry & David, 2018). It also addresses the need to prepare students for the complexities of South Africa's economic environment, as highlighted by Spaull and Jansen (2019).

In conclusion, the document analysis reveals that these teachers implement feedback practices that are theoretically grounded and aligned with contemporary approaches to economics education. Their feedback goes beyond simple correction to foster critical thinking, real-world application, and a nuanced understanding of economic concepts within the South African context. This approach has the potential to develop economically literate citizens capable of engaging critically with economic issues, which is crucial for addressing the economic challenges faced by South Africa (Van der Berg et al., 2022).

3.1.2 Providing assessment feedback for real-world application

The second sub-theme focuses on teachers' motivations to use assessment feedback as a bridge between theoretical knowledge and practical application of economic principles. The following quotes illustrate this theme:

> "*My feedback often includes real-world examples or current economic events. I want students to see how the theories they're learning play out in the actual economy. It's about making Economics come alive for them.*" (Teacher A)
>
> "*When I provide feedback, I'm always thinking about how to push students to apply their knowledge. I'll ask questions like, 'How would this economic policy affect small businesses in your community?' It's about preparing them to think like economists.*" (Teacher B)
>
> "*I see my role as not just teaching Economics, but preparing future citizens who can understand and engage with economic issues. My feedback aims to develop their analytical skills so they can make informed decisions in their personal and professional lives.*" (Teacher C)

The teachers' responses in this sub-theme reveal a strong emphasis on bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application in economics education. This approach aligns with several contemporary educational theories and addresses key challenges in economics education, particularly within the South African context. Firstly, the teachers' focus on real-world application resonates strongly with the theory of situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). By incorporating real-world examples and current economic events into their feedback, as mentioned by Teacher A, they are situating economic concepts within authentic contexts. This method helps to make abstract economic theories more concrete and relevant to students' lives, potentially enhancing both

engagement and understanding. The emphasis on application also aligns with the higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy (Anderson et al., 2001), particularly the 'apply' and 'analyse' categories. Teacher B's strategy of asking students to consider how economic policies might affect local businesses demonstrates this push towards higher-order thinking skills. This approach goes beyond mere comprehension of economic concepts, encouraging critical analysis of their real-world implications.

Moreover, the teachers' responses reflect the principles of authentic assessment (Gulikers et al., 2004). By framing feedback in terms of real-world economic scenarios and encouraging students to "think like economists," the teachers prepare students for the kind of thinking and problem-solving they might encounter in future academic or professional settings related to economics. The notion of preparing "future citizens who can understand and engage with economic issues," as expressed by Teacher C, aligns with the goals of critical pedagogy in economics education (Maistry, 2023). This approach aims to develop not just economic knowledge, but also the critical thinking skills necessary for active citizenship in a complex economic world. It addresses the call for economics education to contribute to broader social and economic development goals in South Africa (Van der Berg et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the teachers' approaches demonstrate an application of the concept of transfer of learning (Bransford & Schwartz, 1999). By consistently encouraging students to apply economic theories to real-world situations, they facilitate the transfer of learning from the classroom to practical contexts. This is crucial in economics education, where the ultimate goal is often to equip students with the ability to understand and engage with real-world economic issues. The focus on local economic contexts, as evidenced by Teacher B's reference to "small businesses in your community," highlights the importance of contextualising economics education within the South African environment. This aligns with Maistry and David's (2018) call for more context-sensitive approaches to economics education in South Africa.

Lastly, the teachers' motivations correspond with the concept of economics education for capability development, as discussed by Sen (1999). By aiming to cultivate students' analytical skills and their ability to make informed decisions, the teachers are contributing to the broader goal of enhancing students' capabilities to function effectively in economic contexts. These findings suggest that the teachers in this study are motivated by a desire to make economics education relevant, practical, and empowering for their students. Their approach aligns with contemporary educational theories and addresses key challenges in economics education, particularly within the South African context. By bridging theory and practice, these teachers are working towards developing economically literate citizens capable of engaging critically with the economic challenges facing South Africa.

