





## Chronicling teacher's experiences in the teaching of economics in the Covid-19 era

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### ABSTRACT

Worldwide the emergence of Covid-19 brought about shock and many challenges in the education system. During the lockdown, schools were closed and that reduced contact time. Hence, almost 75 percent of a full school year of the curriculum was not covered. Approximately 400. 000 to 500. 000 learners dropped out of school and to date, the total number of drop-outs grown to 750.000 in South African schools. The study explored the teachers' experiences in the teaching of Economics during the COVID-19 pandemic. Underpinned by an interpretive paradigm, the study adopted a qualitative research approach and used a case study design. The samples comprised four township secondary schools in KwaZulu Natal (Durban). Using purposive sampling, two Economics teachers were sampled. Two instruments (semi-structured interviews and document review) were used as data collection tools. The findings revealed that Economics teachers experienced problems when teaching the subject during the pandemic. They have found it challenging to adapt to the new teaching methods like using technological tools. The lack of resources and Economics instructional materials exacerbated teachers' difficulties. The findings revealed that poor attendance for teachers and learners was extraordinary. Notably, due to fears of being sick and infected, stigmatization within the schools prevailed, resulting in bad working relations. From the findings, the study recommends new teaching approaches to stabilize and restructure the curriculum and the retainment of some of the COVID-19 regulations to ensure the effective teaching and learning of Economics.

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## Introduction

Since when the Coronavirus disease (Covid-19) emerged in China it has been spreading all over the world. Worldwide its emergence has created a lot of economic, social, educational, and political challenges. For this paper, the focus is on educational challenges that Economics teachers experienced in schools during the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic has brought about shock in the education system, confusion, and disruptions, all of these affected the school community badly. UNICEF (2021) maintains that the effect of the Covid-19 outburst has been shattering, with learners between 75 percent to a full school year behind with their school work. UNICEF reports that, about 400. 000 to 500. 000 learners dropped out of school during the pandemic era and as of to-date the total number of drop-outs has increased to 750.000 in South Africa, (Unicef, 2021). Apart from learners dropping out of school, to minimise the spread of the virus, schools were closed and learners stayed at home. Hence, learners lost their time to be taught and thus, they were behind in terms of the work to be covered as prescribed in the Annual Teaching Plan (ATP). To this end, this proves that the pandemic has shaken the teaching and the education system as a whole.

The education system experienced sudden challenges in coming up with mitigation strategies to circumvent, curb or lessen the spreading of the virus. These strategies habitually disturbed the daily routines of citizens and restrain rights and privileges. Policies envisioned to curtail the spread of the virus have (Goudeau, Sanrey, Stanczak, Manstead, and Darnon, 2021) triggered hostile response, aggression, and resistance to the public (schools included). Prominently, all the strategies were 'trial and error' based as the virus was new to everybody and thus, there were no tried and tested strategies known to better the circumstance. Remarkably,

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there were no cut-and-dry or solid strategies implemented to curb the spread of the virus. In the midst, new teaching approaches and strategies emerged and teachers used them in trying to uphold their teaching. In Turkey Sharp, Nelson, Lucas, Julius, McCrone, and Sims (2020) study revealed that Economics teachers had both positive and negative considerations about the nature of the teaching and learning process that occurred because of the Covid-19 pandemic. New elements were surfacing due to Covid-19, for example, in the United States the study by Goudeau et al. (2021) revealed that closing the schools resulted in intensified racial inequalities in learning and achievement.

These authors emphasise that when schools were closed it was the survival of the fittest, only those who had better socioeconomic status, better background, or middle-higher class families were able to keep up with the demands of the pandemic. In this instance, they maintained that school closures have aggravated academic achievement gaps and that is blamed on social class and ethnic group. Similarly, Cifuentes-Faura (2020) declares that both teachers and learners have had to adjust to a new teaching pedagogy yet many of them were inadequately equipped. Teachers at the most, experienced difficulties in using information and communication technologies (ICT) tools, and learners on the other hand suffered because they lacked ICT resources to follow online learning (i.e. WhatsApp groups created) and thus cannot adapt. Chen (2010) argues that for effective ICT integration in the education sector teacher's attitudes towards ICT, educational competencies and equipped backgrounds should be improved.

