

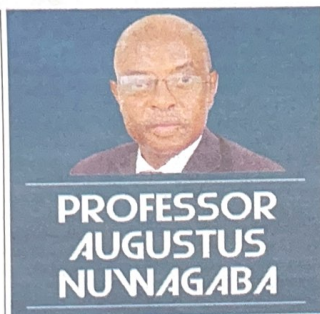
For the last five years, I have been analysing the performance of economics as a subject in various schools and it is glaringly clear that the performance has been declining year after year. In fact, contrary to us who used to excel in economics as our best subject, the current students I have talked to hold the view that economics is one of the "hardest" subjects. This is an unacceptable paradox!!

What is the problem? I have interacted with headteachers, teachers and students from various schools across the country and this is my conclusion; the application of economics seems to be the problem is. How? There is need to understand "what is economics as an empirical subject." What does this mean? Economics is a branch of knowledge concerned with scarcity and its implications for the following; use of resources under different dynamic environment and stimuli; production and distribution of goods and services; consumption of goods and services and transfer of wealth

Now, what is the cause of the problem? Because of the complexity of the issue of scarcity and the changing character of production, distribution, consumption and transfer of wealth, economics is anchored on theories and propositions, whose aim is to facilitate the teaching of economics. It is from such theories and propositions that we derive what we call principles of economics. Why do we need the theory and principles? These help us to understand production and consumption behaviour of a human being as the primary object of economics. This is because production, distribution, consumption and wealth transfer are all aimed at one major objective namely: improving people's standard of living.

Now, where is the problem in our schools?

What is happening to economics in Ugandan schools?



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The major problem I have recently discovered is the failure of our learners to distinguish between economic theory and economic reality. Let me repeat this. I have elucidated in the foregoing that economic theory and attendant principles help us to understand the major elements of economics namely: production, distribution, consumption of goods and services and wealth transfer. However, these elements must be understood within the dynamic environment, which presents different stimuli and subsequent behavioural responses. Therefore, a given stimuli and subsequent behavioural response depends on the changing character in a given environment. For example; Economic theory dictates that when many people demand a commodity or service that is in short/constant

supply, the price of that commodity/service will increase. It is from this theory that we derive our famous demand curve, which slopes from left to right with price on the vertical axis and quantity demanded on the horizontal axis.

What has changed that requires new thinking? There has been growing need for our students to learn through critical thinking and problem solving. This is the tenet that has driven the need for introducing the new curriculum in our schools. Government has correctly argued that our education must change from theoretical and teacher-centred – call it cramming and reproducing material as given in class lectures/lessons; to critical thinking and application of knowledge. What is the aim? To make students able to use the acquired knowledge in problem solving.

So, what is the new reality? The reality in teaching economics now is as follows: Students and teachers of economics, please note; You will not find a theoretical question like: "Explain what are the causes of inflation?" The critical and practical question, which is currently asked is: "What are the causes of inflation in your country in recent times?" What is the aim? The objective of this question is not to test the understanding of the theory or principle of demand and supply perse, but to translate the theory in understanding the type of inflation currently experienced on the ground. The ultimate objective is to enable the student apply the acquired knowledge and the tools required just in time (JIT) to solve the problem.

In answering this question, the correct answer

would definitely be: The current inflation in Uganda is "imported inflation" caused by disruptions in the global supply chains that have hindered the production and normal distribution of petroleum products, which has resulted in high prices of petrol and diesel that affects transport of all goods and services.

Secondly, inflation in Uganda has largely been caused by climate change, reflected in sporadic draught, which constrains steady food supply, leading to increase in prices of food stuffs. Actually, in Uganda, this is usually the major cause of what we call headline inflation.

If students can understand how to answer such a question using the current scenario with just-in-time (JIT) tools of problem solving, there is no reason why our children should not pass economics with flying colours. So, what is the magic bullet to understanding economics? The magic bullet is simply to move beyond theory and instead apply the much-needed theory into practical realities on the ground.

This is actually the essence of the new curriculum the Government has introduced, beginning with lower secondary education. Otherwise, we need practical economists for designing JIT tools for igniting and propelling economic transformation of our economies. The writing is clear on the wall!!

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