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## Teaching Accounting in South African Schools: Challenges, Interventions and Opportunities

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### Abstract

Youth unemployment remains a pressing socio-economic issue in South Africa, partly rooted in inadequate education and the limited development of transferable competencies. The National Development Plan (NDP) Vision 2030 prioritises improving educational quality in disadvantaged schools and promoting partnerships that equip youth with life skills. Responding to this mandate, professional accounting bodies and universities have integrated professional values, attitudes, and enabling competencies (PVAAAs) into curricula, aligned with the University of the Free State's (UFS) Vision 130 Graduate Attributes and the UN SDGs. Grounded in social constructivism, this study investigates a community-based learning project where UFS accounting students tutor learners in grades 8 and 9 in financial literacy (EMS). Schools were identified by the Free State Department of Education based on indicators of underperformance. A mixed-methods design was adopted, collecting data concurrently from three participant groups: teachers (semi-structured interviews) to explore contextual challenges, learners (pre- and post-tests, socio-economic profiles) to evaluate learning outcomes, and students (pre- and post-proficiency questionnaires, reflective journals) to assess development in PVAAAs and graduate attributes. Preliminary findings reveal measurable improvements in learners' financial literacy scores and self-reported gains in students' professional and interpersonal competencies. The study contributes to empirical evidence on the effectiveness of social constructivist, service-learning approaches in advancing both educational outcomes and professional identity formation. It demonstrates how higher education partnerships can operationalise national policy objectives through sustainable, evidence-based community engagement.

**Keywords:** Community Engagement, Graduate Attributes, Inclusivity, Student Engagement