

Problem and Issue in Teaching and Learning and in Large Under-Resourced Classroom in Nigeria Public Schools Implication for Policy Making

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Abstract: The study examined the perceptions of both teachers and students in some secondary schools in Nigeria on the perceived problems and issues they encounter in teaching and learning in their large, overcrowded and under-resourced classroom. One hundred and ten teachers and 500 students from 20 secondary schools purposively selected from Ibadan metropolis, Nigeria, constituted the sample. The focus of the study was to collect a base-line data that could help to address this perennial problem in Nigeria schools. Five research questions were raised and addressed in the study and a stakeholder's perceptions questionnaire (for both teachers and students) constituted the main instrument for data collection. Findings from the study indicate that both the selected teachers and students agreed that large classes constitute a hindrance to effective teaching and learning in their schools. Some of the problems identified with such classes are: lack of discipline and poor class control, it gives no room for effective teacher-student relationship; teachers could not identify students by their names, non-availability and ineffective teaching learning materials, among others. Implications of all these findings for policy making was discussed, prominent among which is for various governments to build more classrooms and provide more teaching and learning materials.

Key words: Large classes, small classes, teaching and learning, under-resource classroom, secondary school, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The problem of teaching and learning in large classes has been extensively documented in literature. Where there are still contentious views on the impact of small or large class sizes on pupils' learning outcomes, evidence abound in literature to show that small class sizes are better managed and they produced good results. It is generally agreed that for effective learning to take place, it essential that both students and teachers must create a conducive classroom environment. It is expected that under a conducive class environment, there will be a good interaction between the teacher and the students; this cannot be guaranteed in a large class situation. The larger class phenomenon is now a big debacle in the aspiration of Nigeria at providing qualitative secondary education to the citizenry.

At the attainment of independence, most of African countries adopted some revolutionary educational policies. In Nigeria for example, the Universal Primary Education (U.P.E) programme which has been in place since 1945 in the western Region later spread to other parts of the country. This policy was later reinforced in 1976, when the then military government adopted the

policy for the whole country as clear demonstration of good intention of government as well as in keeping with the decision of the meeting of Addis-Ababa of African Ministers of Education in 1961 which express the desire for African countries to achieve universal primary education by 1980. A similar programme was adopted by other African countries and as a result, school enrolment ratio increased and the students teacher ratio increased dramatically at the primary and secondary levels of education.

A study of education in Sub-Saharan African shows that between 1960 and 1983, the educational system at the primary level expanded on average by a factor of 14 with Nigeria having the highest rate of enrolment of students in schools at all levels when compared with other African countries. For instance, primary school enrolment increased from about 3.7 million pupils in 1970 to 12.7 million in 1980 and 15 million in 1985. Presently, the latest Multiple Indicator Cluster survey by the same Federal Office of Statistics (FOS) indicated a GER of 92% in 1999, 95% in 2000 and 93% in 2001. The growth in the GER indicates that more children are now in school than before. This growth in enrolment has been boosted by the launch of the universal basic education

programme by the current civilian government in 1999. The current enrolment increase has resulted in the teacher-pupil ratio of 1:50. However, according to the National Policy on Education, student ratio in Nigerian primary and secondary schools have been fixed at 1:30 and 1:35 respectively, but the reality is that in some states of the Federation (e.g. Lagos, Oyo, Osun and Ogun states, where this study was conducted), they are between 1:50 and 1:85.

With the increase in enrolment, primary and secondary education thus faces many problems and stresses. Such problems ranges from inadequate teaching personnel (which aggravated the large class issue), lack of infrastructure, poor funding and consequently poor achievement or under-achievement. The problem of teaching personnel ranges from teacher quantity, quality, motivation, etc. It was evident with the introduction of UBE in 1999 that the available teachers could not cope with the staggering number of pupils in schools. This factor led to the merger of classes under a single teacher, leading to a disproportionate teacher-pupil ratio. The large class syndrome was compounded by poor resources, facilities and technologies for effective delivery in such situation.

