

NEED TO REDESIGN ECONOMICS EDUCATION IN NIGERIA FOR THE 21ST CENTURY LEARNING NEEDS

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Abstract

This paper focuses on Economics education in Nigeria and how it can be redesigned keeping in view the learning needs of the 21st century and the goals of the Federal Republic of Nigeria National Policy on Education. Special focus is on regular revision of Economics curriculum in view of rapidly growing knowledge, adoption of innovative ways of learner-centric teaching methods, strategic use of technology and scientific approach to assessment based on higher-order thinking skills. It is imperative that to be successful in this revamp, Economics teachers at all levels of education in Nigeria should, and are to be regularly empowered in all aspects of Economics education.

Key words: 21st Century, Economics Education, Learning, Need, and Redesign

Introduction

Economics is an incredibly fascinating field of study which impacts all facets of our life. Economics education has very many definitions. It is sometimes said that there are as many definitions of the term Economics as there are economists. The reason for this seems to be that economists see the subject from different points of view. They may be interested in different aspects of Economics such as Education, Development, Financial, Monetary, Industrial, Business, Welfare and Political. They therefore define Economics to reflect their interests. Economists could also be influenced by the conditions prevailing at the time of writing. For example, an economist writing during a period of recession may include aspects of it in his definition of Economics. He could say, for instance, that Economics deals with the

ways by which an ailing economy could be revitalized through a judicious use of scarce resources. The most widely accepted definition of Economics is that by Professor Lionel Robbins who defined Economics as the science which studies human behaviour as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses (Anyawuocha, 2012).

Economics education which in a formal sense means the teaching-learning process of Economics, is the foundation of Economics research. Economics education is a discipline that involves the use of the appropriate teaching and learning methodology in improving the comprehension and understanding of Economics as a concept and makes it easy as an in-depth residual knowledge of the learners in order to make them contribute significantly to the growth and development of the society. It is a curriculum designed to produce experts in the field of Economics education to develop Economics curriculum, instructional methodologies and materials for effective teaching and learning of Economics at the various educational level and for the training of manpower in order to promote growth and development in the society. (Gotip, Ede and Oleabhiele, 2020).

Besides Economics research, Economics education also puts one in an excellent position to choose out of a wide variety of useful, interesting and rewarding careers. The list of career possibilities for Economics professionals is very long and varied. A well-trained economist always remains one of the most highly sought after and employed person anywhere in the world.

Present-day Economics Education and Problem of Creativity

Economics education in Nigeria unfortunately has not changed much with the changing times. It still focuses on examinations, rote learning and scoring high marks. Students are examined one against the other. The real ability, achievement or potential of the students is never brought out. The student's mark sheet is the prestige sheet for the family but a pressure sheet for the child. The curriculum is broad with over-loaded contents and outdated thereby creating a big gap between what is learnt and what should be learnt, and this ultimately affects the quality of Economics research. The method of teaching Economics in Senior Secondary Schools is the traditional teacher-center talk and chalk method where it centers interest around the teacher rather than on the learner. Thus, students are merely passive listeners and which neither engages students nor encourages thinking, innovation and creativity amongst them; provides for no initiative on the part of students; stimulates auditory sense only; creates problems because of inability of most students to take proper notes; necessitates the preparation and setting up of visual aids when lecture is to be illustrated, which might be too costly and cumbersome on the part of the teacher.

The exams are mainly knowledge based with a focus on lower order thinking skills such as knowledge, understanding and applications. Further excessive use of technology by the present-day students has impacted adversely the generation of original ideas, plans and hence creativity. It is therefore not surprising that such an education system has created a crisis of creativity in Economics in Nigeria (Kapur, Subramanyam, Shah and Bakhshi 2020). Nigeria best placed University is ranked as the 1335th in Best Global Universities in the world (World Bank, 2020). This sounds an alarm bell for education including Economics education in Nigeria as it is the foundation of all economic research which is the cornerstone for the development of a nation.

