impact International Journals and Publications

© IIJP 2026 | Volume 2, Issue 4, pp. 641-653 | ISSN: 2636-4484

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF ECONOMICS EDUCATION CURRICULUM INNOVATION AND WORKFORCE READINESS IN ABIA STATE, NIGERIA

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ARTICLE INFO
Article No.: 0673
Accepted Date: 21/10/2026
Published Date: 07/11/2026
Type: Research

ABSTRACT
This study critically examined Economics Education Curriculum Innovation and Workforce Readiness in Abia State, Nigeria. The study was motivated by increasing concerns regarding the preparedness of Economics Education graduates for contemporary workplace demands and the need for curriculum reforms that integrate practical and employability skills. The study specifically investigated the extent to which curriculum innovation influences students' workforce readiness, examined the relationship between practical and skill-based learning and graduates' employability, and identified challenges affecting the implementation of curriculum innovations in Economics Education. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population comprised 3,009 Economics Education teachers in Abia State, while a sample of 229 respondents consisting of 209 Economics teachers and 20 Curriculum Educationists was used. Data were collected using a validated questionnaire titled "Economics Education Curriculum Innovation and Workforce Readiness Questionnaire (EECIWRQ)." The mean was used to answer the research questions, while the independent-samples t-test was employed to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that curriculum innovation positively influences students' workforce readiness. The study also established that practical and skill-based learning enhances graduates' employability. Furthermore, inadequate funding, lack of instructional materials, insufficient lecturer training, poor technological facilities, and resistance to change were identified as major challenges affecting effective curriculum implementation. The hypotheses tested indicated no significant difference between the opinions of Economics teachers and Curriculum Educationists on curriculum innovation, practical learning, employability, and implementation challenges since all calculated p-values were greater than the 0.05 level of significance. The study concluded that curriculum innovation remains a vital instrument for promoting workforce readiness among Economics Education students in tertiary institutions. The study recommended increased government funding, continuous professional development for lecturers, provision of modern instructional resources, integration of entrepreneurship and technology-driven learning, and stronger collaboration between tertiary institutions and industries.

Keywords: Economics Education, Curriculum Innovation, Workforce Readiness, Employability, Practical Learning, Skill-Based Education, Abia State.

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Introduction

Education is widely recognised as an essential tool for national development, economic growth, and human capital formation. In contemporary societies characterised by technological advancement, globalization, and dynamic labour markets, educational systems are increasingly expected to produce graduates equipped with relevant competencies for employment and entrepreneurship.

Economics Education occupies a strategic position in the educational system because it equips learners with economic knowledge, analytical skills, decision-making abilities, and entrepreneurial competencies necessary for personal and societal development. However, concerns have emerged regarding the relevance of existing Economics Education curricula in addressing the demands of modern workplaces.

Curriculum innovation has therefore become a central focus of educational reforms globally. Curriculum innovation involves the introduction of new ideas, methodologies, technologies, and practical learning experiences designed to improve educational outcomes and align learning with labour market expectations.

In Nigeria, various educational reforms have sought to improve graduate employability through curriculum reviews, entrepreneurship education, industrial attachment programmes, project-based learning, and technology integration. Despite these efforts, many Economics Education graduates continue to experience unemployment and underemployment, raising questions about the effectiveness of curriculum innovations.

Workforce readiness refers to the acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes, competencies, and professional behaviours required for successful transition from school to work. Graduates who possess critical thinking, communication, problem-solving, teamwork, digital literacy, and entrepreneurial skills are more likely to secure meaningful employment and contribute positively to economic development.

The challenge therefore remains whether current curriculum innovations in Economics Education adequately prepare students for workforce participation. This study seeks to critically analyse Economics Education Curriculum Innovation and Workforce Readiness in Abia State, Nigeria.