Literature review: There is no consensus yet among educators as to what constitute a small or large class. A perception exists among parents and teachers that smaller classes are better than large classes; and researchers and policy analyst, however are more wary^[1]. This author explains that some researchers have technical concern about the research designs of study that report a relationship between large class and reduced achievement. It is even generally believed by some teachers that a large class under an intelligence and skilful teacher is preferable to a small class under an incompetent teacher. Experience has however shown that class size often affect teaching effectiveness. It can therefore be said that the smaller the size of the class, the more effective teaching is likely to be^[2]. The belief is that large classes are not only exhausting but also the cause of frustration and failure in most school is indiscipline. Insecurities about teachers ability to control a class of some 40 (all too often 40 plus) children loom large in the minds of many inexperienced and even experienced teachers. Ajiboyejo and Tella^[3] assert that the problem of learning and teaching in a large class situation are enormous. They explained that the situation in large class does not make for close attention to individual student by the teacher. In most of the schools for example, students write on their laps and at times sit on the windowsills during lessons. Any learning under such conditions

according to can neither be meaningful nor effective. Many teachers may not find it easy to vary their seating arrangement because of the constraints place upon them by the size of the classrooms and the large number of pupils in their classes. In some cases, the shape and size of the desks may not make it easy for them to be moved around. Whatever problems teachers encounter in arranging their classes in different seating pattern they should, once in a while at least try to vary their seating arrangement. Good class management is the key to classroom success. When there is good class management, there is a positive approach to class management and class activities. It must be emphasised that there is no classroom without its little problem, no matter how it is managed.

However, where good class management is lacking, there is chaos and teaching and learning are disrupted and the instructor may be confronted with any of the following problems: Absenteeism, disobedience, fighting, (Verbal and Physical) inability to learn, inattentive, leaving seat for no good reason, noisemaking, refusal to complete assignment, sleeping and untidiness. Maryland in TCPE^[4] pointed out the fact that few students in a class will create a path to good classroom management. The researcher stresses further that good classroom management makes personal teaching possible for it frees the individual from constant conflict and only then can the teacher avoid confrontation and it allows the teacher to establish warm relationship with most of his pupils that he want to teach.

Nye and Konstantopoulos^[5] identified two problems posed in large class for teachers. These to the authors include the provision of an opportunity for discussion or for any kind of oral input into the written work are difficult; and the amount of marking involved can dissuade even the most enthusiastic teacher from setting the amount of written work that he feels will benefit the students. When trying to overcome problems created by teaching and learning in large class (West and Woessman^[6]), suggests some innovations for dealing with large classes which they define as those with over 60 students. Such innovation according to them include, peer tutoring system, group work organisation, printed teaching aids, educational methods effective for developing countries locally produced materials, educator training strategies, school construction and tapping, with community resources. They conclude by saying that large class will continue to be the norms for developing countries.

Teacher/Student interpersonal relationship in large classes: It is highly important for a teacher to know the

social and power structure of the class. They should be in a position to point out those who lead and those who follow. Such knowledge will not only help to relate well to his pupils at different levels, it will also help him to foster a healthy relationship among his pupils. The relationship between teacher and pupils has a direct effect on the rate at which pupils learn and the effectiveness of a teacher. Additionally, classroom relationship influences the emotional tone of the class. The teacher's behaviour contributes to the ways in which his pupils learn social attitudes and this has deep effect on the pupils' sub-conscious levels.

The major element of teacher-pupil relationship is what is known in some circle in teacher education as the interpersonal regard. The term is used to determine human relationship between teacher and pupil, pupil and pupil and between the institution of the school itself and the pupils. According to Osokoya^[7], for effective learning to take place, it is essential that both the student and the teacher must create a conducive class environment where there will be good interaction between teacher and the student. It should be noted that this cannot take place in large class situation.

