

LEARNING ABOUT MIGRATION THROUGH ECONOMICS: A DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION APPROACH

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Abstract: Most economics handbooks describe multiple applied market-related issues and situations from a purely economic perspective. The social or environmental aspects of these issues are, however, rarely discussed and, in any case, considered of residual importance. This gap can be filled by introducing development education (DE) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into economics teaching, as these encompass the three dimensions of sustainability: economic sustainability, social inclusion and environmental protection. The DE approach analyses social and environmental problems that need to be taken into account in economics subjects. It also involves increasing analytical and critical capacity, as well as offering a multidimensional perspective to economics or related fields. This article aims to highlight different economic concepts in which DE can be embedded. We will make use of standard economic concepts that can be found in a standard syllabus or in textbooks used in most universities around the world, such as the popular handbooks written by Mankiw and Taylor (2017), Blanchard (2017), Samuelson and Nordhaus (2010) and Acemoglu, Laibson and List (2022).

Migration provides a rich source of issues and questions that can provide useful examples when teaching economics, while simultaneously serving to raise awareness of, and teach, solidarity principles. Different economic concepts relating to migration can be exposed, analysed and discussed from alternative viewpoints. A deeper analysis may help to improve students' ability to identify fake news and fallacies related to immigration, which have recently arisen all too frequently. This article will discuss positive and negative macroeconomic perspectives on migration, such as brain drain and imbalances in the supply of workers. From a microeconomic point of view, we will cover issues such as competition in access to goods and other externalities. The article concludes by arguing that introducing DE in these elementary economics subjects offers useful

opportunities to understand and learn more deeply about the reality of migration. This way, learning economics may offset the use and abuse of migration as a source of social and political tension.

Keywords: Development Education; Migration; Economics; Critical Thinking; Meaningful Learning.

Introduction

A common assumption often propagated by some sections of the media is that, if the population increases, the same resources will have to be distributed among more people, making each of them poorer. As an extreme argument, if people die from hunger and malnutrition in the world, the solution is to reduce the population size. As Pazos (2019) states, it is a mistake to blame population growth as the main cause of impoverishment, since both poverty and wealth exist equally in populated and unpopulated places. For example, New York City, with its very high population density, may appear abundant and wealthy, but experiences significant levels of poverty (Elliott, 2022). On the other hand, poverty may occur in places where neighbours are kilometres apart but shortages of vital supplies abound. One can compare India and Japan, both of which have dense populations, but with disparate development rates. Pazos (2019) states that there is no constant relationship between overpopulation and poverty, but rather that levels of wealth depend on the economic policies implemented. A clear comparative example was in West Germany, which was much more densely populated and strongly developed than East Germany; while their populations were of the same religion, race and culture, the main difference between the two was their political and economic systems.

People from all over the world try to cross borders in search of opportunity and security. There is a continuous movement of migrants and refugees. The reasons for emigrating are mainly economic, and to find better working and living conditions. But other compelling reasons also push people to emigrate to other countries or move within them, such as situations of continued violence, conflict, natural disasters, climate change and food insecurity. Chapter two of the World Migration Report (WMR) of the International Organization for Migration (McAuliffe and Triandafyllidou, 2021) states that the

migration process itself turns many people into vulnerable subjects who suffer violence, exploitation and abuse, becoming objects of human trafficking, being trapped without being able to cross borders, and suffering worse situations than those they were fleeing. The lack of legal channels for international migration makes migratory movements difficult. The World Migration Report also shows that the number of people migrating is significant and increasing (McAuliffe and Triandafyllidou, 2021: 23). The percentage of international migrants worldwide increased from 2.3 percent of the world's population in 1980 to 3.6 percent in 2020.

Thus, human mobility and migratory phenomena are increasingly common and the debate about them in public and political discourse is important and enduring. The WMR states that the news media is often excessively negative and that key aspects of the migration issue have been endlessly distorted (Ibid.). It indicates that misinformation is widespread about migration and migrants. The report also states that this trend has increased interest in investigating misinformation and verifying facts to minimise the spread of false ideas about migration (Ibid.: 13). According to Lazer et al. (2018), fake news is a socially harmful phenomenon that generates an increase in cynicism and apathy, and encourages radicalisation. Lazer et al. suggest two possible solutions: one is to control and prevent the publication of fake news, and the other is to improve the ability of individuals to recognise and protect themselves from fake news. This requires new teaching approaches that help university students detect fake news, as Ramos Ruiz (2023) also recommends. Since, as has been shown in recent studies (see Vosoughi, Roy and Aral, 2018), fake news has a much greater diffusion and impact than real content, the vehicle for spreading it is mainly social networks and especially news from the political sphere that influences political, economic and social well-being and causes misinformation and other information disorders (Lilleker and Pérez-Escolar, 2023).