21st Century Economics Education

To understand 21st century Economics education, one must first of all understand what a 21st century education is and what it is not. A 21st century education is one that responds to the economical, technological, and societal shifts that are happening at an ever-increasing pace. It's an education that sets learners up to succeed in a world where more than half of the jobs they'll have over their careers don't even exist yet. In short, it's an education that provides students with the skills and competencies they need to thrive in the 21st century (Hallerman, Lewis and Dresbach, 2019).

A 21st century education is about giving students the skills they need to succeed in this new world, and helping them grow the confidence to practice those skills. With so much information readily available to them, 21st century skills focus more on making sense of that information, sharing and using it in smart ways. The coalition P21 (Partnership for 21st Century Learning) has identified four (4) skills, namely; Creativity; Critical thinking; Communication; and Collaboration.

Creativity is about thinking through information in new ways, making new connections and coming up with innovative solutions to problems. Critical thinking is about analyzing information and critiquing claims. Communication is understanding things well enough to share them clearly with other people. Collaboration is about teamwork and the collective genius of a group that is more than the sum of its parts (Maxine, 2022). It's an education which shifts focus from examination and rote learning to conceptual clarity, critical thinking, problem solving, innovation and creativity in conformity with the goals of the Federal Government of Nigeria National Policy on Education (FGN, 2012). It's an education that prepares students to face the challenges of life in the 21st century and succeed in all the spheres.

A 21st century education isn't a class of students sitting quietly in a classroom, taking notes of everything that the teacher says or writes on the blackboard. It's not a

teacher-centric approach, teaching students for the examination, telling students what they need to memorize to get 90% + marks, assuming every student learns in an identical way. A 21st century education is actually much more and different than all this (Bakhshi and Rarh, 2022).

For the 21st century Economics education, curriculum, teaching methodologies, assessment as well as infrastructure need to be in tune with the times. Students, besides disciplinary, interdisciplinary and practical knowledge of Economics also need to develop 21st century skills, values and attitudes to acquire competence to thrive in the fast -changing modern world. 21st Century skills include, besides the literacy (viz. information, media and technology) and life skills (viz. flexibility, leadership, initiative, productivity and social) the four 'Learning Skills' viz. creativity, critical thinking, communication and collaboration. These four learning skills are not to be only understood as such but rather they should also be part of every topic in Economics in the same way as literacy and numeracy are. Only then these skills can be imbibed in our students.

Growth of Economics knowledge and Economics curriculum

Economics is one of the most productive of all the social sciences. Economists produce research papers. The most fascinating aspect of Economics is that economists not only describe and explain our world economy as it is but are also changing and extending this world economy through producing or making new products in form of goods and services (Bakhshi and Vimal, 2020). The result is that there has been an exponential growth in the number of goods and services produced in Nigeria and the world. This number is expected to continue to increase year after year (*ceteris paribus*: other things being equal). Many new concepts, ideas and theories have emerged on the chemistry scene. It is, therefore, not surprising that due to this exponential growth in chemistry knowledge, many new sub-disciplines of chemistry such as chem-informatics, green chemistry, combinatorial chemistry, supramolecular chemistry, phytochemistry, food chemistry etc. have come up during the course of time. In view of this rapidly growing chemistry knowledge, the chemistry curriculum needs to be revised regularly with a focus on core essentials and kept up to date with the demands of the industry and the modern day-market. At the same time, it also needs to be ensured that the curriculum is light thereby giving students more time for thinking.

21st Century teachers

Innovative methods of Economics teaching and assessment. Teachers have a very important role to play in imparting 21st century Economics education. Unfortunately, in Nigeria, most students continue to be educated in the same way as they were in the past. Traditional teacher-center methods of teaching make little

sense to today's 21st century students who have grown with technology and who learn and think differently, and for whom making use of information is far more valuable than simply knowing things (Agarwal, 2022).

Twenty-first (21st) Century teachers must embrace new learner-center ways of teaching and learning like flipped classroom model which focuses on higher order thinking skills and encourage thinking, innovation and creativity amongst learners. The main idea behind learner-centric education is that learners learn best when they are engrossed in the topic, motivated to seek out new knowledge and skills because they need them in order to solve the problems at hand. The flipped classroom model enhances student learning and achievement by reversing the traditional model of a classroom by focusing class time on student's understanding through interaction rather than on passive lecture component (Bakhshi, 2020). Further, besides flipped classroom model, there also needs to be more focus in teaching-learning on case-studies, experiential, collaborative, project-based and problem-based learning rather than merely lecture-based learning as is the case at present (Betty, Hodge, Corritore and Ernst, 2015).