Jack (2020) stated that education and results strengthen professionalism and create an environment for creativity in the learners. He believed that an educated person who makes no meaningful contribution to society reflects a vacuum created by the structure of the curriculum and its implementation. Kind (2022) also believed that Economics as a subject requires strict curriculum monitoring because the curriculum changes frequently in response to government policies. These policies have always been reflected in the Economics curriculum; hence the need for curriculum innovations that do not create gaps whenever the curriculum changes in response to government economic policies. Kind further advocated curriculum innovations in Economics that promote workforce readiness. Iwejuo (2021) opined that Economics as a subject requires curriculum innovations that will promote awareness and confidence for workforce readiness in society. He further suggested that curriculum innovations should deliberately integrate government economic policies from time to time, so as to give objectivity to the teaching and learning of Economics Education. This is in line with the opinion of Jude (2019), who believed that Economics Education curriculum innovation should, at the very least, aim at achieving the economic blueprint of the state or government. Such innovations should address the gaps or problems that might emanate from curriculum adjustments arising from government policies. He further suggested that, to create workforce readiness, curriculum innovations should be specific,

that is, innovations that build in learners the readiness to apply what they have learnt. West (2019) stated that workforce readiness is cultivated through the implementation of an innovative curriculum that makes learning memorable and motivates learners for participation in the workforce and the wider economy. This agrees with Faan (2023), who believed that Economics Education curriculum innovation should prepare learners for the practical use of knowledge, with competent experts instilling it in them.

Kirat (2023) defined Economics Education Curriculum Innovation as a tool that promotes effective learning in Economics as a subject. He believed that it is a device that creates productivity and efficiency in the teaching of Economics within and beyond classroom activities. Ezeabi (2018) defined workforce readiness as the capacity to support and deliver a task from initiation to completion. He believed that workforce readiness keeps individuals alert and ready to be engaged because their skills are sharpened. Kirat (2023) further believed that education is an engine room that activates skills for work readiness and propels learners into the workforce. He saw education as machinery that continually cultivates skills, knowledge and efficiency in order to encourage productivity.

1.1 Statement of the problem

Despite the importance of Economics Education in preparing students for employment, many graduates experience difficulties meeting contemporary workplace demands. This situation raises concerns about the relevance of existing curricula, the integration of practical skills, and the effectiveness of innovative teaching methods in tertiary institutions in Abia State. Inadequate funding, limited instructional resources, insufficient lecturer training, and poor technological facilities may further hinder curriculum innovation and graduate workforce readiness.

Objectives of the study

The main objective of this study is to examine the influence of Economics Education curriculum innovation on workforce readiness in Abia State.

Specifically, the study seeks to:

Determine the extent to which curriculum innovation in Economics Education influences students' workforce readiness.

Examine the relationship between practical and skill-based learning components of Economics Education and graduates' employability.

Identify the challenges affecting the implementation of curriculum innovations aimed at enhancing workforce readiness among Economics Education students.

Research questions

To what extent does curriculum innovation in Economics Education influence students' workforce readiness in tertiary institutions?

What relationship exists between the incorporation of practical and skill-based learning in Economics Education curriculum and graduates' employability?

What challenges affect the effective implementation of curriculum innovations aimed at improving workforce readiness among Economics Education students?

Research hypotheses

H_{o1}

There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of Economics teachers and Curriculum Educationists on the influence of curriculum innovation in Economics Education on students' workforce readiness.

H_{o2}

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There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of Economics teachers and Curriculum Educationists on the relationship between practical and skill-based learning components of the Economics Education curriculum and graduates' employability.

H_{03}

There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of Economics teachers and Curriculum Educationists on the challenges affecting the implementation of curriculum innovations aimed at enhancing workforce readiness among Economics Education students.

Review of related literature

Concept of Economics

Economics is the social science concerned with the production, distribution, exchange, and consumption of goods and services. It studies how individuals, organisations, and governments allocate scarce resources to satisfy unlimited human wants. Economics provides learners with analytical tools for understanding economic problems and making informed decisions.