Economics subjects in higher education have great potential to educate students and challenge anti-immigrant discourses. This article aims to describe key moments in introducing development education (DE) in economics teaching and to take advantage of the opportunity it offers for raising awareness and training in the field of migratory movements, as well as helping to develop

analytical and critical thinking. This fits with Bourn's (2018: 80) claim that 'companies and organizations need skills to interact with other people from different linguistic, cultural and religious origins', which has been referred to as the acquisition of 'intercultural competence'. This is a task that is characteristic of DE and which is necessary to overcome the added difficulties that trigger the information distortions referred to above.

The 2030 SDG Agenda incorporates migration issues in SDG target 10.7, which aims to facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility, as well as to apply planned and well-managed migration policies (United Nations, 2019). In addition to contributing to the achievement of SDG 10, which aims to reduce inequality, other objectives are also achieved with migratory movements, such as the reduction of poverty in places of origin by migrant workers sending remittances home. The 2030 Agenda makes clear the importance of migration, and SDG target 17.18 specifically requests that reliable data be obtained to monitor migratory movements (UN, 2024).

DE can support actions that improve social cohesion as well as relations between states by enhancing the mutual knowledge that fosters communication and coexistence (Vallés Marugán, 2021). DE actions promote rapprochement between countries and regions that share a common relationship such as migratory flows. Economic analysis must, therefore, take account of more than just the economic contributions that those who migrate can make in their role as workers. Vallés Marugán (Ibid.) advocates highlighting the benefits of migration as a source of cultural and social enrichment, in which migrants see their voice and vision recognised, and which serves to promote the construction of an active, participatory citizenship that is open to coexistence with others.

As long as migration is taking place and is a reality, it is vital to evaluate political discourses and actions, as well as to promote solutions, cooperation and support. Research is also necessary to help to protect human rights in the field of migration. As part of this process, projects like the one presented in this article, which seeks to open up new ways of showing the positive effects that migration can have on communities, may contribute through scientific arguments and facts to support interculturality and coexistence and challenge discrimination. This

process augments other international efforts to promote social cohesion and manage migration.

One of the aims of DE is to challenge the growth of racism, anti-immigrant vitriol and disinformation that threatens human rights, and promote values of solidarity and equality. This article reviews the opportunities offered by teaching economics in university studies to expose, analyse and debate different situations related to migration. Some examples and strategies for delivering DE in economics teaching are outlined that raise awareness of the protection of the human rights of migrants.

Materials and methodology

Economics education is home to diverse fields of study. One of them is business management, which includes topics such as social economy and transformative economy movements like the green or the circular economy, among others. The United Nations Global Compact (UN, 2019) defines ten very clear principles that promote respect for human rights and avoid any form of discrimination. However, this article is oriented towards a more general economic overview, looking for topics and theoretical resources from macroeconomics, microeconomics and introductory economics in which DE issues can be included, in particular those related to migration and social and economic sustainability. A classic review has been conducted of economic cases and content covered in economics subjects and which can be found in reference books for undergraduate economics studies in numerous related degrees from around the world. Among the authors consulted were Acemoglu, Laibson and List (2022), Blanchard (2017), Mankiw and Taylor (2017), and Samuelson and Nordhaus (2010). Thematic contents have been selected that can provide key answers to economic issues related to migration, and that are also found in the professional skills development of economics students.