Document analysis further substantiated this motivation. In a Grade 12 assignment on international trade, Teacher B's feedback included:

> "*Your explanation of comparative advantage is correct, but consider how this principle applies to South Africa's trade relationships. What are the implications for local industries and job markets?*"
>
> "*You've discussed free trade agreements well. Now, think about how these might impact small-scale farmers in our region. What policies might help mitigate any negative effects?*"
>
> "*Good analysis of exchange rates. Consider this: How might the recent fluctuations in the Rand's value affect South African businesses that import raw materials?*"

Teacher A's feedback on a Grade 11 project about unemployment included:

> "*Your overview of unemployment types is thorough. Now, relate this to our local context: Which type of unemployment do you think is most prevalent in our province? What evidence supports your view?*"

> "*Excellent discussion of the social impacts of unemployment. Can you think of any initiatives in our community that are trying to address these issues? How effective do you think they are?*"

Teacher C provided the following feedback on a Grade 10 assignment about economic systems:

> "*You've described the characteristics of a mixed economy well. Looking at South Africa's economic policies, where do you see elements of both market and command systems? Provide specific examples.*"

> "*Your comparison of capitalism and socialism is balanced. Now, think about how these economic systems might address a current issue in South Africa, such as income inequality. What would be the potential advantages and disadvantages of each approach?*"

The document analysis reveals a sophisticated approach to feedback in economics education that aligns with recent literature and addresses contemporary challenges in the field, particularly within the South African context. Firstly, the teachers' consistent contextualisation of economic concepts within South African realities aligns with recent calls for decolonising the economics curriculum. As Chelwa (2021) argues, there is a pressing need to make economics education more relevant to African contexts. The teachers' feedback encourages students to consider local industries, regional farmers, and provincial unemployment, demonstrating this contextualisation in practice. The emphasis on real-world application in the feedback reflects recent discussions on the importance of experiential learning in economics education. Mendez-Carbajo et al. (2021) highlight the value of using real-time data and current economic issues to enhance student engagement and understanding. The teachers' references to recent Rand fluctuations and current South African economic policies exemplify this approach.

Moreover, the feedback aligns with the concept of "economics imperialism," as discussed by Mäki (2021). By encouraging students to consider the broader implications of economic policies on social issues like unemployment and inequality, the teachers help students understand the pervasive influence of economic thinking across various domains of society. Their approach also resonates with recent literature on developing critical thinking in economics education. Carrasco-Gallego (2022) argues for the importance of fostering students' ability to question economic models and theories. The feedback prompts students to consider the limitations of free trade agreements or the potential downsides of different economic systems, reflecting this critical approach.

Furthermore, the feedback aligns with contemporary discussions on the role of economics education in promoting sustainable development. Halonen et al. (2022) stress the need for economics education to address sustainability challenges. The teachers' questions about the impacts of economic policies on local communities and industries reflect concern for sustainable and inclusive economic development. Their focus on developing students' analytical skills through feedback aligns with recent literature on economics education for capability development. Devaney et al. (2022) advocate for an approach to economics education that enhances students' abilities to engage with complex economic issues. The feedback encouraging students to analyse local economic initiatives or compare economic systems demonstrates this capability-enhancing approach.

Lastly, the teachers' emphasis on relating economic concepts to current South African challenges aligns with recent calls for more policy-relevant economics education. Patel (2023) argues that economics education should equip students to engage with pressing policy issues. The feedback prompting students to consider policies to mitigate negative effects on small-scale farmers or address income inequality exemplifies this policy-oriented approach.

The document analysis reveals that these teachers are implementing feedback practices that align well with recent literature in economics education. Their approach addresses key contemporary

challenges, including the need for contextualisation, critical thinking, sustainability awareness, and policy relevance. By consistently encouraging students to apply economic concepts to real-world, local contexts, these teachers are fostering the development of economically literate citizens capable of critically engaging with the economic challenges faced by South Africa. This approach has the potential to make economics education more relevant, engaging, and impactful for students, contributing to broader goals of economic development and empowerment in South Africa.