Goudeau et al. (2021) submitted that Economics experienced difficulties with the scarcity of Economics instructional materials during the pandemic. Orlov et al. (2021) expound that lack of infrastructures, such as sanitisers, masks, hand soaps, classrooms, chairs, tables, desks, water, toilet facilities, ICT facilities, and internet access remarkably frustrated Economics teachers, consequently teaching Economics remained a problem. Adu, Badaru, and Adu (2022) sustain that Covid 19 brought about sluggishness in executing daily routines and a scarcity of data. Sharp et al. (2020), Goudeau et al. (2021), and Cifuentes-Faura, (2020) agrees that poor interaction, technological infrastructure, and lack of teacher competencies related to distance education were noted as negative consequences. However, the literature (Sharp et al., 2020, Goudeau et al., 2021 & Cifuentes-Faura, 2020), has proved that the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic has not only affected the education system negatively. There were positive effects such as improved communication between the teacher and the parent, improved cooperation, and compassion, and the use of ICT gadgets in teaching (online classes), (Ojo & Adu, 2018). This proves that teachers have mixed and deferring views of the Covid-19 pandemic with its educational implications. In this regard, this study aims to explore what are the teachers' experiences in the teaching of Economics during the Covid-19 pandemic in the KwaZulu Natal schools in Pinetown (Durban).

To address the problem of the study, the following research question is raised to guide the study:

- i. *What are teachers' experiences in the teaching of Economics during the Covid-19 pandemic?*

## **Literature Review**

### **Theoretical Underpinnings**

The study explores teachers' experiences in Economic teaching during the Coronavirus pandemic. And thus, it focuses on Economics teachers as they are the vehicles to inspire learners into learning Economics in schools. The discussions above highlighted that Economics teachers experienced challenges in the teaching and learning process. As such with school closure more time was lost and thus teachers could not finish the prescribed curriculum. The emergence of online or distance learning instructional approaches poses challenges as teachers themselves were not familiar with the use of ICT gadgets (ICT integration into learning). Many external forces emerged due to the pandemic i.e. education, economy, and health implications, all these compelled schools to bend forth and ensure that at least learners are exposed to home-schooling. Therefore, underpinning the present study is the ecological systems theory developed by Bronfenbrenner (1994). According to Bronfenbrenner's (1994) theory, an individual's development revolves around the related systems. This suggests that happenings in an institution (like a school) are informed by its central view of reality, (deSousa, Richter & Raath, 2017).

Bronfenbrenner (1994) identifies how ecological systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem, are interrelated in shaping an individual, or an organisation. He expounds that the interconnectedness of these systems can positively or negatively affect the happenings in schools for example. Bronfenbrenner's (1994) views centre on the impression that schools form part of their economic, socio-political, and cultural contexts. Rashidi (2019) maintains that the South African economic and socio-political contexts are a system that can be mirrored in the economy, education, law, governance, financial institutions, etc. as sub-systems of the ecological system. DeSousa et al., (2017) sustain that school community and social institutions have towards finding connections between the systems as this can result in greater positive influences on schools, individuals (learners), and families.

In this study, the researchers use the ecological system to locate Economics teachers in the broader social context of teaching and learning. Thus, this will allow the researchers a better understanding of what were the teacher's experiences when teaching Economics during the Covid-19 pandemic. According to Adu, Galloway, and Olaoye (2014), the teaching of Economics in schools affords learners the chance to live evocatively in this ever-changing changing economic world. For Adu (2012) this is because Economics assists learners in understanding and redressing the disparities. Therefore, it helps to understand how the wider system (pandemic) affected the sub-systems (different) and also assists in how the systems are interrelated to each other. The pandemic was

a global crisis that affected the economy, the way of life, the health of individuals, the environment, and the increased deaths worldwide, and thus Bronfenbrenners' (1994) theory will assist in understanding how interconnected systems affected teachers teaching Economics in schools. Furthermore, the theory will offer an understanding of the fact that many causative factors hindered teaching and learning as result schools were too close to minimising the spread of the virus and thus far impede the effective teaching and learning of Economics in schools.

