



**ASSESSMENT OF THE LEARNING DIFFICULTIES OF ECONOMICS STUDENTS:
INVESTIGATING THE POSSIBLE WAYS OF MITIGATING THE DIFFICULTIES FOR
IMPROVED ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE**

By

Francis M. Anthony, Ph.D.

**Faculty of Education University of Texas
Austin, Texas United States**

And

Chiekezi Chienyenwa. U.

**Department of Economics
Benjamin Uwajumogu (State)
College of Education
Ihitte Uboma Owerri.**

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the emerging issue of AI-induced dehumanization, analyzing how the increasing integration of artificial intelligence into human-centered domains can diminish empathy, reduce individual autonomy, and foster systemic bias. One pressing issue is the phenomenon of AI-induced dehumanization, where human beings are increasingly perceived, treated, or replaced in ways that strip them of agency, dignity, and individuality. As AI systems become more embedded in decision-making processes across sectors such as healthcare, education, and law enforcement, concerns arise about the erosion of human dignity and the loss of meaningful human interaction. Furthermore, it proposes a range of remedies, including ethical AI design, human-centered policymaking, and regulatory frameworks aimed at preserving human dignity. The evaluation underscores the need for a balanced approach that leverages AI's capabilities while safeguarding the core values of humanity. The study concluded that by addressing these learning difficulties holistically not only promotes better comprehension and retention among students but also paves the way for sustained academic improvement and greater interest in the discipline of Economics. The study also recommended that institutions should develop structured academic support systems, including remedial classes, tutorial sessions, and peer-assisted study groups specifically tailored for students experiencing learning difficulties in Economics.

Keywords: Learning Difficulties, Economics Students, Academic Performance

INTRODUCTION

Understanding how societies allocate scarce resources and make informed financial and policy decisions requires a solid understanding of economics, a core subject in secondary and university education that helps students develop their critical thinking, decision-making, and analytical skills and prepares them to live successfully in an economically driven world. However, despite its importance, many students struggle with learning Economics due to its abstract concepts, mathematical demands, and graphical analyses (Ezeudu, 2021). These challenges frequently result in decreased student interest, limited classroom participation, and eventually subpar academic results on both internal and external tests.

According to a number of studies, these difficulties stem from systemic, pedagogical, and cognitive factors. Pedagogical problems are linked to teacher-centered or out-of-date instructional strategies that fail to consider various learning styles, while cognitive difficulties



may be brought on by a lack of prior foundational knowledge. Moreover, environmental constraints such as overcrowded classrooms, lack of instructional materials, and limited use of technological tools further compound the learning gap (Umo&Igwe, 2022). The use of economic jargon, poor teacher preparation, and the general perception that Economics is difficult have all been shown to affect students' ability to grasp and retain key concepts (Okafor & Nwafor, 2023).

To lessen these learning difficulties, a shift towards more inclusive, learner-centred pedagogical frameworks that leverage digital instructional technology, practical applications, and active learning is required. Using visual aids, case studies, simulations, and problem-based learning increases the likelihood that students will actively participate and apply economic theories in pertinent situations. Additionally, consistent formative assessments and feedback mechanisms have been shown to improve students' academic self-efficacy and performance (Alabi, 2020). These strategies not only address content understanding but also help to improve motivation, memory retention, and critical thinking skills.

Therefore, in order to enhance academic performance, this study aims to assess the primary learning obstacles faced by economics students and provide practical solutions. It will examine how curriculum design, instructional delivery, and learner support services can better meet the diverse academic needs of students. The study will ultimately offer a more inclusive and successful framework for teaching economics by emphasising clarity, accessibility, and improved academic outcomes.

Concept of Learning

Learning is the acquisition of knowledge or skills through study, experience, or being taught. It is the individual growth of the person as a result of cooperative interaction with others. It is the advancement of understanding that enables the learner to function better in their environment, improve and adapt behaviors, create and maintain healthy relationships, and achieve personal success.