Assessment

Teachers also need to be trained in transforming the culture of assessment which should be competency-based and not merely knowledge-based. Assessment process should be made more scientific to encourage multiple skills of the students (Patrick and Schulz, 2015). Questions in exams need to be on concepts, critical thinking, analytical thinking and various ways of looking at the avenues of knowledge and not just on speedy reproduction of information. It is important to realize that assessment drives learning. The way we assess our students, the students will learn accordingly. That is the best way to slowly draw our students away from rote learning and lead them towards innovation and creativity.

Technology in Economics Education

It is difficult to imagine 21st century Economics education without technology. In this regard, teachers need to become tech savvy and understand their changing roles as mentors or coaches or facilitators rather than merely knowledge providers (Bakhshi and Rarh, 2013). Teachers need to upgrade their Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills on usage of basic tools like word processing, presentation tools, spreadsheets, graphics, video capture and editing tools, anti-plagiarism tools, learning management systems etc.

Learning Management System (LMS) empowers a teacher to create a virtual classroom in which all the e-resources like videos, Portable Document Formats (PDFs), PowerPoint Presentations (PPTs), word docs, link to other resources,

quizzes of various forms, assignments and discussion forums can be provided to learners in a structured manner which can be accessed by the learner in twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week (24 x 7) mode. The teacher can look into the analytics of the LMS and track the learner's self-learning.

Assessment through LMS can be used for formative assessments in which multiple assessment methods along with rubrics can be provided to the learner. Timely feedback and quick result analysis can be done which is time-consuming, if done manually. Economics software for teaching and learning Economics like: EVIEWS, MINITAB, SPSS, SAS and STATA Data Analysis and Statistical Software amongst several others need to be integrated in the teaching methodology as well a part of curriculum to prepare the future economists. Electronic e-Labs as video demonstrations and virtual labs with simulations need to be integrated along with hands-on experiments for better understanding and visualization of what is happening in the economy. Manual graph plotting should be replaced by excel or other graph plotters through which one experiment can be understood in a variety of ways by changing the variables in excel rather than performing the experiment just once as is the usual practice. Practical Record books can be in fully ICT mode. Real time observations and inputs of various data in experiment can be taken using ICT Tools and calculations can be automated. Integrating use of ICT tools usage in experiments is also environmentally friendly and greener. With the popularity of online education and coming up of digital universities in Nigeria in the near future, teachers also need to become proficient in development of e-content in four quadrant format and MOOCs/Online courses (Rarl, 2013).

Conclusion

Economics education in Nigeria needs to be thoroughly redesigned keeping in view the needs and goals of the 21st century. We need to have modern but light syllabi, embrace innovative learner-centric pedagogies to improve students' performance, attitude, interest and retention in learning and shift the focus of examination to assessing their competence (knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes) rather than merely knowledge. Further, there are also needs to be a proper coordination between Economics education at secondary and tertiary education levels. This redesigning of Economics education is possible only if the Economics teachers at all levels are regularly empowered in each aspect of Economics education including strategic use of technology. One needs to keep it in mind that the quality of an educational system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers and therefore the empowerment of Economics teachers through their regular professional development is the need of the hour.

Recommendations

In the light of the need to redesign Economics education in Nigeria for the 21st century learning needs examined; the following recommendations were made.

- i. Economics education curriculum should be reviewed and re-develop to incorporate 21st century needs of learners.
- ii. Seminars and workshops should be organized for Economics teachers periodically to sharpen their teaching skills especially in the use of technology.
- iii. Electronic e-Labs should be set up and well-furnished with economic software's in Secondary and tertiary education levels for better understanding of Economics and visualization of what is happening in the economy.
- iv. Economics teachers at all levels of education in Nigeria should and are to be regularly empowered in all aspects of Economics education.

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