## **Empirical Review**

### **Teaching Economics in the COVID-19 era**

Like many countries, South Africa has been widely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Many schools and educational institutions had to close and switch from face-to-face teaching to remote or online teaching. However, this was only applicable to the well of schools while most public schools attended by low-class children shut down with little or without any compensation in terms of schooling (online instruction). Mostly, if not at all, there was no communication between such schools and learners or parents. The information was shared via media i.e. radios, television (TV) news, or teachers cascading the information on their surrounding areas. While the pandemic continued to engulf the country, the schools were to re-open under the strict Covid-19 regulations, and due to the social distancing of 1.5 meters learners were to alternate schooling days. Consequently, there was no ample time set to cover the work as prescribed in the ATP. These views are corroborated by Goudeau et al., (2021) who sustain that in some African countries like Ethiopia, Kenya, Liberia, Tanzania, and Uganda, the Covid-19 disaster has "resulted in learning loss ranging from six months to more than one year, and this learning loss appears to be greater for working-class children (that is, those attending no-fee schools) than for upper/middle-class children". To date, there are schools at which learners alternate, yet in some of the schools, all learners returned. Surely, this created a gap in curriculum coverage. It can be argued that the gap will be recurring because across the grades the work has not been covered. And these questions the quality of learners we are going to have. Cifuentes-Faura (2020) anticipated that due to school closures, the Covid-19 pandemic will considerably escalate the social class achievement gap and that it will take years to fill.

Ferhat, Merve, Gökşen, Osman, and Mehmet (2021) purport that the spread of Covid-19 has affected not only the health and economy sectors but also the education system around the world. UNESCO (2020) has reported that about 1.5 billion learners and 63 million teachers in 188 countries were affected by the Coronavirus pandemic. In reducing the impact of the pandemic most countries adopted distance learning/online learning. In Turkey, the Ministry of Education (MoE), and Turkey radio and Television corporation collaborated and opened three different television channels to cater to distance education, (UNESCO, 2020). According to UNESCO in the United States, China, England, Germany, and Italy deterrent measures were taken, contact time/face-to-face teaching was suspended, and effective teaching measures for the teaching and learning process (distance learning) were implemented. The South African study conducted by Chisadza, Clance, Mthembu, Nicholls, and Yitbarek in 2021, revealed that when Coronavirus emerged there was a transition from contact learning or face-to-face to online learning. Their study reported that online learning necessitated ICT integration. And thus, their study revealed that for learners who had access to Wi-Fi, relative to using mobile internet data their academic performance was positively affected. While lower academic performance was noted for learners who found a move to online learning difficult, (Chisadza et al., 2021 & Ferhat et al., 2021).

Realistically, it can be argued that for most marginalised families (children), online teaching and learning remain a dream that will never come true. Even for some teachers, using ICT tools in teaching online classes is a dream. The reason is, that teachers are not familiar with ICT technologies, for example, some cannot even type using a computer or a laptop. Even the smartphones they have, are only used to send messages and make calls, and barely WhatsApp for the older ones. Sharp et al., (2020) and Goudeau et al., (2021) sustain that technological infrastructure and lack of teacher competencies related to distance education and poor communication impede distance learning. Yemi, Jacob, and Akanbusoye (2021) reported that they experienced poor supervision as subject advisors did not come to schools to offer academic support due to Covid-19 regulations. In the views of these authors, Economics teachers had to deal with poorly motivated learners and had a negative attitude toward learning Economics, Adu et al., (2022). Mark (2017) highlighted that most learners perceive Economics as a boring and voluminous subject to study. Being away from schools diminished my passion and interest, as such during the lockdown this negative attitude was aggravated. According to Adu (2014) teaching Economics makes learners live 'eloquently' within the changing economic world.