The aim is to generate innovative teaching by using meaningful learning as a teaching strategy. For Moreira (2017: 2), meaningful learning, a concept originally proposed by David Ausubel, 'is the acquisition of new knowledge with meaning, understanding, critical awareness and the possibility of using that knowledge in explanations, arguments and solutions to situations or problems'

and not just deposit content in the student's head as suggested by Freire (2009: 12). Literacy implies 'a critical understanding of social, political and economic reality' (Ibid.: 48). There is a strong contrast between rote and meaningful learning. The former is based on decontextualised repetition, while meaningful learning requires examining ideas, critically analysing, comparing with previous knowledge and applying knowledge in new contexts. The theory of meaningful learning remains one of the strongest theories of modern pedagogy. According to Baque Reyes and Portilla Faican (2021), meaningful learning supports the acquisition of efficient knowledge, which remains and is nourished over time in the student's daily life. As Moreira (2017) explains, if learning is mechanical and meaningless, the student will reject it, and to achieve meaningful learning a predisposition to learn is required. Previous knowledge and a context to which to add new knowledge are also needed. In addition, significant learning is obtained if thoughts, feelings and emotions are integrated along with, ultimately, a more humanistic approach that improves personal growth.

Results

Below are four adaptations of economic content that include analysis of immigration issues and facilitate the implementation of DE for economics teachers.

Supply shifts caused by an increase in the active population: The arrival of immigrants supports development

People often migrate either for work or to study, although the most controversial migration flows are usually linked to employment. The migration of workers increases the active population and, therefore, the potential level of production of an economy. Gross domestic product (GDP) is the level of production towards which an economy tends in the long term. It is the totality of goods and services generated by the group of companies and producers in a country over a specific period of time and is determined by the so-called 'aggregate supply'. The resources traditionally considered necessary for growth are: land and natural assets, work, capital and, finally, technology or technological knowledge. Any economic measure or event that raises any of these four factors will increase a country's production and its level of wealth.

If immigration increases in an economy, the number of available workers rises, and by employing them, the quantity of goods and services produced also rises. Technically, this is said to shift the aggregate supply to the right or increase it. If, on the other hand, workers emigrate, the aggregate supply curve contracts. The reasoning is the same whether we are talking about physical capital or human capital, the latter being defined as the body of knowledge, experience and skills of a company's employees. The greater this human capital, the larger and more effective the productive and economic value of the employees. Just as increasing the number of machines will raise the capacity to produce goods and services and help to achieve the company's objectives, if human capital is increased, productivity rises and there will be economic growth, and hence a shift of the aggregate supply to the right.

The well-being of workers, including their physical and mental health, is also an essential factor in the effective delivery of activities and for optimising motivation and productivity. Economically, it is very important to the achievement of SDG 3, health and well-being, in both developed and developing countries. Along the same lines, the contribution of technological knowledge, although it is not literally technological progress, acts as a change in technology and produces effects similar to investments in new technologies, generating economic growth. Classical economic theory believes that each person is a determining element in generating production due to their contribution to the labour force and human capital. Out of the four resources that can grow the economy and create new economic wealth, three of them can be provided by immigrants: work, human capital and technological knowledge. An additional question in this regard is what training do immigrants have? According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (2016), it is increasingly common for immigrants entering advanced economies to be highly qualified, and as early as 2010, they surpassed low-skilled and medium-skilled immigrants in number. This may be due to the fact that access to university studies is becoming easier, but also because of policies that enable the entry of highly qualified people, such as those applied by the United Kingdom, which continues to increase the number of visas granted to highly qualified personnel, based on queries to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2023). What is known as brain drain is positive for

receiving economies but negative for countries that see their better-educated population leave.

Shifts in aggregate demand due to increases in population: The increase in spending in the economy leads to an increase in GDP

Aggregate demand is the curve that represents the quantity of goods and services that families, companies and the state aim to purchase at each price level. But, in addition to prices, there are factors that affect the quantity of goods and services demanded. If, at the same price, there is a circumstance that causes the quantity demanded to be different, we will observe shifts in demand. Shifts in aggregate demand may be caused by: families, who consume; companies, which make purchases for investment; the state, which spends and also collects taxes; and external agents, by which exports occur.

If the mood and confidence in the political, economic and social situation improves and increases, which encourages families to consume, then aggregate demand will move to the right and there will be growth. The same will happen if there are positive expectations for businesspeople who will increase their purchases and investments if the government decides to raise budgets for public spending, or similarly if the products of a certain country become fashionable and exports grow. The economy as a whole will have the same effect if the population increases, because the demand for goods and services that will be necessary to survive immediately rises. This increase in demand, given market prices, shifts aggregate demand to the right.

