
Probing Masters Level Teaching / Learning Economics in Kerala

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Why is it that one often stumbles with lot of outstanding economists hailed from Kolkata, from Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen and Koushik Basu to many others in a streak at various universities across the globe? But why not any single individual who spent his adult life studying in Kerala comes up in such a list? I would largely like to penetrate this issue on the basis of the information gathered from a random survey.

Keywords: Economics, Teaching, Theory, Curiosity and Learning.

Introduction

The Subject “Economics “offers a different paradigm to the students in social science both in form and content. therefore, the rush for learning the subject at master’s level in Kerala is aptly justified on two grounds. One is that economics gives more rigor and precision to the kids than most of its other counter parts in social science. The second is woven in and around the proximity and usability of economics in garbing both government and private sector jobs. Economics is supposed to cater to the needs of growing economy of our country as business analysts and CEOs are essential catalysts in the private sector. So does the academicians and economists in the universities. In this context, this study tries to assess the quality of economics teaching in general in Kerala at master’s level. The major problem one could site is the lack of teachers who could skilfully handle the subject economics One has to teach chapters filled with a lot of analytical methods such as set theory, vector algebra and equations let alone difference equations and complex variable. Generally, teachers with masters in economics are taken on the merit of their past academic records in economics which itself is lacking in mathematical rigour. This pushes the standard of the course below the mark and throws them up in a vicious circle of low standard.

A multiple non-linear Regression Model is developed to analyze the syllabus in all universities is looking fairly good in shape. Designed and drafted fairly well, even though the reason is not an ominous one. All these are handpicked by somebody from some other university handbook without much effort. Accountability and intellectual curiosity in the syllabus preparation is perennially lost as any reforming of it is politicized. The syndicates and senates would approve only ones that are brought about by the loyalists’ teachers who could serve their political masters than any academic interest.

The Quality of Teaching

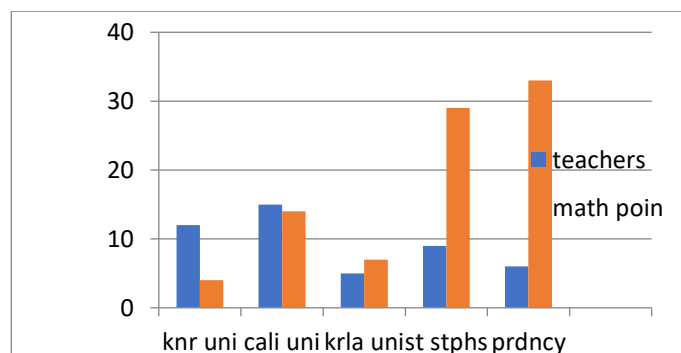
Most of the economics papers call for an interest and backing in mathematics. For example, to teach market form “monopoly” from an old day text called *Modern Micro Economics* by Anna Koutsoyiannis (this has been teaching in Kerala for more than twenty years...!) Needs differentiation while Anindya Sen's “*Micro klEconomics: Theory and Applications*” needs discrete maths and vector theory. In macroeconomics sphere Rosalind Lavasics “*Macroeconomics*”, needs difference equation for teaching later developments in Keynesian economics and calculus for multiplier accelerator interaction. But these areas generally omitted or taught by somebody who could well draft some stories related to the overall theme. Nobody takes the risks of solving problems related to these areas in order to make a point clear.

Data

We have picked up some representative colleges and Canters across Kerala as samples to articulate our point. (See the appendix 1) In fact, two colleges from Kannur University and a University Centre and a College from both the Calicut and Kerala universities are chosen. To know the ways in which some good colleges earn their slots in any entrance exams all over India and for that matter abroad, we can compare it with two leading colleges in the country namely St. Stephens and Presidency College, Calcutta. (though the later is a university by now). We have also chosen two central universities, JNU and HCU for better understanding of the issue. We have juxtaposed the number of teachers to their “math points” (a concept developed exclusively for this analysis. Here we give points 2, 5,7,12, each teacher to an Inter, Graduate, Masters and PhDs in Mathematics or statistics. For example, an M.A economics with science intermediate will get two points while the same guy will get 5 points if he were doing math for his graduation and so on. A PhD in mathematical economics or statistics will earn 12 marks.

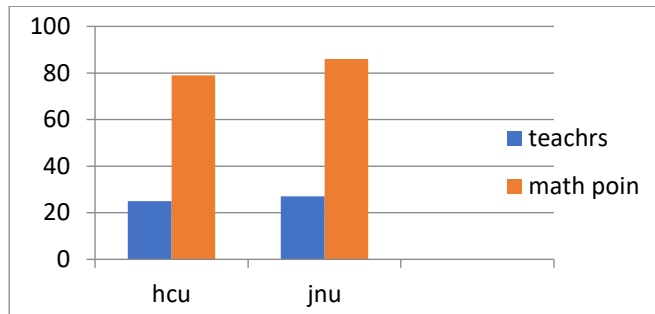
Explanation

The math points scored by the colleges/centres in Kerala are quite less compared to the leading colleges namely St Stephens and Presidency. Also the ratio of teachers and their math points is high in universities across Kerala.



The second diagram shows this ratio of teachers to their math points in central universities; here you can find in the hind sight that the ratio here is comparable to that of leading colleges. In

fact, these colleges are perhaps better of as their ratio is still below the central universities. (In fact, both the universities don't have an M A)



The fact is that even learning economic history becomes a problem in this kind of an academia. Much of the contributions to the subject in the recent past in both Micro and Macro Economics stems out of a deeper understanding and applicability of mathematical sciences.

Usually in centres of academic interest, one could find research helps teaching and vice versa. People solve research questions using the models they learn or interpret the models on the basis of what they found in the real-life experiences. But in Kerala, teaching could go separately as research is a method of just earning a degree to secure the life as the up gradation of faculty positions such as assistant, associate professors etc. needs a PhD.

The result of these complacency and negligence in quality is widely visible in the academia at national level. Each year in J N U entrance exams for Masters in Economics, one could hardly find a Malayali name in the long list of some 70 students while a huge number of Bengalis, Orias and Delhiates are listed out one by one. This absence is obvious in places like ISI Kolkata, Delhi, and IGIDR Mumbai etc where also the way of teaching economics is mostly mathematical.

Therefore let us look at the question we did ask in the beginning regarding the reasons of Bengali dominance in economics. Records shown that even in those days, economics teaching in Kolkata went well beyond the standards and qualities of other institutes let alone some universities within in India. Therefore you find no wonder in Amartya Sen's affirmative in his auto biography by Swedish Academy that "the Cambridge in 1953 was less mathematical than Kolkata". Let's hope that things would change for the better.

Suggestions

- 1) There must be a reform in the whole spectrum of economics teaching at B A, M A level since there is no regression in the direction of science. One could not expect a teacher with poor math would take the course further forward.
- 2) The idea of teaching statistics and econometrics by somebody from the mathematics department must be stopped. This fails in two counts. First it makes to believe that math learning is no business of economists. Second, it doesn't sink well with the economic theory taught.

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