Economics is a practical social science subject, therefore, for the effective teaching of Economics teachers use the problem-solving method as technique. In this regard, learners are actively involved in activities such as conducting investigations and collecting and making understanding information of data. This requires teachers to personal cultivate and allows learners enough time to get used to the problem-solving type of questions. During lockdown this was impossible. Buheji (2019) defines problem-solving as the "act of defining a problem, determining the cause of the problem, identifying, prioritising and selecting alternatives for a solution, and implementing a solution". From this definition, it can be concluded that the pandemic propelled the gap in what learners were to do in schools while they subscribed to the lockdown and Covid-19 protocols and regulations. On the other hand, good Economics teachers could have used this opportunity of the pandemic to enhance the abundance in solving Covid-19-related problems and structure their case study questions and instil problem-solving skills in learners, (Buheji, 2019). Based on the discussions above, the study, therefore, aims to explore what are teachers' experiences in the teaching of Economics during the covid-19 pandemic in the KwaZulu Natal schools.

## Research and Method

### Research design and methods

Underpinning the study is the interpretive paradigm. The study employs a case study research design as a data collection strategy. According to Yin (2013) case studies are an appropriate strategy to use when contextualising conditions relevant to the studied phenomenon. In selecting the research sites, research participants from different settings, and differing experiences on experiences they encounter when teaching Economics during the pandemic, a multiple case study design was of assistance. To gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena being studied (i.e. teachers' experiences in the teaching of Economics during the Covid-19 pandemic), the uses qualitative research approach. Purposively, the researchers selected four public high schools in KwaZulu Natal, Umlazi district, anticipated to provide distinctive qualitative data on teachers' practices in Economics teaching in the Covid-19 era. Additionally, Cohen et al., (2018) sustain that purposive sampling allows the researcher to pick relevant information-reach samples for the study. This is a qualitative study, and it intends to gain deeper insights into the phenomena under study, therefore in each case study school, two Economics teachers were sampled (n=8). To collect data semi-structured interviews and document reviews were used. In addressing ethical issues anonymity, confidentiality and privacy were respected and participants' consent was sought before the start of data collection. To analyse data themes were used as suggested by Creswell (2013) for example coding, sorting, and categorisation to analyse the responses from the participants and report writing. For data presentation, the false name for the four selected schools was used, such as school A, School B, school C and School D. In each school, participants were coded, ET1, ET2, ET3, and ET4 and School A, B, C or D respectively.

### Findings and Discussion

The study report on the teachers' experiences in the teaching of Economics during the Covid-19 pandemic. From the participants' responses, the following themes were formulated and they were used to present and discuss data:

- ii. A move from traditional teaching methods to distance or remote teaching methods
- iii. Poor attendance
- iv. Lack of infrastructure and resources
- v. Fears of getting sick or infected by the virus and the fear of stigmatisation

Participants were asked, "What are teachers' experiences in the teaching of Economics during the Covid-19 pandemic"?

#### A move from traditional teaching methods to distance or remote teaching methods

The participants' responses revealed that adopting new teaching methods was puzzling since the sampled schools were mainly attended by poor learners or disadvantaged learners. As one participant stated:

*As an Economics teacher, I have experienced difficulties in teaching Economics or teaching any subject in general. We are used to traditional teaching methods, for example, you prepare a lesson and go to the classroom and teach. To check or ensures that learners follow what is taught I ask questions. I will then be able to know or have an idea that my learners grasp the Economics topic in question. And if I noticed that learners are not clear, I try another strategy or technique to ensure that we are together. However, during the Covid 19 lockdown that was impossible. It was frustrating to be a teacher [...]. Practically, as black township schools, we enrol learners with poor financial backgrounds as such using social media or distance learning was not practical. Therefore, in short, I can say my teaching stopped during the lockdown. (School D-ET2)*

The participant emphasised that teaching in disadvantaged schools worsen the teaching of Economics during the pandemic, as teachers are used to traditional teaching methods. The emphasis was made to a point that the participants declared the stopping of the teaching and learning process.

