

TEACHING AND RESEARCH IN ECONOMICS IN NIGERIA: THE STUDY OF THE NEXUS

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Abstract

Teaching and Research are inseparable in the learning process. While teaching involves imparting knowledge, research involves creating knowledge and the two work together to produce a better outcome. Studies have shown that there is a strong link between teaching and research in economics. In view of this proposition, the researchers undertook this study with a view to examine the link between economic research and teaching. Expository approach was used in carrying out this study and the findings however, show that the challenges facing teaching and research linkage include inability to integrate professionalism, academic behaviours of the teachers, research operating environment among others. Also, most research works in economics adopt highly econometric models where theories are explained using mathematical concepts. The relevance of this concept at times, does not address the issue on ground (economic problems) thus, making it difficult for the outcome to be properly disseminated or taught in the classrooms. This leaves a huge gap between research and teaching in the field of economics. The study therefore suggests that a platform where ideas can be shared between researchers and teachers of economic subjects be instituted.

Universities education everywhere has three cardinal focus; Teaching, Research and Community Development. A correlation therefore exists between teaching and research. However, research and teaching have been segregated for too long even though each role mirrors the learning process (Brew, 2003; Jenkins and Zetter, 2013; Dawson and Burke, 2008; Burke and Rau, 2010).

Research and teaching processes accomplish learning which involves modification or increase in knowledge through assessment of a current question or person's state of knowledge, exploration of phenomena and revised interpretations, implications or reflections based on the new knowledge generated (Burke and Rau, 2010). For the fact that teaching and research are viewed as learning processes, it is necessary to conceive at least conceptually how they can and should be mutually reinforcing. Unfortunately, some do not believe that a positive and reciprocal relation exists between teaching and research (Marsh and Hattie, 2002). Yet, others believe that a strong research-teaching nexus is best described as an ideal or desired state, rather than something that occurs naturally. Arguably, the ability to integrate both research and teaching is the essence of being in academics (Walstad and Allgood, 2005; Burke and Rau, 2010).

The relationship between teaching and research as outlined above is often assumed and just as often ignored. Research is expected to influence teaching and teaching is also expected to influence research, but the gulf between the two can at times seem large. The act of teaching is fundamentally concerned with passing ideas, skills and attitude from the teacher to the learner. With proper research, teaching can be made more effective. In Nigeria, teaching of economics in Nigerian universities has not witnessed substantial progress like it happens in the case of its quasi-rivals such as Business Administration and Accounting who were offshoots of economics that developed in independent disciplines. Could this be attributed to the death of research culture in the field of economics? This question takes us to the main objective of this paper; that is, examining the nexus between teaching and research in economics in Nigeria. The paper is divided into six sections with the first section introducing the study. Literature review, challenges of bridging the gap in teaching and research in economics, bridging the gap, and the benefits of research in teaching comprises of sections two to five, while section six summarizes and concludes the paper.

Literature Review

The changing world requires introducing innovation and new development into whatever economic activity there is. The essence of teaching is to develop students' skills and abilities while that of research is to create knowledge and technology (Benalallam, 2014).

Rote learning (memorization technique based on repetition) was before now considered the most acceptable method of lessons delivery in schools, but the experience over the years has shown that the approach is ineffective especially as regards the pupils' psycho-motive domain. The need for guided-discovery as a method of learning is appropriate if a student must be made to discover things himself with a view to creating lasting impression in the student. Therefore, the most wide spread teaching strategy in any discipline is the promotion of research, bringing research into the classroom and involving students in research projects (Benalallam, 2014).

Disciplines are added and curricula are created to meet the grand challenges in the society and to provide the work force required to integrate innovation and new development into the economy. Moreover, research plays an increasingly important role in the development of innovations and technology. It should also be noted that research can contribute to prosperity and address social challenges, so there is an evident correlation between the two-research and teaching. As noted by Becker and Kennedy (2005), impacting knowledge (teaching) and creating knowledge (research) are complimentary activities. And so strengthening research – teaching link, research inspired teaching instruction that draws upon and is grounded in relevant discipline theory and research, which in turn supports evidence-based practice should be pursued (Brew, 2003; 2007).

As teachers and researchers in economics, we should be honest and humble enough to admit that gaps exist in the learning, teaching and research in the subject which is otherwise important for one and all as consumers, producers, distributors and traders. Unfortunately, economics of education has devalued the value of education. Therefore, there is need to strengthen the learning value of education instead of devaluing by attaching economic value to it (Goel, 2010).

Trade-off exists between teaching and research in economics. Most of the teachers in schools and colleges are not able to do research of any kind in the subject of economics for want of time, while most of the teachers in the universities and research institutions devote more time to research with the aim of getting promotion based on research contribution and not the quality of teaching. However, it is worth noting that communication of research findings need not be confined to published academic studies, rather there is need to share from the experience obtained from field projects through consulting (Burke and Rau, 2010). Hence, conferences should be adopted as the best way for disseminating research findings.

