ECONOMICS EDUCATION IN INDIAN SCHOOLS

Economics, among all social science being taught at the school level, has been getting increasing attention in recent times from upper primary to higher secondary stages. In India, it continues to be an important elective subject for higher secondary / intermediate students for more than eight decades. Economics is also taught in schools affiliated to a few other national (ICSE) and international examination boards (GCSE or International Baccalaureate). According to Seventh All India Education Survey 2002, nearly 38 lakh students study economics as an optional subject in 29300 higher secondary schools and 2100 degree colleges in India. At the higher secondary stage, being opted by largest number of students, it emerges as the most popular social science subject.

Despite its importance and popularity, development of economics curriculum remains a major challenge. Economists as well as economics educators in the country seem to be disinterested in the teaching-learning process of this dynamic subject. There is hardly any research to investigate economics classroom processes. This has greater implications on curricular reforms in economics. As such the economics curriculum is generally perceived as dull and unexciting among learners. Similarly discussion and debate on the emerging areas, inclusion / deletion of topics, pedagogy of teaching-learning in economics, evaluation methods, inter-linkages between school and college or university level economics curriculum are lacking.

Keeping the above scenario in view, the National Council of Educational Research and Training proposes to organise a National Seminar on ‘Economics Education in Indian Schools’. This seminar aims at initiating a dialogue among economists, teachers, economics educators and all others, who are interested in creating a suitable environment in the country for the growth of economics education.

The National Seminar intends to address all aspects of economics education viz., (i) developing economics curriculum for the 21st century (ii) Teacher Education in Economics (iii) Assessment of and assessment for economics learning and (iv) Other systemic issues.

(i) Developing economics curriculum for the 21st Century
The development of economics curriculum in India is based on the directions given by the National curriculum frameworks. The NCERT, the apex body set up and supported by the Government of India and located in New Delhi prepares model economics curriculum (syllabi and textbooks) for various stages of school education. Even though, these curricular materials are mostly used by schools affiliated to Central Board of Secondary Education, these model curricular materials help state curricular agencies such as State Councils of Educational Research and Training (SCERTs) develop economics syllabi and textbooks in different ways. State agencies also adopt or adapt the syllabi and textbooks prepared by NCERT. These curricular materials are also adopted or adapted by various national and state level examination boards to prescribe in their affiliated schools. Based on the examination-board-prescribed syllabi, economics textbooks are developed by private and public sector publishing agencies.

(a) **Economics syllabi up to secondary stage:** While a few developed countries introduce rudimentary economic aspects to primary (1-5) children, Indian students are introduced only at the upper primary stage (classes 6-8) as part of their social studies / social science course. Within the composite social science course, economics is included in either political science (civics or social and political life) or geography. A comparison of economics content in social science textbooks used in schools affiliated to state examination boards in the 1990s reveal that economics forms about 10-20 per cent of the social science course (Das, 2004).

Students studying in schools which follow NCERT syllabus and textbooks are exposed to a few economics topics such as livelihood, markets and economic role of government. Those studying in secondary stage (classes 9-10) are exposed to a few aspects of development economics. For example, they study how development is perceived, conceptual and measurement issues relating to poverty, measures of food security, and the importance of investing in human capital. Students are also exposed to a few basic economic concepts such as factors of production, classification of economic activities and the role of financial institutions in the day-to-day life and so on. Compared to classes 6-8, students get exposed to larger economic(s) issues in classes 9 and 10.
Textbooks developed by NCERT used integration approach to include economics topics for classes 6-8 whereas for classes 9-10, two separate economics textbooks were developed. Economic aspects are discussed with an inter-disciplinary perspective taking into consideration of political, social and historical aspects.

Approach to integrate economics in social studies / social science course is one important topic received considerable attention among economics education researchers. Studies on high school social studies classrooms in United States of America, for instance, indicate that students’ economic understanding is limited in the integrate which they call “infusion” approach. There is scope to examine whether or not students studying in classes 6-10 are able to develop economic understanding in Indian schools.

Conventionally it is argued that students are to be exposed first to the concept and the application of the concept in the real world. The new economics curricular materials bring in variety of real life economic aspects in which concepts are integrated. How students understand economic aspects? What is happening in economics classrooms - what works, how they work, what not work and why?