The issue of involving parents was deemed ineffective in ensuring that at least a small amount of work is done as learners were given activities to complete while they were on lockdown. One participant declared:

*Due to social distancing, we were forced to rotational classes/or timetables... [...]. As a result, this delayed the completion of ATP as work could not be covered.... In our school, we were told to prepare activities, and worksheets and to give learners step-ahead documents to do at home with their parent's guidance. This was to keep them absorbed and active in the prescribed curriculum. Only to find that when learners return to school on their turn no work would have been done at all. And in that case, I feel that parents were not helping teachers to sustain their teaching. (School B-ET2)*

The argument put forward here, is that parental support was lacking in supporting learners in the course of their schooling during the pandemic, as parents were failing to prioritise their children's education.

The prevalence of ICT integration was common in the sampled schools. From the participants' responses, it emerged that incorporating ICT digitals in the teaching of Economics had championed teaching and learning. Really, for some Economics teachers, this lightened the burden during the trying times. However, to some teachers ICT integration accelerated frustration as they lacked the necessary skills to utilise technological tools in the classroom. In school A the participant attested:

*For informed teaching and learning, ICT has to be integrated into teaching and learning because it helps the learners to do homework, assignments, and school projects. Therefore, its accessibility is a need to enhance learners learning and train their minds for the near future. But during the Covid-19 era, the lack of ICT resources worsened the situation. The small number of ICT resources and infrastructures were limited/ or reserved for only grade 12 teachers to teach and prepare their learners for examinations. With the lower grades neglected. This act affected me badly because it felt like we as lower grades teachers our work is not recognised and grade 11 and grade 10 learners' right to education was impinged on. (School A-ET1)*

At school C one participant echoed:

*In remedying the situation I opened a WhatsApp group to communicate with my learners and I was able to reach a few of the learners. The vast majority of learners had no means of communication. In some cases, some learners were using their parents' cell phones to communicate. When posting something on the group it took days to get feedback because learners were not owning cell phones. Even the ones with cell phones did not bother to respond. (School C-ET2)*

As is evident from the participants' responses tentatively using ICT tools assisted in teaching during the Covid-19 era. However, the shortage of ICT tools impeded the full utilisation and keeping afloat teaching and learning. At school A, negative ramifications were heartily felt by the Economics teachers in the lower grades (i.e. grade 10 and 11 teachers) as the participant reported that he/she felt not recognised as a teacher with a right to use the infrastructure available to help his/her learners.

From the participants' comments, it emanated that Economics teachers experienced problems in teaching. Resultantly, many children (learners) received little/or no education when schools were closed. Corroborating the findings are Goudeau et al., (2021) who sustain that Covid-19 resulted in decreased contact time hence, less work was covered, and/or learners received no education at all. The little education that learners received was in the form of hand-outs, worksheets, and assignments which in turn did not serve the purpose of teaching learners remotely. In this regard, it can be argued that self-teaching served no purpose and it cannot be regarded as formal or rather normal education (more especially in township schools). As the findings proved that initially, the parents were at the Center of successful remote learning, which was not the case, however, in the Covid era. The study revealed further that to subscribe to Covid-19 regulations schools adopted rotational timetables, which reduced contact time to cover the enormous Economics content. As such learners ended up learning few topics than the prescribed Economics content in the ATP. The findings were corroborated by Adu et al., (2022) sustaining that Covid 19 brought about sluggishness in performing daily routines. From the participants' comments, it emerged further that integrating ICT, at a glimpse, prevailed to be a solution as teachers used ICT gadgets to communicate and send school work to the learners. However, to a certain degree ICT was viewed by some of the participants as impractical, due to unaffordability by most of the learners. In the views of Adu and Galloway (2015) indeed integrating ICT in the teaching of Economics has been prolific and thus even in our context, it was believed to be fruitful. Continuing with this view, Adu (2014) maintains that ICT integration in Economics teaching is a necessity because Economics countrywide has been reckoned as an important subject, thereby learners acquire the necessary skills they will need in their maturity. The participants revealed that they opened WhatsApp group chats to ensure that learners received the least education they can get. This confirmed the ideas of Ojo and Adu (2018) who attested that the emergence of ICT gadgets such as cellular phones, computers, or/ laptops, can succour in achieving educational goals and objectives in Economics.