The following question may arise, as in all cases in which aggregate demand increases: if the immigrant population that needs to consume goods and services increases, can it generate inflation? The answer is that the market responds to the increase in demand with an increase in production that satisfies it; the supply adapts flexibly to demand and will incorporate more labour into production levels. As supply also shifts, the prices of these goods and services do not necessarily increase. Therefore, welcoming immigrants does not generate inflation and impacts positively on the labour market. Other events generate inflation: for example, bad weather that destroys crops, as agricultural products become scarcer, or political and military conflicts that interrupt the supply of

goods necessary for production and transportation, thereby raising production costs.

It should be added that immigrants contribute from the beginning to providing tax benefits to the host state when consuming goods and services, since they pay the taxes associated with their acquisition, such as value added tax (VAT). Secondly, as has been indicated, if companies have to increase their production in order to satisfy the new demand that is generated, they need to hire more labour, generating new employment opportunities. In the same way, other economic activities will be triggered more in the long term, when the stay lengthens. In fact, the IMF (2016: 185-186) states that there is a positive relationship between the entry of immigrants and the growth of GDP. Rowthorn (2015: 40) estimated that in the UK, GDP per capita would be three percent higher in 2087 with high migration versus very low migration, especially if human capital and productivity are high. And not only in the UK, but in general, the economic repercussions of immigration for host countries are positive in terms of economic growth and productivity (IMF, 2020).

The labour market

The labour market supports the aggregate supply of a country, where the worker is the key to creating goods and services, and is central to the debate on immigration. The labour market is also governed by the laws of supply and demand; it contains people looking for employment and companies offering jobs. The operation is similar to that of an agreement between workers and companies that reach a balance where the interests of both parties are united. The balance they reach determines salary and hiring levels. This basic operating scheme may suggest that, if there are more people willing to work, they will tend to lower wages in negotiations, and that it will be the immigrants who are willing to accept wages lower than those of the initial equilibrium, appropriating jobs that were previously performed by natives. In any case, standard economic theory (Krugman and Obstfeld, 2003: 161-166) also predicts greater per capita production for the host country which leads the way for improving the quality of life of affected workers through redistribution policies.

This could be true in very specific labour markets, in which a very high number of immigrants willing to work at any price have been concentrated, such as in agriculture. But in developed economies, labour markets are highly regulated. Wages and working conditions are not as flexible and do not adapt freely to population fluctuations in such short periods of time. Research by the Migration Observatory (2023) in the UK shows that the influence of migration is not considerable, either on wages or on unemployment.

Spain, a country that traditionally welcomes immigrants, has conducted various investigations on the matter of immigration; these investigations concluded that the impact of migrants on average salary and employment is insignificant or even beneficial for natives, and they demonstrate that it is economic recessions that increase unemployment, not immigrants (Atienza-Montero and Romo-Calixto, 2021). In the same way, at a global level, the IMF (2016: 186) indicates that the global impact of migrants on jobs and salaries is very limited, including the specific case of the mass migration of Syrian refugees to Turkey.

What happens if there are waves of massive and unexpected immigration? There may be certain segments of the labour market in which migrants present skills similar to those of natives or other previously existing migrants. This competition may occur in the short term, but in the longer term, immigrants, while increasing the available labour force, also generate the need for more goods and services; more will have to be produced and more people will need to be hired. It is the natives, who have more language skills, that usually occupy the best job positions generated (Atienza-Montero and Romo-Calixto (2021; D'Amuri and Peri, 2014). Migrants tend to exchange family caregiving roles with qualified natives. If cases of competition are observed, one solution could be for the state and social services to provide training and thus facilitate the acquisition of complementary job skills so as not to compete.

Comparatively speaking, it is much more damaging for employment and wages when developing countries have extremely low wages. Global North companies take advantage of this to relocate their production to countries around the world where work is arguably the worst paid, with no guarantee of safety or

social rights, even in conditions that resemble slavery or using child labour. These are places where targets such as SDG targets 8.7 and 8.8 are urgently needed. It is understandable that a company would want to take advantage of the relatively lower costs in other countries, but it is abusive if wages barely cover daily subsistence needs. Wage increases can be very positive for a country's development; an example is the Chinese economy, which has also progressively raised its wages (IMF, 2016: 176).

Microeconomics: market failures and negative consequences of its natural functioning

Another economic topic that is studied generically is where the market does not regulate itself and the state intervenes to correct the inefficient effects. Although the market should provide sufficient quantities of the goods and services that society demands, this is not always the case. The market does not always respond to certain needs, particularly if they are social. The state is the only institution that can provide a system of goods, services and investments that would never be profitable for a private investor. These are clear cases of negative market effects, or market failures, which can include difficulties in accessing private goods, such as housing or public goods, and education or healthcare, among others.