According to Thakuric (2019), Learning is a relatively permanent change in the behavior or attitude of a person over time. For example when a child learns to read they are able to retain this knowledge and behavior for the rest of their lives. It does not have to be taught out of a book or by a teacher, rather it may be acquired through self-exploration, sharing or by instruction from anyone, not necessarily a teacher, accumulating of experiences and the consequential growth and new understanding of the world around us.

As explained by Bhasin (2021), Learning is defined as gaining knowledge, preferences, attitudes, behavior, understanding, values, and skill. The ability to learn is most prominent in humans and also, to some extent, animals. It can result because of a single event or through repeated experiences and can be immediate and life lasting. . Some learn quickly, scanning the information and mastering the concept or skill seemingly effortlessly Others find that the information they have learned slip away rapidly.

Learning is the process of acquiring new knowledge, skills, behaviors, or understanding through study, experience, practice, or teaching. It is a fundamental aspect of human cognition and development, enabling individuals to adapt to their environment, solve problems, make decisions, and improve their capabilities over time. . Others stumble while processing information, taking longer to grasp the concept or requiring numerous exposures over a sustained period of time. Some individuals store the information they have



learned indefinitely, cementing it in their memories (Geeksforgeeks, 2024).

Concept of Learning Difficulties

According to GoodTherapy (2024), learning difficulty (also referred to as a learning disability) can be described as an issue with the brain's ability to process information. Individuals who have a learning difficulty may not learn in the same way or as quickly as their peers, and they might find certain aspects of learning, such as the development of basic skills, to be challenging. Because learning difficulties cannot be cured, their effects may impact an individual's performance throughout life: academically, in the workplace, and in relationships and daily life. Intervention and support, which may be supplemented by counseling or other mental health care services, can help an individual with a learning difficulty to achieve success. Learning difficulties, which are neurological challenges, affect the way the brain receives, processes, stores, and analyzes information. Because a learning difficulty often affects an individual's ability to develop reading, writing, and math skills, a learning difficulty is typically recognized and diagnosed while an individual is in school.

According to Linda (2025) Learning difficulties, known as learning disabilities in North America, are conditions that can affect an individual's ability to gain knowledge and skill at the same rate as his or her peers. Having a learning difficulty does not make someone less intelligent, it just means they learn in a different way and traditional classroom activities might be less effective. Children and adults with learning difficulties may require specific accommodations and or strategy training in order to overcome the challenges they face and make progress in an academic or work environment. They can also benefit from additional support when it comes to motivation and encouragement. That is because despite there being plenty of strengths that correlate with learning difficulties, such as enhanced creativity and out-of-the-box thinking; it is more common to hear about the negatives. Focusing on the positives for a change can make a big difference in encouraging people with learning difficulties to develop healthy self-esteem and increased self-confidence.

According to Jala (2025) learning difficulty is a term used to describe children and adolescents who struggle in acquiring, retaining, organizing and using skills in the areas of listening, speaking, reasoning, reading, spelling, writing, and mathematics. These children may also experience difficulties in the areas of visual and auditory perception, processing skills, memory, mood (anxiety and depression), motor skills planning and attention. The term learning difficulty is not a formal diagnosis however it is commonly used in school environments to describe children struggling to learn in the classroom in a number of areas. The term learning disability is also not a formal diagnosis but can sometimes be used to describe a more persistent form of learning difficulty. Learning difficulties are not only caused by internal factors such as neurodevelopmental differences, sensory impairment, behavioral challenges and psychological issues, but can also be attributed to external factors including the school or home environment, opportunities and relationships.