(b) Economics at higher secondary stage: As pointed out earlier, economics is an important social science subject taught at the higher secondary / intermediate stage for a long period in Indian schools. Students opting for this subject are taught four different courses spreading over classes XI and XII. Since 1976, the year in which NCERT initiated the development of a national-level syllabi and textbooks, there has been a considerable change higher secondary economics courses. The current NCERT model syllabi prepared on the basis of National Curriculum Framework 2005 recommends four courses: (i) Statistics for Economics; (ii) Indian Economic Development; (iii) Introductory Microeconomics and (iv) Introductory Macroeconomics. A study which examined the higher secondary (also known as senior secondary, intermediate or junior college) syllabi followed in schools affiliated state examination boards found the following topics covered in the higher secondary economics courses: (i) Nature and Scope of the subject; (ii)
Development Economics; (iii) International Trade; (iv) Regional Development; (v) Developmental Issues; (vi) Sectoral Issues; (vii) Public Finance and Financial Institutions; (viii) Statistical Tools and Sources of Economic Data; (ix) Microeconomics and (x) Macroeconomics.

Over the years, higher secondary economics curriculum underwent considerable changes. However, we do not have any evidence on whether these changes have led to improvement the levels of economic understanding. What changes took place in the economics curriculum and why? What are the emerging areas and topics receiving the attention? How can they be incorporated in the curricular revisions? How can ideological wars within economics be discussed in economics classrooms? To what extent economics curriculum take into account gender concerns? One of the objectives of the advisory group could to identify people who could analyse these trends and also review the materials used in different stages.

(c) School – University Linkages: Economics syllabi and textbooks have undergone considerable changes over the years due to various reasons. Curriculum developers presume that these changes will help students while taking up higher studies, even though only a minuscule section of those who pass out higher secondary examinations with economics as one elective subject enrol themselves in colleges and universities to study undergraduate course in economics or its related courses such as management. What was taught in colleges and universities a few decades ago are being introduced at the secondary and higher secondary economics courses. Curricular reforms aimed at lowering the curricular load over these years could not stop the progressive overloading of the curriculum. They led to many questions?

Although the objective of doing economics at higher secondary stage is not always due to the desire to specialise in economics, why should higher secondary economics curriculum be treated as preparing ground for higher education? Whether the higher secondary economics curriculum really helps those who study undergraduate or graduate economics or management courses? If higher secondary economics curriculum need not form the base for higher studies, what are the topics and themes that could be taught at higher
secondary stage? Whether the higher secondary economics students develop
economic understanding or achieve curricular objectives envisaged by
curriculum developers.

There is no research on whether the Indian higher secondary economics
students develop economic understanding or fulfil the curricular objectives.
More importantly one can critique the curricular objectives itself and whether
the materials help in develop an economic understanding. It is also not clear
how higher secondary economics help students enrolling themselves in
colleges and universities.

(d) *Analyzing economics textbooks for schools and colleges:* Textbooks brought
out by both government and private agencies are the major instructional
materials for economics teachers. They are the only sources of learning for
economics students. They determine the quality of economics education. Even
though textbook analysis is one of the major skills acquired by teacher students
during their B.Ed. courses, it is yet to receive serious attention. Scholars can
examine textbooks from various pedagogical dimensions – whether or not they
cover the entire syllabus, its rationale and curricular objectives.

(ii) **Teacher Education for better Economic Understanding**

(a) *Social Science Teachers and Teaching of Economics:* Two important determinants
of teaching a social science subject are (a) the way knowledge is generated and (b)
the method of enquiry. They may vary from subject to subject. A teacher who is
specialised in one social science subject may find it difficult to teacher another
social science subject. Economics is taught in upper primary and secondary stages
by trained graduate social science teachers. Social science teachers who have not
studied economics during their graduation may find it difficult to teach economics
content.¹ It is necessary to examine how teachers who have not studied economics
cope up with this difficulty. This may be true for social science teachers teaching
other subjects (history, geography and political science) as well. For example,

¹ In some states, those who studied economics at the graduate level cannot study B.Ed. only
post-graduates are eligible. This also means none of the social science teachers in these states
could have studied economics.
teachers studied political science may find it difficult to teach geography. Understanding social science teachers’ challenges in teaching economics would help curriculum developers and policy makers. It also helps in reforming social science teacher education curriculum, recruitment policies for social science teachers in India. It will also help the department (DESSH) in developing remedial courses for social science teachers.