In this case, it is the state and public institutions that are responsible for providing what is necessary for the well-being of the population, whether native or immigrant. If a very large number of people come to a locality, quick responses are required from administrations to equip the area with what is necessary, or provide private companies with incentives to do so, such as the construction sector, or even the local redistribution of activities and population. The solutions lie in public actions, from water supply and sanitation to housing, education and health. Could population aging be considered a negative externality? It could be considered an economic and social cost due to high levels of dependency along with a small active population. If the demographic system becomes unbalanced, it is very easy to understand that a low contribution in terms of production and payment of taxes is unsustainable in the face of high social costs. Facilitating the entry of younger people may provide the solution.

Could a possible culture clash between natives and immigrants be considered a negative externality? This does not have economic effects per se, but it does have social effects that can indirectly affect other areas of well-being. Standards of tolerance towards criminal behaviour, for example, are often stricter in the wealthiest countries, therefore it is important to promote integration, but also to make an effort to understand and incorporate migrants' faiths and cultures in order to achieve mutual appreciation and social well-being. Development education activities can support this integration by promoting values such as diversity and respect in order to obtain positive social results that reduce these externalities (Vallés Marugán, 2021).

The economic principle that states that the market itself is regulated to achieve economic well-being is well known, and it should not be separated from another economic principle, as important as the previous one, which indicates that the state can improve the results of the market (Mankiw and Taylor, 2017), precisely because it protects from 'market failures'. If coexistence problems are seen as a market failure caused by immigration, the state can act by introducing DE, as it promotes social cohesion and cultural diversity. Critical analysis is necessary to go further and actively demand solutions in the field of migration, that require the joint effort of different actors, such as governments, civil society organisations, and the media. De Angelis (2021) asserts that DE can be an effective response to migration-related issues to address the drawbacks found in educational and policy strategies. Integrating the analyses outlined above, and many more that have not been addressed here, into economics teaching is one way to implement DE. But the DE sector needs to pay more attention to neoliberalism, which Fricke (2022) highlights as one of the root causes of poverty and inequality, both locally and globally, and which is not adequately addressed by the development education sector.

Conclusions

This article has reviewed the opportunities offered by teaching economics in university studies to expose, analyse and debate different situations related to migration. The most basic examples and topics have been listed, including examples of, and strategies for, delivering development education through economics. The article has considered key economic concepts related to migration

including aggregate demand or supply and the labour market, while also discussing issues central to the human rights of migrants. In economics there is always a debate around two trends. One is letting the market regulate itself. Another is for the state to control the economy with fiscal, monetary and even social policies, to try to counteract some of the negative effects in those areas and prevent them from creating unwanted levels of inflation, production or unemployment. State intervention is necessary to ensure an adequate supply of infrastructure and public services for both migrants and natives. Too often migrants and new communities are blamed for cuts to public spending to mask a lack of public initiative to resolve the needs of the general population. However, from an economic point of view, immigration has positive effects on the economy and DE could incorporate these benefits into its public engagement programmes.

It is essential to understand the dynamics of migration. This is an issue that requires special attention in analysing the policies, interventions and aid that impact the lives and rights of migrants and natives. Therefore, it is necessary to train citizens who are capable of formulating more humanitarian policies and promoting a more supportive approach to migration crises. The phenomenon of international migration is complex and has economic and social repercussions. Real data, although abundant, remains difficult to extract and manage because changing realities emerge. But the most basic economic theory leaves no doubt about the benefits, even the necessity, of immigration from a demographic point of view, especially in the future, given the current population projections.

It is necessary to be prepared to change the dynamics of migration through immigration policies and practices. DE can prepare the population to understand the economy, in addition to training them to exercise political influence. The training of students capable of dismantling myths about migration is a task that involves putting DE into practice. Concepts such as co-development, launched for the first time by Naïr (1997), are now part of DE programming (IDEA, 2022: 23) with the idea of seeking alliances with organisations led by migrants to promote solidarity and fight against racism and discrimination. Development education is well positioned to incorporate a positive economic narrative about migration into its programmes and activities thus ensuring that the public is better informed about this critical development issue.

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