Academic performance in large class: As the school continue to experience enrolment explosion, in terms of students' intake, less care was taken to provide adequate human and material resources to take care of the students in quality and quantity. Some researcher have asserts the effect of size on the performance of student^[8], define performance as a response which may be identified as one of the actions or reactions that constitute the operations of an interaction system. The authors view performance as an aspect of behaviour and that it represent a complex aspect of behaviour. Individual difference in performance provides the basic for the differentiation of structure on groups. In a study, Scheck^[9] noted that large class affected teachers' behaviour and students' performance. Adeoye^[10] postulated that while large classes have sufficient resources in the developed part of the world, the reverse is the case in the developing countries. To him, they are either haphazardly arranged or completely lacking material backup. It has been argued that students in smaller classes benefits from greater attention which result in higher student achievement. There is however, little empirical evidence to support this hypothesis. Literature reviews suggest that only very small classes (in which instruction is nearly one-to-one) produced significant differences in average student achievement.

Aber-Bengtsson^[11] also identified the causes of student underachievement to include large class population and was quick in recommending a reduction of

classes-size toward better achievement. Reducing class size to increase student achievement is an approach that has been tried, debated and analyzed for several decades. The premise seems logical with fewer students to teach, teachers can coax better performance from each of them. But what does the research show? Some researchers have not found a connection between smaller classes and higher student achievement, but most of the research shows that when class size reduction programs are well designed and implemented student achievement rises as class size drops^[4]. The most influential contemporary evidence that smaller classes lead to improved achievement is Tennessee's project STAR where researchers could compare student who had four years of small class participation to student who had none. This means that researcher could more reliably evaluate the impact of the class size reform. Finn^[12] reported that students in smaller classes did better than those in larger classes.

Nye analysed project STAR data to determine if certain sub-groups of student had greater gains in achievement when placed in smaller classes. The researcher found that minority students participating in small classes had larger gains in achievement than students in small classes. In another study^[5] explored the long-term effect of reading and mathematics for students' who had participated in small classes. Students who took part in small in small classes had statistically significant higher scores in reading and mathematics than student who participated in small classes for four years had higher reading achievement scores than students who were in small classes for the same amount of time. Speas^[13] found mixed results in an evaluation of class size reduction program's impact on achievement in its third year. At class 3, no significant differences were found in the achievement between students in reduced size classes and those in regular size classes. Likewise^[14], found that no impact on student learning as measured by standardized tests after a one- year class reduction. Also examined the data from the 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) to analyse the effect of class on academic achievement and found little or no impact. The study found that being in a small class did not increase the likelihood of a student's attaining higher score on the tests. They define small class as those with 20 or fewer students per teacher and large classes, as 31 or more students. Johnson concluded that it is quite likely, infact that class size as a variation pales in comparison with the effects of many factors not included in the data such as teacher quality and teaching methods. Considering the above review literature, the focus of the study is to examine the problems and issues in teaching and learning in large under-resourced classrooms in

Nigeria public secondary schools and its implications for policy making.

To achieve the objective on this study the following research questions were stated.

- Do the teachers perceive any problem in teaching large classes?
- Do the students perceive any problem in learning in large classes?
- Do the teachers' perceived teaching aid as making learning more effective in a large class?
- Does large class give room for effective student-teacher and students-students relationship?
- What is the perception of teachers and students on the influence of class size on students' achievement?
- What is the level of availability of teaching learning materials in the schools?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study is a descriptive survey research. It concern with obtaining firsthand information from teachers and students in public secondary school in Nigeria. It investigated the problem and issues in teaching and learning classroom in Nigeria. A simple random technique was used to select 500 students from ten randomly selected secondary schools in Ibadan. A total number of 110 teachers also took part in the study. An instrument tagged: Teacher/Student Perception of Large Class Teaching Scale (TSPLCTS) developed by the researcher with reliability co-efficient of $r = 0.85$ through test-retest method of two weeks interval was used to gathered data on the study. The teachers part of the instrument contains section A which focus on teachers personal data; Section B focuses on teaching/Learning situation in large classes; Section C focuses on teaching methods/aids in large classes and Section D focuses on ranking of the problems as perceived by the teachers.

The student's part of the instrument focuses on 3 areas. These are Personal data = A; Teaching/Learning Situation in Large classes B; and C focuses on Problem Ranking. Data collected was analysed using percentages.