The Prevalence of Poor Performance in Economics

Studies across various educational contexts continue to reveal alarmingly high rates of poor performance in economics. For instance, an investigation by Yunisa et al. (2024) at Nigeria's Federal University of Kashere reported high failure rates among economics education students in econometrics, attributable to inadequate laboratory infrastructure, insufficient



lecturer preparation, and weak student study habits—and emphasized that both institutional and individual factors are at play. Similarly, research by Divine (2022) in Imo State, Nigeria highlights systemic issues: a lack of qualified economics teachers, poor motivation, and insufficient instructional aids were cited as root causes of SSCE failure in economics. These findings reflect common patterns: poor practitioner training, resource deficits, and negative perceptions of difficulty profoundly undermine performance. Also, Nwachukwu, Orih, & Iheanaetu, (2024) stated that, the quality of school facilities and environment shape attitude not only of the students, but that of the teachers and other support staff. However, many school facilities throughout Nigeria face general mismanagement and social turmoil. Learning is a complex activity that supremely tests student’s motivation, physical conditions, teaching resources, methods and skills of teaching and the school curricula. All these play vital roles in the children’s development.

A recurring theme in recent journal work is the critical role of quantitative competence—namely mathematics and numeracy—in performance within economics. Eleje et al. (2020) notes that poor mastery of quantitative economic topics directly contributed to weaker SSCE outcomes; without feedback and remediation in quantitative exercises, students struggle to grasp fundamental economics concepts. Reinforcing this, a 2023 study from the Philippines found Grade 10 students were only “approaching proficiency” in core economics concepts, attributing performance gaps to both resource shortages and limited teacher support. These insights suggest that improving foundational skills and boosting targeted remediation are essential to reversing declining performance in economics.

While traditional lecture methods remain dominant, recent evidence supports the positive impact of more engaging teaching strategies. In Nigeria's Kano State, Yakasai et al. (2025) quasi-experimental study found that reflective inquiry methods significantly improved economics performance compared to conventional instruction, even though interest levels remained unchanged.

How to Mitigate Learning Difficulties in Economics

Economics, as a social science, plays a crucial role in helping individuals understand the choices that governments, businesses, and consumers make regarding resource allocation. However, many students struggle with learning economics due to its abstract theories, use of mathematics, and need for critical and analytical thinking. These learning difficulties can hinder student performance and reduce interest in the subject. To address this, educators, institutions, and policymakers must implement effective strategies that mitigate these challenges and foster better understanding. Below is an extensive discussion of how learning difficulties in economics can be mitigated.

- **Simplification and Contextualization of Economic Concepts**

Economics often involves abstract concepts such as opportunity cost, marginal utility, and equilibrium, which can be difficult for students to grasp. One effective strategy is to simplify these concepts and present them in relatable contexts. Teachers should use real-life examples, analogies, and everyday economic scenarios to explain complex ideas. For example, the concept of scarcity can be linked to a student's daily decisions about time management or budgeting. Research by Ige and Ajayi (2021) emphasizes that using local examples and culturally relevant content makes economics more relatable and easier to understand.



- **Integration of Visual Aids and Technology**

Visual tools such as graphs, flowcharts, videos, and simulations can significantly enhance comprehension. Economics is a subject that often relies heavily on diagrams and models to illustrate theories and relationships. Using interactive whiteboards, economic simulation software, and animated videos helps students visualize abstract relationships, such as demand and supply curves or inflation trends. According to Adeyemi and Okebukola (2020), multimedia tools improve cognitive engagement and promote deeper understanding among economics learners.

- **Use of Active Learning Methods**

Traditional lecture-based teaching often leads to passive learning, where students memorize information without truly understanding it. Instead, active learning strategies, such as debates, group discussions, case studies, and problem-solving exercises, encourage students to apply economic concepts in practice. These methods help students think critically and analytically.

- **Step-by-Step Teaching of Quantitative Aspects**

Mathematical application is one of the most significant challenges in learning economics. Many students lack confidence in handling equations, graphs, and statistical data. Teachers should break down quantitative topics into smaller, manageable steps and ensure that students master each component before moving on. Scaffolding instruction—providing support at early stages and gradually reducing it—helps students build competence and confidence. According to Onah and Oye (2023), sequential teaching of mathematical skills in economics leads to significant improvements in student performance.