4. Conclusion

This study explored the motivations of Economics teachers in South African rural public schools regarding their provision of assessment feedback. The findings reveal two primary motivations: the use of assessment feedback to enhance students' academic growth and the promotion of real-world applications of economic principles. These motivations indicate a profound commitment to student learning and a nuanced understanding of the role of economics education in preparing students for future academic and professional challenges. Teachers perceive feedback as an essential tool for deepening students' comprehension of economic concepts, fostering critical thinking, and bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. They consistently highlight the importance of contextualising economic theories within the South African environment, demonstrating a dedication to making economics education relevant and accessible to their students. This approach aligns with recent calls for decolonising the economics curriculum and adapting it to African contexts (Chelwa, 2021).

The study reveals that teachers' feedback practices are consistent with contemporary educational theories, including feedback literacy (Carless & Boud, 2018), situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and critical pedagogy in economics education (Maistry, 2023). Their methodologies exhibit a nuanced understanding of the role of feedback in economics education, transcending mere correction to promote deep learning and practical application of economic knowledge. This is in accordance with recent literature emphasising the significance of experiential learning and critical thinking within economics education (Mendez-Carbajo et al., 2021; Carrasco-Gallego, 2022). The teachers' emphasis on real-world applications and policy implications in their feedback practices illustrates an awareness of the necessity for economics education to address pressing societal issues. This approach resonates with ongoing discussions concerning the role of economics education in fostering sustainable development and addressing policy challenges (Halonen et al., 2022; Patel, 2023). By encouraging students to consider the implications of economic theories and policies on local industries, communities, and social issues, the teachers equip students to engage critically with the complex economic realities of South Africa.

Moreover, the study underscores the potential of feedback practices to contribute to the broader objectives of economic empowerment and development in South Africa. By cultivating analytical skills, critical thinking, and the capacity to apply economic concepts to real-world situations, these teachers work toward developing economically literate citizens who can contribute meaningfully to the nation's economic discourse and development. The findings also highlight the dedication and professionalism of these rural Economics teachers, who exhibit a commitment to providing quality feedback despite challenges such as large class sizes and resource constraints. This commitment reflects a profound understanding of the transformative potential of economics education and the crucial role of effective feedback in realising this potential.

4.1 Limitations of the Study

This study presents several limitations that must be acknowledged when interpreting the results. The small sample size, comprising only three teachers from rural public schools, constrains the generalizability of the findings to broader contexts. Furthermore, the study's geographic focus on a single region of South Africa may not adequately represent the diversity of educational contexts

across the country. The reliance on teachers' self-reported motivations and practices introduces the potential for social desirability bias. Additionally, the study was conducted over a limited time frame, which may not account for variations in teachers' motivations or practices over an extended period.

4.2 Recommendations

Acknowledging the findings and recognising these limitations, several recommendations are proposed:

- The implementation of targeted professional development programs can assist Economics teachers in refining their feedback practices, with an emphasis on enhancing feedback literacy and contextualising economic concepts within the South African environment.
- Revising Economics curricula to explicitly incorporate opportunities for meaningful feedback can underscore the application of economic theories to real-world, local contexts.
- Providing additional support and resources to teachers can help them address the challenges of delivering detailed, timely feedback, particularly in settings characterised by large class sizes. Developing strategies to enhance students' feedback literacy can encourage them to actively engage with and apply the feedback they receive.
- Further research across diverse South African educational contexts is necessary to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of feedback practices in Economics education. Implementing longitudinal studies can investigate the long-term impact of these feedback practices on students' economic understanding and their future academic and professional outcomes.
- Encouraging the sharing of best practices among Economics teachers, potentially through the establishment of professional learning communities focused on assessment feedback, can further improve the quality of feedback practices.

5. Declarations

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Data availability: Due to ethical standards and the conditions outlined in the consent agreement with participants, the data must remain confidential. However, interested persons may contact the corresponding author for more information.

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