Corroborating the findings obtained from interviews, data obtained from document review (ATP), revealed that the Economics curriculum has been reduced or limited to the important topics in the content teaching. But the data obtained from the lesson plan and/or lesson preparation showed that teachers failed to complete the reduced prescribed curriculum as per ATP. Supporting the argument, Unicef (2021) declared that during the pandemic teachers could not keep track of time as a result, they fallen behind in the completion of the ATP. Guided by Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological systems theory, the study found that the worldwide occurrence (of Covid-19) deadly affected the micro-level (teaching of Economics in schools) as teachers due to Covid repercussions could not finish the curriculum. Moreso, the theory suggested that there were many macrosystems to chronosystem factors that impeded teaching and learning as schools closed in curbing the spread of the virus. And this affected badly the teaching in schools.

### **Poor attendance**

The participants' comments revealed that poor attendance for both the teachers and the learners was rife during the pandemic. The findings also showed that nothing could have been done to minimise or control poor attendance. This is because school community members were advised to stay at home and self-quarantine or isolate themselves when felt sick or when demonstrated any Covid -19 related symptoms. The participants' views further worryingly revealed that learner absenteeism in particular matured to dropouts. As many learners who frequently absent themselves from school did not come back, and that accelerated the dropout rate. One of the participants noted:

*Before and after the lockdown school attendance was voluntary for both teachers and learners. But sometime after the minister of DBE announced that all learners were to return to schools, attendance was obligatory and schools were to ensure that learners attend. However, with the large number of learners enrolled in our school, it was not feasible that all our learners will return to school [...]. As a result, our learners continued to rotate. Also, attendance policies were compelling for both teachers and learners not to come to school when feeling sick. That made it difficult to teach Economics, as a result, I was stagnant in my teaching because learners lost concentration and consolidation due to the rotational timetables. And thus, there was a slow content absorption from*

*learners [...] because of family problems or having relatives infected by Covid-19[...]. In my grade 12 Economics class I had +/-5 learners who had chronic health conditions, who due to their vulnerability to infection and/or infected by/or others, were forced out of school [...]. At that, some (teachers and learners) took an advantage of the situation and absent themselves for no reason and which worsened the situation. More importantly, this harmed academic achievement. (School C-ET2)*

The participant emphasised that during the Covid-19 bizarre teachers experienced poor learner attendance, and teachers as well were not exempted from absenteeism. These sentiments were echoed by Economics teacher 1, in school D, the participant proclaim that “some learners acted sick so that can get some days off school for self-isolation”. Upon the review of the class attendance register and period register (for Economics classes), it was clear that poor attendance was a serious problem for the schools under study. As many learners (almost 55 percent) were marked absent. These findings were corroborated by Unicef (2021) who opines that almost 400. 000 to 500. 000 learners dropped out of school with 750.000 increased number of dropouts in SA during the pandemic era, with a drastic decline in academic achievement. Chisadza et al., (2021) agree that during the Covid-19 saga, learners’ lower academic performance was noted. In this regard, Economics teachers experienced discouragement as the situation was beyond their control. Poor attendance and wearing of masks were found to have fuelled behaviour problems amongst learners. And alternating timetables was believed to be the cause of experiencing behavioural problems. At school C, one participant stated that the Coronavirus pandemic has not made it easy for teachers to enhance discipline in schools. With learners alternating, it was hard for teachers to know learners by names, and wearing face masks made it even more difficult to recognise learners. Thus, it was also not easy to spot a misbehaving learner because teachers could not lip-read and identify who is making noise for example. In that regard, the emergence of the Coronavirus exacerbated the disciplinary problems in schools.