- **Incorporation of Formative Assessment and Feedback**

Regular assessment through quizzes, concept checks, and in-class exercises, followed by timely and constructive feedback, helps identify and correct misconceptions early. Formative assessments allow teachers to monitor student progress and adjust instruction accordingly. They also give students the opportunity to understand their errors and learn from them. Formative feedback has been proven by Akinyemi and Fagbohun (2021) to significantly enhance student learning outcomes in economics by promoting continuous learning and self-assessment.

- **Encouraging Peer Tutoring and Collaborative Learning**

Peer tutoring allows students who have mastered certain topics to assist others who are struggling. Collaborative learning fosters an environment of mutual support and shared responsibility. Students often feel more comfortable discussing economic problems with peers, leading to increased confidence and understanding. Group work also encourages the development of communication and teamwork skills.

- **Use of Concept Mapping and Note Organization Techniques**

Many students struggle with organizing and connecting economic concepts. Concept maps and structured note-taking techniques like the Cornell Method help students visualize the relationships between ideas and retain information better. These tools promote higher-order



thinking and aid long-term memory retention. According to Eze and Nworgu (2020), concept mapping helps students make connections between economic theories, policies, and real-world applications.

- **Teacher Training and Professional Development**

Educators play a central role in how economics is taught and understood. Continuous training and professional development ensure that teachers are equipped with modern teaching strategies, subject knowledge, and digital skills. Workshops, seminars, and online courses expose teachers to new methods for addressing learning difficulties and updating curriculum content. The National Economics Teachers Association (NETA, 2023) recommends that teachers receive at least one major update training session annually to remain effective in tackling learning challenges in economics.

- **Individualized Learning and Remedial Support**

Different students learn at different paces and may require personalized support. Teachers should identify students with persistent difficulties and provide individualized learning plans or remedial sessions. One-on-one or small group instruction gives struggling learners a chance to ask questions and work through challenges without pressure. According to Ajayi and Bamidele (2024), tailored intervention programs in economics have been shown to close learning gaps and improve student performance significantly.

- **Curriculum Review and Alignment with Learner Needs**

Outdated or overly theoretical curricula can disengage students and contribute to learning difficulties. The economics curriculum should be regularly reviewed and aligned with contemporary economic issues, learner interests, and practical applications. Including topics like financial literacy, entrepreneurship, and digital economy can make economics more appealing and relevant. A recent review by the West African Examination Council (WAEC, 2023) suggested integrating practical economic skills to improve learning outcomes and relevance in secondary schools.

How to Improve Students' Performance in Economics

Improving student academic performance requires integrating evidence-based practices that support learning behaviours, physical health, and cognitive techniques rather than relying just on individual interventions. When carefully used in educational settings, recent meta-analyses and systematic reviews provide compelling insights into what works, from active movement to self-regulation.

- **Self-Regulated Learning**

Self-regulated learning (SRL)—where students deliberately plan, monitor, and evaluate their progress—has proven to be highly effective. A 2024 meta-analysis of 15 studies in online and blended environments reported a moderate effect (Cohen's $d \approx 0.65$) on learning outcomes, regardless of educational level or SRL component (Guntur & Purnomo, 2024). Another 2022 review integrating primary and secondary education data also found positive impacts on reading, math, and writing skills. These findings highlight the central role of metacognition, time management, and cognitive strategy training in boosting academic performance.



- **Physical Activities and Cognitive Gains**

Physical activity combined with academic activities yields strong cognitive and academic benefits. A 2023 meta-analysis of 92 RCTs (ages 5–12) by Vasilopoulos et al. (2023) found that exercise interventions enhanced on-task behavior (large effect), creativity ($g \approx 0.70$), working memory, and fluid intelligence. Physical activity + academic curriculum programs significantly improved math scores in youth ≤ 12 ($SMD \approx 0.75$), with a smaller effect on reading and spelling.