Economics contributes significantly to national development by guiding policy formulation, resource allocation, employment generation, and economic growth.

Concept of education

Education is the process through which individuals acquire knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and competencies necessary for personal and societal development. Education serves as an instrument for social transformation, economic development, and nation-building.

Modern education emphasises competence acquisition, critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving, and lifelong learning.

Greg (2021) defined education in the context of curriculum innovation as well-planned tools for teaching and learning of content, concept and integrated topics capable of harmonising individual differences for workforce readiness that maintains higher productivity within a state. He further believed that education limited to knowledge alone is not enough to drive youthful productivity and efficiency sufficient to encourage workforce readiness. Ezeabi (2018) believed that education means impartation that reflects productivity and efficiency. He argued that education intended only for knowledge amounts to knowing without skilful application. Kind (2022) believed that education means exposure and clarification capable enough to encourage workforce readiness and impactful knowledge. He further held that education means what is learnt and applied. Iwejuo (2021) stated that education means laying a holistic foundation of skilful knowledge that creates productivity and efficiency within an individual. He believed that education without efficiency and productivity fails to achieve educational goals. West (2019) stated that education means imparting knowledge that addresses the critical economic blueprint of a state and reshapes its citizens with the sole aim of workforce readiness and prepares them for future challenges. Faan (2023) believed that education means an act of passing knowledge, innovations and skills from one generation to another. He opined that education is a generational process that adds value according to the specific needs of the state or society. Having evaluated the concepts of education, the present research aims at analysing Economics Education Curriculum Innovation and Workforce Readiness in Abia State.

Curriculum innovation

Curriculum innovation refers to deliberate changes introduced into educational programmes to improve learning outcomes and address emerging societal needs. Such innovations include technology integration, entrepreneurship education, experiential learning,

project-based learning, industrial attachment, collaborative learning, and competency-based instruction.

Doff (2018) defined curriculum as a series of programmes, learning experiences, activities or events periodically carried out in the classroom and outside classrooms. It is a structured and streamlined activity implemented within a time frame aimed at creating impactful knowledge and skills capable of leading to productivity. Adeyemi (2021) believed that curriculum means a set of schemes of work to be delivered from time to time. He further suggested that curriculum is a programme of activities that is planned to cater for societal needs and productivity. This view is supported by UNESCO (2022), which described curriculum as a planned academic structure that promotes purpose and synergy in the impartation of knowledge. Yusuf (2021) defined curriculum as a set of schemes carried out within academic settings or purposeful events. Olaitan et al. (2017) defined innovation as a tool introduced to make activities easier to carry out. They believed that innovation means a refined approach that introduces new methods of carrying out difficult tasks with ease. Olaitan et al. (2017) further stated that innovation is embraced in all serious-minded institutions to allow the easy flow of processes aimed at achieving the stated goals. They also defined curriculum innovation as a strategy to deliver curriculum tasks with ease aimed at creating impactful knowledge and efficiency in the learners for workforce readiness. Akinpelu (2020) stated that curriculum innovation is a strategic framework aimed at creating impactful knowledge and efficiency using the numbered course outlines of planned academic settings. Ezeabi (2018) defined curriculum innovation as tools that must be consistently sustained to deliver planned programmes effectively and achieve educational goals within the state. Kirat (2023) was of the opinion that ineffective curriculum implementation gave rise to curriculum innovations. He believed that curriculum innovations are systematic measures that remove the deficiencies which curtail the full implementation of curriculum programmes. Hence, the present research aims at evaluating Economics Education curriculum innovations and workforce readiness in Abia State.

Curriculum innovation seeks to bridge the gap between academic learning and labour market requirements.

Workforce readiness

Workforce readiness refers to the extent to which graduates possess the knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and professional competencies required for effective performance in the workplace.