### **Lack of infrastructure and resources**

The findings revealed that a lack of resources and/or infrastructure yielded increased stress levels and frustration for Economics teachers. The idea of social distancing with a recommended distance of 1.5 meters apart from each other, was stressful for teachers because schools lacked resources. It also emerged that the instrument used to check the temperature at times was faulty and thus provided false information. One participant commented:

*My Economics classes are full, with learners above 70 per classroom. The shortage of resources/infrastructure for example books/workbooks, desks, and chairs, made it difficult to teach because we could not adhere to the Covid-19 protocols. My learners were sitting in pairs with no space between the desks. This was worrying because learners as children acted childish and could not internalise Covid-19 as a reality. Sometimes they would come to school /or the classroom without a face mask. To them, it was like it is the teacher who is a virus because it was only when the teacher enters the classroom they put on their masks and that served no purpose. We were short of sanitisers and hand wash soap. Therefore, learners could not maintain hygiene. At that point, some learners brought their sanitisers from home.[...]. (School B-ET2)*

The above comment emphasised the fact that the shortage of resources and lack of infrastructure continued to engulf schools during the pandemic era. And that compromised the Covid-19 regulations. These findings were corroborated by the data from the document reviewed. In the log book, it was documented that both the schools under study, lacked infrastructure as learners were sitting in pairs with no 1.5 meters distance. In some of the cases, there were no sanitisers and hand wash soap placed in the classrooms and also in the toilets. The sanitiser was only found at the gate where the screening took place. In support of these findings, Goudeau et al., (2021) and Adu et al., (2022) opine that Economics teachers experienced difficulties with the inadequacy of Economics teaching materials during the pandemic. Similarly, Orlov et al., (2021) explicated that schools lacked the infrastructure, such as sanitisers, masks, and hand soaps. Buheji (2019) added that the shortage of classrooms, chairs, tables, desks, water, and lavatory utensils exasperated Economics teachers, subsequently teaching Economics or teaching, in general, remained a problem. Bronfenbrenner’s theory, suggests that an individual’s growth circles around interconnected systems. The implication of this theory in this study implies that the reality of Covid-19 (as a global occurrence) affected the happenings in a school as a school forms part of the ecological systems as suggested in Bronfenbrenner’s (1994) theory, (deSousa et al., 2017). It emerged from the findings that the issue of ‘hand hygiene and breathing hygiene’ was compromised. School A - ET1 declared that during the pandemic frequently, taps run dry of water, as the eThekweni water (municipality) experienced problems with water supply systems. The participant explained further that, on some days, they operated without water. Hence, teachers experienced difficulties to adapt in the “new normal- the pandemic”. Subsequently, all these problems brought about challenges in the teaching profession. All this sustained that for effective distance and in-school learning more resources were required.

### **Fears of getting sick or infected by the virus and the fear of stigmatisation**

The findings revealed that the participants were scared about getting sick or infected by the virus and that hindered their effective teaching. One participant declared:

*Going to the classrooms was terrifying as we were fearing for our health. This resulted in self-quarantine, both learners and teachers when demonstrating Covid-19 symptoms learners and teachers will refrain from going to school. Or even if I was at school, I would not go to class to teach because I was afraid to enter the classroom so as not to spread the virus to my learners. Also, learners themselves demonstrated uneasiness with a teacher who reported having tested positive for Covid 19. [...]. From another angle, stigma is manifested among the teachers. I remember one day when one of my colleagues returned from isolation we did not know*