- **Active and Problem-Based Learning**

Active learning—where students engage in discussions, problem-solving, or projects rather than passively listening—has strong empirical support. Doolittle et al. (2020) reported that such methods reduced achievement gaps in under-represented STEM students by 33% and failure-rate disparities by 45%. These findings affirm that strategies like flipped classrooms, problem-based learning, and collaborative inquiry significantly boost understanding and retention.

- **Peer Tutoring & Cooperative Learning**

Peer tutoring—where students teach or learn from each other—yields consistent gains. A study by Zhang et al. (2024) covering 27 experimental/quasi-experimental higher-education studies found a moderate positive effect (Hedges' $g = 0.48$) on academic performance. In K-12 math specifically, an earlier 2018 meta-analysis of 50 studies reported a smaller yet significant effect ($g = 0.33$), with 88% of programs showing improvement (Alegre-Ansuategu et al, 2018).

CONCLUSION

The assessment of learning difficulties faced by Economics students reveals a complex interplay of cognitive, instructional, and environmental factors that hinder their academic success. These challenges, ranging from poor foundational knowledge and lack of motivation to ineffective teaching methods and limited access to academic resources, significantly impact students' ability to grasp core economic concepts. However, by implementing targeted strategies such as differentiated instruction, student-centered pedagogy, curriculum enhancement, academic support systems, and consistent formative assessments, these barriers can be effectively mitigated. Addressing these learning difficulties holistically not only promotes better comprehension and retention among students but also paves the way for sustained academic improvement and greater interest in the discipline of Economics.

RECOMMENDATION

1. Educators should embrace interactive and student-centered instructional strategies such as case studies, group discussions, simulations, and problem-based learning.
2. Institutions should develop structured academic support systems, including remedial classes, tutorial sessions, and peer-assisted study groups specifically tailored for students experiencing learning difficulties in Economics.
3. To enhance teaching effectiveness, Economics instructors should undergo regular professional development that equips them with modern pedagogical skills, digital teaching tools, and strategies for differentiated instruction.



4. Curriculum developers and school administrators should periodically review and update the Economics curriculum to ensure alignment with current economic trends, student learning capacities, and labor market demands.