In economics as in other management courses, the primary goal of specialization is wide knowledge, deep foundation, application and innovation with the purpose of cultivating student's practical ability and professional personal training ability to solve problems (Hu, Zhou and Zhang, 2013), Albu (2012) earlier collaborated this assertion by observing that the mission of accounting academia should be teaching, research and practice. This means that during the processing of education theory, attention must be paid to students practice in education so as to prepare them to meet the need of the business environment. The achievements in scientific research can be used not only in teaching, but also in guiding students in internship, so that a perfect combination between theory and practice may exist. In recent years, some of the universities have directed attention to bridging the gap between teaching and research by building lush level laboratory for economic practice. Yet, in most of their teaching ideas, teachers are still considered as the main role and the centre of the model, with lack of independent

analysis of students to cultivate their ability in solving practical problems (Hu *et al*, 2013). Teachers involved in research gain insight into how they are working presently while looking forward to their future practice. This insight according to Walter and Hen (2012) came about as a result of:

- i. Analysis and interpretation of methodologically collected data,
- ii. Dialogue with others,
- iii. Contributions from pupils or other groups as partners in negotiation and information sources.

Extensive knowledge in research has accumulated as well as means of facilitating such learning in the university. But creating avenues to bridge the gap between research and academic learning and teaching models to support such integration is difficult. The position of this paper is to solve these difficulties.

Challenges in Bridging the Gap in Teaching and Research in Economics

Albu (2012) asserts that the difficulty in integrating teaching and research arise as a result of: research characteristics, researchers behaviours, the expectations of the economic environment and the characteristics of the communication between academics and professionals. The consideration is that economic research has become highly mathematical, employing sometimes exotic theories with a reduced focus on practice.

Baldvinsdottir, Mitchell and Norreklit (2010) wonder how empiricism which is focused on what is happening in practice, leads to result that are not of interest for practitioners. The language in economic research along with mathematical modeling and the way in which results are presented and interpreted are considered to be the main obstacle for practitioners in interpreting results of economic research.

In addition to methodological difficulties, Singleton-Green (2010) is of the view that the volume and dispersion of research is also a problem for practitioners, in the sense that for a specific issue, there is a large volume of work sometimes with conflicting results. Though, these results may not seem conflicting to a researcher, but to a practitioner who may not be familiar with research methodologies and designs, the result may be difficult to understand hence the reason for variation in research result due apparently to different research settings.

Bridging the Gap of Teaching and Research in Economics

In spite of the perceived challenges of integrating research and teaching, different authors have pointed out how the gap between teaching and research can be bridged in economics and other disciplines, Benalallam (2014) suggests that to bridge the gap between teaching and research, students must be involved in research projects and research should be brought to the classroom. Walter and Hen (2012) posit that conceptual theory mapping is one way to promote the transfer of research into practice. This model can be achieved by making research appear as the focal point of undergraduate education seminar course. Teaching can be research-based in the sense that the curriculum is highly designed around enquiry-based activities rather than the acquisition of subject content.

Hu Faug, ZZhou Xiaolin, Zhang Aiwei (2013) emphasized construction of an economic and management laboratory as an effective way to cultivate qualified talents and the construction must meet the requirement of teaching and scientific research development. The conviction of the authors is that construction of economic and management laboratory is the fundamental way to solve specialty practice problems. Burke and Rau (2012) collaborate the position of Benalallam (2014) that to bridge the gap between research and teaching, research evidence should be incorporated into teaching and actively collaborating with students and teaching research method.

Singleton-Green (2010) notes that if the gap between teaching and research is to be bridged, researchers should write guides through the literature review. Cohen (2007) posits that academics/academia should attend practitioner conferences and events to interact with practitioners, and practitioners should interact with the academic community to learn about their research agenda. In addition, practitioners and academic organizations could be founded to facilitate this dialogue.

Rynes (2007) asserted that academics could develop research questions in line with the need of practitioners. They might include implications for practice in each paper and conduct research with practitioners. In the words of Tucker & Lowe (2011) researchers should be aware that their research should inform practice and develop new ideas to address the need of a changing business environment.

The bulk of all these suggestions are meant to improve the relationship between research and teaching. But what is so important about bridging the gap between teaching and research?

The Benefits of Research in Teaching

Inanga and Schneider (2005) saw research as a theory-based systematic investigation of, or enquiry into a specific phenomenon for the purpose of discovering new facts or critical exposition of existing knowledge. The findings that emerge are normally expected to contribute to knowledge and bring about positive changes especially towards teaching and societal development.