(b) Pre-service, in-service or continuing economics teacher education: How is economics taught in Indian classrooms? Who is a post graduate economics teacher? What kinds of economics knowledge she possesses and how she is trained and upgraded and updated? Curricular reforms met with serious resistance from teachers. It is necessary to investigate why and whether or not the in-service education helps teachers in equipping themselves for curricular changes in economics.

It is argued that the economics classrooms are syllabus and examination centric. How far it is true? How to move from this scenario? How controversial topics can be taught in economics classrooms? Various approaches teachers adopt to promote interest among economics students to study the subject. The changes in the economics syllabi and textbooks call for teachers to changes their traditional methods such as lectures to discussion and problem-based learning. Scholars note that students bring knowledge they acquire in their social life outside school to classroom. What economics knowledge students bring to classrooms? Do economics teachers facilitate students to learn economics integrating real life economic aspects with formal economics curriculum? Hardly there is any evidence on the nature of economics classrooms in India. Scholars may be expected to observe economics classrooms and report their observations. This will help in improving economics classroom activities and towards better economic understanding.

(c) Teaching economics effectively: Even though most economics teachers use lectures as a major approach to teach economics, a variety of innovative tools are being attempted by a few. They are yet to receive due attention for wider dissemination among their fraternity. Also important to examine is – which strategy works best and why. For instance, a few researchers found that problem
based learning (PBL) or problem solving – posing students a variety of problems and seeking answers through students’ exploration can enhance students’ economics learning. They also carried out tests before and after they carried out their experiment and noted that students learn better in the innovative approach. Some researchers compared the students’ economic understanding using traditional and innovative approaches and found improvement in students’ economic understanding in the latter approach. The practising university and school teachers and researchers have great scope to carry out a few small experiments and share their experiments.

(iii) **Assessment in Economics**

Examinations conducted by school boards promoting rote memorisation are a major challenge facing quality economics education in India. The National Curriculum Framework 2005 calls for changes in the typology of questions and encourages formative assessment practices. At present, economics students are asked objective type questions, fill in the blanks, match the following, very short answer questions, 2-3 kinds of short answer questions, essay type questions and long essay type questions. It is necessary to look for strategies to move away from these conventional assessment systems and to look for alternative way of making assessment.

The second aspect requiring attention of researchers is the analysis of answer scripts. While the marking schemes given by examination boards determine marks awarded to students, they have not received any serious attention from educational researchers. The answers given by the students for a question not only reveal his or her understanding about the concept in the question but also classroom processes - whether the teachers have taught the concept in the appropriate manner or not. It is also possible to get to know more than what is given in the textbook as answer. Teachers can analyse the answer scripts for a particular topic in economics and write a paper on it. It is also necessary to examine the marking schemes. They not only determine how marks could be awarded but also how students’ answers are rewarded. It can be hypothesised that more and more innovative and creative answers may not be receiving attention of the examiners whereas those which are vomited from a guidebook or a recommended textbook may receive maximum marks. In order to give sufficient guidance to developers of marking scheme, it is necessary examine the answer scripts and hence students’ understanding of economics.
(iv) **Other systemic Issues**

(a) *Students’ economics proficiency – understanding the economic literacy of the school leavers:* In a few developed countries, it is common to find curriculum development agencies conducting tests of economic literacy among students and among common people. These tests are used both formative and summative purposes. Popularly known as Teaching Economic Literacy (TEL) tests, such nation-wide tests also help in understanding the quality of economics learning among school leavers. In India, achievement surveys are conducted in the lower classes (Classes III, V and VIII) for a few core subjects like languages and mathematics. There is a need to conduct similar tests among at least secondary and higher secondary students.

(b) *Expansion of Economics Education:* It was pointed out earlier that more than 38 lakh students enrolled in economics in 2002. It is necessary to investigate why economics is a popular subject. Students scoring low marks in class X are allotted to humanities, commerce and arts streams - streams in which economics is included as an elective paper. There is no evidence to know whether students opted voluntarily these streams or forced. How many students who have opted these three streams or studied economics at higher secondary stage take up economics or related courses in colleges and universities? Students who did not study economics at higher secondary stage but studied maths or science streams are also eligible for studying economics in universities and colleges. Hence, this issue needs to be investigated for curriculum planning.

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