Olaitan et al. (2017) stated that workforce readiness means the combined capacity to carry out tasks with the intent to deliver. It is the ability to deliver a task whenever one is called upon to do so. They further explained that workforce readiness means skilful knowledge that creates productivity and efficiency whenever it is required. Faan (2023) stated that workforce readiness is a condition in which people within the workforce can effectively deliver a particular task as a result of impactful knowledge gained from effectively implemented curriculum innovations. He further highlighted that workforce readiness is evidence that removes doubt about people's ability to deliver a task. West (2019) defined workforce readiness as a supportive energy that characterises a system as a result of the implementation of curriculum innovations. He believed that the implementation of curriculum innovation develops enduring skills and efficiency within the learners of a particular state. Iwejuo (2021) believed that workforce readiness is a state of alertness for meaningful engagement resulting from a strategically functioning system. He argued that workforce readiness cannot thrive in a system already conditioned to fail; hence the need for curriculum innovations in Abia State. Greg (2021) stated

that workforce readiness is an ideal strategy for achieving the goals of Economics Education curriculum innovation. He said workforce readiness means an achieved result that strengthens a progressive system. Workforce readiness considers skilfulness, expertise, readiness without excuses, evidence and creativity; hence the need to evaluate Economics Education Curriculum Innovation and Workforce Readiness in Abia State.

Workforce readiness encompasses:

- Communication skills
- Problem-solving skills
- Critical thinking
- Teamwork
- Digital literacy
- Leadership skills
- Entrepreneurial competence
- Adaptability

Graduates who possess these competencies are more employable and productive in contemporary labour markets.

Theoretical framework

The study is anchored on two relevant theories: Human Capital Theory and Experiential Learning Theory. These theories explain how curriculum innovation and practical learning contribute to workforce readiness among Economics Education students in tertiary institutions in Abia State, Nigeria.

2.1 Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory, associated with Gary Becker (1964), explains that investment in education, training, and skills development enhances individuals' productivity and employability. In Economics Education, curriculum innovation provides students with relevant knowledge, analytical abilities, digital competencies, entrepreneurial skills, and problem-solving capabilities required in the labour market. Innovative curricula improve the quality of human capital by connecting classroom instruction with contemporary economic and occupational demands. This theory supports the study because workforce readiness depends partly on the quality and relevance of educational experiences. Therefore, tertiary institutions in Abia State should adopt innovative curricula that develop competencies valued by employers and promote graduate productivity.

Experiential Learning Theory

Experiential Learning Theory, developed by David Kolb (1984), emphasizes that learning becomes more effective when individuals acquire knowledge through experience, reflection, conceptual understanding, and practical application. In Economics Education, this theory supports the use of internships, fieldwork, simulations, projects, case studies, and entrepreneurship activities to prepare students for employment. Such experiences enable learners to apply economic principles to real-life situations while developing communication, teamwork, decision-making, and problem-solving skills. The theory is relevant to this study because workforce readiness requires more than theoretical knowledge. Consequently, tertiary institutions in Abia State should integrate practical learning opportunities into Economics Education curricula to improve graduate employability.

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Methodology

Area of the study

The study was conducted in Abia State, located in the South-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Abia State has several tertiary institutions that offer Economics Education or related programmes, including universities and colleges of education. The study focused on Economics Education teachers and curriculum educationists working in tertiary institutions within the state who are involved in the training of Economics Education students.

Research design

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researchers to collect data from a relatively large population and describe existing conditions regarding curriculum innovation and workforce readiness without manipulating any variables.

Population of the study

The population of the study consisted of Economics Education teachers and curriculum educationists in tertiary institutions in Abia State. The population figure of 3,009 Economics Education teachers was obtained from the records of the Abia State Ministry of Education and the relevant tertiary institutions' academic planning units (2023/2024 session). Although the research questions focus on tertiary Economics Education students and graduates, the study measured workforce readiness through the informed opinions of teachers and curriculum educationists. These respondents possess professional knowledge of curriculum content, instructional practices, and the competencies students acquire; therefore, their judgements provide a valid proxy for assessing the readiness of graduates for the labour market. Curriculum educationists were included because of their specialised expertise in curriculum design, implementation, and evaluation.