*what to do, whether to welcome her or distance ourselves from him/her. It took guts even to talk and come closer because we were fearing for our health. And seriously, this resulted in bad relations among the staff members, and as a result, the atmosphere was bad within the school. (School C-ET1)*

This participant reported that teachers feared being sick and infected. Furthermore, the participant emphasised that the fear of stigmatisation emerged within teachers as well. And this intensified conflicts and bad working relations and bad blood among staff members. Sharp et al., (2020) caution that feeling saddened, worried, frightened, or angry emanates when the circumstances like Covid-19 manifest. Drawing from this, therefore it is important that you have full support from the people close to you. That alone is a remedy on its own. Yemi et al., (2021) attest that it is advisable to talk with a person you trust and somebody who cares as this help to lift a weight from the sick person. In addressing fears of sickness leading to death people were advised to undergo vaccination and teachers as the forefront workers were to be prioritised in the process. However, the talks about the effects of vaccination were frightening. Resultantly teachers were in a dilemma of whether to/or not vaccinate. As one participant declared, "I was really afraid to get vaccinated [...] rumours were that vaccination had recurring health implications leading to death, as such I was confused. Again, the vaccination was said to be voluntary, yet all the workers were to conform to this directive. The situation was life-threatening for front-line workers. All this confusion jeopardised teaching in schools. And this confirmed at a glance that the mitigation strategies put in place to withstand Covid-19 challenges to a certain extent were insufficient to remedy the situation but rather brought about incongruences in the whole system.

## Conclusions

The findings proved that the emergence of the pandemic brought drastic changes in schools. In dealing with the challenges posed by Covid-19 mitigating strategies were put in place. In keeping up with these strategies Economics teachers experienced problems since the government and/or the BDE were not ready and thus some of the strategies were found to be ineffective in dealing with the situation. The findings reported here revealed that the Covid-19 saga necessitated a move from the traditional teaching approaches to distance instructional methods. In this regard, the findings reported difficulties as teachers find it difficult to adapt to the new normal. The failure of the successful new teaching strategies (for example, ICT usage) was found to originate from socio-economic status and ethnicity. For the schools under study, as enrolled learners from poor economic backgrounds, these strategies were not spot-on and responded very slowly to the mitigation strategies. The lack of necessary skills by the teachers was found to infringe on the effectiveness of the strategies. Emanated from the study that for both teachers and learner's poor attendance was common, and it was proved to emanate mostly because learners and teachers were sick or demonstrated Covid-19 symptoms and thus stayed in quarantine. Insufficiency of resources and Economics teaching materials hampered the teaching and learning of Economics and thus resulted in ineffective teaching and learning. Additionally, the results showed that teachers feared being infected by a virus, and learners, on the other hand, were found to have demonstrated reluctance on receiving teachers who have tested positive from the Covid-19. From the findings, it was striking to learn that stigmatisation among the staff members prevailed and bad working relations surfaced. And thus, based on the findings it was concluded that teachers suffered more as personal beings than as workers in an institution, as there was no support offered from colleagues to other colleagues.

The findings of the study suggest that the country as a whole is far from adapting to the new normal because even the strategies implemented to a certain degree did not meet the difficulties Economics teachers experienced in the Covid-19 era. And thus, the DBE has a long way in spanning the educational gaps resulting from the pandemic and also needs to devise some/or strategies and perhaps restructure the curriculum ensuring that when learners exit the system they are well equipped with the Economics skills they will need as adult beings to leave persuasively in the ever-changing economic world. Emanating from the findings the study recommends that collaboratively, the government and the DBE must work towards finding new mitigation strategies and continues to retain some of the Covid-19 regulations such as screening and sanitizing. In preparing Economics teachers on being cutting edge with the ICT utility, the study recommends computerised training that teachers can access at their leisure. Notable, in making up for the lost curriculum, it is recommended that the DBE can restructure an overlapping curriculum covering the work from the former grades so that there will be no gaps in the Economics subject content for learners.

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