Going by this definition, we can deduce that teaching can trigger research into an obscure subject with a view to unraveling new facts about the subject. Also, research can prompt investigative teaching and impact positively on the learners. According to Miller and Fox (2005), research can inform practice and policy in the teaching and learning in any discipline. Research is also known to support high quality instructions for all students. Research stimulates conversations among researchers and all involved in the teaching and learning processes. For research to be of benefit to teaching and learning;

- It must address issues that teachers and others recognize as important. The community must be in dialogue with teachers, administrators, parents and the public about the challenges faced by various constituencies and about the role research can play in responding to those challenges.
- It must be explicit in describing the assumptions and beliefs that guide the work
- Research that promises to benefit both teaching and learning must be explicit in describing the method by which the research questions are raised.
- Research that promises to benefit teaching and learning must be marked by an overall quality of plausibility and trustworthiness and it must be ethical (Miller and Fox, 2005)

From the researcher discussion so far, how relevant are research and teaching to the study of economics in Nigeria?

In Nigeria, most research works in economics adopt econometric model where theories are explained using mathematical concepts. Sometimes the relevance of mathematical interpretation of the model to issues on ground is not practicable. If economic researches continue in this form, could it make the teaching of the subject meaningful? The answer to this question may to a greater extent depend on the method of teaching adopted and the relevance of such approach to research. Akpakpan (1999) asserted that by examining the methodology of the subject, the student has the opportunity of knowing about the various approaches by which studies may be conducted in his own discipline. The knowledge by the student that alternative method of solving economic problems exists apart from econometric model will help the student in making a choice. In making this choice, the student will be compelled to examine and assess the strength and weaknesses of his approach in relation to other approaches. This is where the link between teaching and research lies. Teaching economics in Nigeria require a pragmatic approach based on the economic reality on ground. Theories relating to development economics should be thoroughly researched with a view to filling the gap between such theories and Nigeria economic situation.

Teaching And Research In Economics In Nigeria: The Study Of The Nexus

Researches enhance better teaching no doubt, yet the way teaching is conducted could make or mar research drives.

Research means better teaching and more students learning. The two are compliments. At some threshold however, they become substitutes. Incremental research comes at a net cost to the student (Vedder, 2008). In a research university like the University of Ibadan in Nigeria, teaching assistants are given opportunities to teach, this is to enable the faculty engage more in research with a view to discovering new expositions and contribute to knowledge which is the essence of research.

To deliver qualitative teaching therefore, research must be undertaken seriously. Mateer (2008) submitted that a good teacher has a comparative advantage in the delivery of instruction at the principle, intermediate and quite possibly senior level undergraduate courses. In view of the essence of research as the mission of higher education, it is suggested that best thinkers should be released from the classroom so that they can maximize their contributions to the environment of the discipline and also help to mentor the next generation through research process.

Gwartney (2008) held the view that research helps one become a better teacher. He however noted that the marginal pay-off of research is low for most faculty members. From the foregoing comments, the research can deduce that informed teaching requires the critical reading and discussion of research findings of others who use a variety of methods in their investigation. Students should be introduced to this range of studies and to the conventions of the various schools of research. Research should be approached in a critical fashion. First, the theory surrounding an issue must be understood. This will help the teacher become more knowledgeable about theory, determine which theory best account for what is learned and then determine the relationship between theory and research. Research becomes valuable for teachers when it is applicable to their work with students in their classrooms. As part of an ongoing cycle, teachers who study, critique and select research, do so in terms of questions that emerge from their own teaching. And in questioning how their research will impact on their students, the application of their research findings could translate the theoretical to the real world. As teachers begin to apply the research of others to their classroom contest, they inevitably come up with their own questions.

Does the research I am studying address the concerns I have about my students? If not, is there research that does? If not, how may I find the answers to my questions? As teachers ask questions, they begin the kind of reflection that leads to the generation of their own research.

Summary and Conclusion

Teaching and research cannot be separated from each other. They are sacrosanct to the learning process. In the course of teaching, issues that border on theories are raised and this necessitates research. Research will lead to new discovery which must be communicated and debated upon. The debate may spot the limitations of the previous findings and will trigger another research. Then, unending round of debate and finding may continue until the facts are established. The process of establishing the fact must have left indelible memory in the minds of the debaters. In this way, research impacts positively on teaching. It should be noted that the process of teaching and research involve enormous expression of mental research and depending on the nature of the teacher and the researcher, the teaching and the research outcome may be intriguing to the learner. To a greater extent, teaching outcome may trigger in the learner the desire to dig more and in some instant it may dull his eagerness. Given this, the attitude of teachers towards teaching and researchers towards research could have much to be desired in bridging the gap between teaching and research in economics and related disciplines.

Finally, in the literature it is observed that research and teaching move hand in hand, and most research works in economics adopt highly econometric models where theories are explained using mathematical concepts. The relevance of this concept at times does not address the issue on ground

(economic problems) thus making it difficult for the outcome to be properly disseminated or taught in the classrooms. This leaves a huge gap between research and teaching in the field of economics. The study therefore suggests that irrespective of the methodology of the research process adopted, a level playing ground-like forum be established to create a dialogue or platform between researchers and teachers of economic subjects.

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Teaching And Research In Economics In Nigeria: The Study Of The Nexus

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