Sample and sampling technique

A sample of 229 respondents was used, comprising 209 Economics Education teachers and 20 curriculum educationists. The sample size was determined using the Taro Yamane formula at a 5% margin of error. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed. First, the tertiary institutions in Abia State that offer Economics Education were identified. Second, stratified sampling was used to ensure proportional representation of teachers from the different institutions. Finally, simple random sampling was applied within each stratum to select the required number of teachers, while the 20 curriculum educationists were purposively selected on the basis of their expertise and involvement in curriculum matters.

Instrument for data collection

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled Economics Education Curriculum Innovation and Workforce Readiness Questionnaire (EECIWRQ). The instrument was divided into three sections: Section A focused on Curriculum Innovation and Workforce Readiness; Section B on Practical and Skill-Based Learning and Employability; and Section C on Challenges Affecting Curriculum Innovation Implementation. Responses were rated on a four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1).

Validation and reliability of the instrument

The instrument was subjected to face and content validation by three experts: two specialists in Economics Education and one specialist in Measurement and Evaluation from a tertiary institution in Abia State. Their comments and suggestions were used to improve the clarity, relevance, and coverage of the items. To establish reliability, the instrument was trial-tested on 30 respondents outside the study sample. The data obtained were analysed using

Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.82. This value was considered adequate for the study.

Method of data analysis

The mean was used to answer the research questions, while the independent-samples t-test was used to test the null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. A criterion mean of 2.50 was adopted as the decision rule; items with mean ratings of 2.50 and above were regarded as accepted, while items below 2.50 were regarded as rejected. In the mean tables, Xa represents the mean rating of the analysis (expected or ideal level of curriculum provision and innovation as judged by the respondents), while Xp represents the mean rating of actual performance or current practice. The difference (Xa – Xp) indicates the gap between expected and actual performance; a positive difference was interpreted as evidence of need for improvement or as a positive contribution of the variable under consideration, depending on the research question.

Results and discussion

Research question 1

To what extent does curriculum innovation in Economics Education influence students' workforce readiness?

Table 1: Curriculum Innovation and Workforce Readiness

Item	Mean Analysis (Xa)	Mean performance (Xp)	Difference (Xa – Xp)	Remark
Current curriculum equips students with workplace skills	3.45	2.08	1.37	Positive
Curriculum innovation improves real-life problem solving	3.85	2.77	1.08	Positive
Revised curriculum enhances critical thinking	3.99	3.09	0.90	Positive
Curriculum innovation increases workplace confidence	3.67	2.99	0.68	Positive
Curriculum prepares students for employment	3.89	2.89	1.00	Positive

Discussion

The findings indicate that curriculum innovation positively influences workforce readiness among Economics Education students. Respondents agreed that revised curriculum content enhances critical thinking, confidence, workplace competence, and problem-solving abilities.

Hypothesis 1

Table 2: t-test Analysis on Curriculum Innovation and Workforce Readiness

Respondents	N	Mean	SD	DF	t-cal	p-value	Decision
Economics Teachers	209	3.71	0.87	227	0.98	0.326	Not significant
Curriculum educationists	20	3.51	0.84				

Since $p = 0.326 > 0.05$, H_{01} was not rejected.

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Research question 2

What relationship exists between practical and skill-based learning and graduates' employability?

Table 3: Practical Learning and Employability

Item	Mean Analysis (Xa)	Mean performance (Xp)	Difference (Xa – Xp)	Remark
Practical learning improves employment opportunities	3.87	2.68	1.19	Positive
Skill-based training enhances competence	3.88	3.00	0.88	Positive
Internship contributes to employability	3.48	2.52	0.96	Positive
Project-based learning develops employable skills	3.45	3.00	0.45	Positive
Employers value practical skills	3.73	3.01	0.72	Positive

Discussion

The findings reveal that practical and skill-based learning contributes to graduates' employability. Internship programmes, project-based learning, and practical training improve workplace competence and increase employment opportunities.