REFERENCES

- Adeyemi, A. &Okebukola, B. (2020). Effect of Multimedia Instruction on Secondary School Students' Learning of Economics in Nigeria. *Journal of Educational Technology*, 17(2), 120–132.
- Ajayi, T. &Bamidele, S. (2024). Remedial Strategies for Enhancing Low-Performing Economics Students in Nigerian Secondary Schools. *Journal of Curriculum and Instructional Studies*, 13(1), 60–72.
- Akinyemi, A. &Fagbohun, F. (2021). Formative Assessment Practices and Economics Learning Achievement in Senior Secondary Schools. *African Journal of Educational Research*, 26(1), 89–104.
- Alabi, O. T. (2020). Effect of innovative teaching methods on academic performance of senior secondary school students in Economics. *African Journal of Educational Management*, 18(1), 98–112.
- Alegre-Ansuategu F., Moliner L., Lorenzo G. &Maroto A. (2018). Peer Tutoring and Academic Achievement in Mathematics: A MetaAnalysis. *Eurasian Journal of Mathematics, Science and Technology Education*, 14(1): 337-354.
- Bhasin, H. (2021). What is learning? Definition, PACT Learning Cycle, Concepts, and Advantages Available at: <https://www.marketing91.com/learning/>
- Divine P. (2022). Causes of Poor Academic Performance OfStudents In Economics In Senior Secondary Schools Certificate Examination In MbaitoliLga Of Imo State. *Ii IMUSInfo*.
- Doolittle P., Wojdak K. & Walters A. (2023). “Defining Active Learning: A Restricted Systematic Review.” *Teaching & Learning Inquiry* 11. <https://doi.org/10.20343/teachlearningqu.11.25>
- Eleje L., Esomonu N., Okoye R. &Agu N. (2020). Students' Academic Achievement in Secondary-School Quantitative Economics: Effect of Feedback with Remediation. *Education Quarterly Reviews*, 3(4).
- Eze, M. &Nworgu, L. (2020). Effect of Concept Mapping on Economics Students' Academic Achievement. *International Journal of Educational Research and Development*, 8(3), 45–58.
- Ezeudu, F. O. (2021). Students' difficulties in learning Economics concepts in Nigerian secondary schools: Causes and solutions. *International Journal of Education and Social Science Research*, 4(3), 45–54.
- Geeksforgeeks. (2024). Meaning, Nature, Types and Principles Available at: <https://www.geeksforgeeks.org/learning-meaning-nature-types-and-principles/>
- GoodTherapy (2024). Learning Difficulties. Available: <https://www.goodtherapy.org/learn-about-therapy/issues/learning-difficulties>
- Guntur M. &Purnomo Y. (2024). A Meta-Analysis of Self-Regulated Learning Interventions Studies on Learning Outcomes in Online and Blended Environments. *Online Learning Journal*, 28(3).
- Vasilopoulos F., Jeffrey H., Wu Y. &Dumontheil I. (2023). Multi-Level Meta-Analysis of Physical Activity Interventions during Childhood: Effects of Physical Activity on Cognition and Academic Achievement. *Educational Psychology Review*, 35:59. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-023-09760-2>
- Ige, A. &Ajayi, K. (2021). Contextualizing Economics Instruction for Improved Learner Engagement in Nigerian Schools. *African Review of Economics Education*, 9(2), 33–47.



- Jala (2025). what is a learning difficulty? Available at: <https://www.learninglinks.org.au/resources/what-is-a-learning-difficulty/>
- Linda (2025). What are learning difficulties? Available at: <https://www.readandspell.com/what-are-learning-difficulties>
- NETA. (2023). Professional Development Framework for Economics Teachers. National Economics Teachers Association Publication.
- Okafor, A. C., &Nwafor, C. E. (2023). Analyzing perceived difficulties in Economics education among senior secondary school students in urban and rural areas. *Nigerian Journal of Curriculum and Instruction*, 30(1), 56–70.
- Onah, B. &Oye, O. (2023). Sequential Instructional Strategy and Students' Learning of Quantitative Economics. *West African Journal of Educational Research*, 15(1), 71–88.
- Thakuric, P. (2019). Definition of learning Available at: <https://tribhuvan.academia.edu/PradipThakuri>
- Umo, U. J., &Igwe, L. E. (2022). Investigating teaching strategies and their influence on students' understanding of Economics in Nigerian schools. *Journal of Educational Research and Practice*, 12(2), 118–130.
- WAEC. (2023). Curriculum Review Report on Senior Secondary School Economics. West African Examination Council.
- Yakasai F., Bugaje H. &Sadiq A. (2024). Effect of Reflective Inquiry Teaching Strategy on Economics Students Interest and Academic Performance in Municipal Zonal Education Directorate, Kano State, Nigeria. *Kashere Journal of Education*, 6(3).
- Yunisa, OHA, &Iweho (2024). Factors Influencing Low Performance of Economics Education Students In Econometrics In Federal University Of Kashere, Gombe State. *LAFEE Conferences*.
- Zhang C., Sun N., Jiang Y., Liu H. & Huang Q. (2024). The Impact of Peer Tutoring Programs on Students' Academic Performance in Higher Education: A Meta-analysis. *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, 34, 1495-1506.
- Nwachukwu, C. M., Orih, F. A., & Iheanaetu, B. I., (2024). Resources Management Effectiveness: A Panacea to Student Poor Academic Performance in Imo State, *Shared Seasoned international journal of educational Management & planning*, (4)3.