Hypothesis 2

Table 4: t-test Analysis on Practical Learning and Employability

Respondents	N	Mean	SD	DF	t-cal	p-value	Decision
Economics Teachers	209	3.86	0.89	227	1.22	0.225	Not significant
Curriculum educationists	20	3.61	0.73				

Since $p = 0.225 > 0.05$, H_{02} was not rejected.

Research question 3

What challenges affect the implementation of curriculum innovations?

Table 5: Challenges Affecting Curriculum Innovation Implementation

Item	Mean Analysis (Xa)	Mean performance (Xp)	Difference (Xa – Xp)	Remark
Inadequate funding	3.88	2.69	1.19	Agreed
Lack of instructional materials	3.56	2.45	1.11	Agreed
Insufficient lecturer training	3.87	2.89	0.98	Agreed
Poor technological facilities	3.99	2.83	1.16	Agreed
Resistance to change among educators	3.75	2.78	0.97	Agreed

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Discussion

The findings indicate that inadequate funding, poor technological infrastructure, insufficient lecturer training, lack of instructional materials, and resistance to innovation constitute major barriers to successful curriculum implementation.

Hypothesis 3

Table 6: t-test Analysis on Implementation Challenges

Respondents	N	Mean	SD	DF	t-cal	p-value	Decision
Economics Teachers	209	3.55	0.77	227	0.78	0.434	Not significant
Curriculum educationists	20	3.41	0.68				

Since $p = 0.434 > 0.05$, H_{03} was not rejected.

Discussion

Since the calculated p-value (0.434) is greater than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was not rejected. This implies that Economics teachers and Curriculum Educationists did not differ significantly in their ratings of the challenges affecting the implementation of curriculum innovations aimed at enhancing workforce readiness in Abia State, Nigeria.

Discussion of findings

The findings revealed that curriculum innovation positively influences workforce readiness, practical and skill-based learning enhances graduate employability, and inadequate funding, insufficient instructional materials, limited lecturer training, poor technological facilities, and resistance to change hinder effective curriculum implementation. These findings are supported by Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964), which emphasizes that investment in education and training develops individuals' productive abilities and employability. Innovative curricula and practical learning equip Economics Education students with analytical thinking, communication, digital literacy, and problem-solving skills required by employers. Similarly, Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984) explains that practical experiences, internships, projects, and simulations enable students to apply theoretical knowledge to real-life situations. However, inadequate resources restrict these learning opportunities and weaken workforce preparation. The agreement between Economics teachers and curriculum educationists highlights the importance of curriculum innovation. Therefore, adequate funding, lecturer training, modern facilities, and practical learning opportunities are essential for improving graduate employability and workforce readiness in Abia State.

Conclusion

The study concluded that curriculum innovation contributes to workforce readiness among Economics Education students in Abia State. The integration of practical and skill-based learning components enhances graduates' employability by equipping them with workplace competencies demanded by employers. However, the effectiveness of curriculum innovation is constrained by inadequate funding, insufficient instructional resources, poor technological facilities, limited lecturer training, and resistance to educational change. Therefore, strengthening curriculum innovation remains essential for producing employable graduates capable of contributing meaningfully to national development.

Recommendations

1. Increased Government Funding: Government should increase funding for Economics Education programmes, provide modern technological facilities and adequate instructional materials to support innovative teaching, practical learning, and students' workforce readiness.

2. Curriculum Review and Lecturer Development: Tertiary institutions should regularly update Economics Education curricula, organise continuous professional development for lecturers, and encourage curriculum reforms to meet changing labour market demands.
3. Practical Learning and Industry Partnerships: Institutions should strengthen practical learning, make internships compulsory, establish industry partnerships, and integrate entrepreneurship education to enhance employability, self-reliance, and national development.

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