Findings: Question 1: Do the teachers perceive any problem in teaching large classes?

Table 1 above shows the teachers' responses to each question. However, the most common problems identified by the teachers are items (10), i.e., numbers of teachers in the school determines the size of the class, 36.4% of the teachers indicating agree and another 36.4% strongly agree. It was noted during the study that in most

Table 1: Teachers' perception of problems of teaching in large classes

Questions	SD	D	A	SA
Experienced teachers can teach perfectly in a large class as well as small class.			60 (54.5)	5 (45.5)
An average student will perform better in a small class than in large class.		(45.5)	50 (54.5)	60
Making students responsible for their learning is a natural issue.	50 (45.5)	20 (18.2)	40 (36.4)	
Classroom teacher like implementing group work/school instead of them separately.	10 (9.1)	40 (36.4)	50 (45.5)	10 (9.1)
Method of teaching influences students' response in large class.		10 (9.1)	60 (54.4)	40 (36.4)
I don't give assignment to my student because they are many.	30 (27.3)	50 (45.5)	30 (27.3)	
It is not easy to identify students by name in a large class.	20 (18.2)	30 (27.3)	30 (27.3)	30 (27.30)
Number of teachers in the school determines the size of the class.	10 (9.1)	20 (18.2)	40 (36.4)	40 (36.4)
Discipline is not easy to maintain in a large classes.	10 (9.1)	50 (45.5)	30 (27.3)	20 (18.2)
Students have been performing well irrespective of the size of the class.		20 (18.2)	80 (72.7)	1 (9.1)
Teachers need to select relevant teaching aid for effective teaching in large class and	10 (9.1)		70 (63.6)	30 (27.3)
Teaching aids are important for large class teaching.			70 (63.6)	40 (36.4)
The class is not skilfully managed during lesson.	10 (9.1)	60 (54.5)	40 (36.4)	
Teaching aid cannot be used effectively in a large class.	10 (9.1)	80 (72.7)	10 (9.1)	10 (9.1)
Lecturing is the method for information delivery and efficient means of teaching in a large class.	4 (36.4)	60 (54.5)		10 (9.1)
Multi-media provides an excellent tool to integrate various teaching methodology.	10 (9.1)		50 (45.5)	50 (45.5)
Multi-media help to address a number of problems.	10 (9.1)		70 (63.6)	30 (27.3)
Computer simulations and internet help to develop a partnership between the the student and the material for the teacher.	10 (9.1)		50 (45.5)	50 (45.5)
Multi-media and computers are not available in my school.			50 (45.5)	60 (54.5)
Field work programme is not easy to carry out	10 (9.1)	30 (27.3)	50 (45.5)	20 (18.2)

of these schools, there are insufficient teachers and this make the authority to ask teachers to combine two or three classes together. Another problem perceived by the teachers is that students were not easy to identify by name. This is evident with 27.3% indicating agree and 27.3% indicating strongly agree. One other problem identified was the fact that class is not usually skilfully managed during lesson with 40 teachers (36.4%) indicating their agreement to the item. And that teachers based on the largeness of the class need to varies their method of teaching during lesson with 60 teachers (54.5%) indicating they are strongly agree and the rest 50 (45.5%) indicating they agree with the items. The other problems as perceived by the teachers is the fact that field

Table 2: Students' perceptions of learning in large classes

Questions	SD	D	A	SA
I perform better in a small class than in a large class.	32 (6.4)	64 (12.8)	286 (57.2)	158 (23.6)
Discipline is not easily maintained in a large class	32 (6.4)	90 (18.0)	232 (46.4)	145 (29.2)
Large class does not allow the teacher and the students.	76 (15.2)	122 (24.4)	202 (46.4)	146 (29.2)
My ability has a lot to do with the performance not the size of the class.	26 (5.2)	122 (34.4)	202 (40.4)	100 (20.0)
My interest in particular subjects is what determines my performance not the size of the class.	44 (8.8)	68 (13.6)	230 (44.0)	168 (33.6)
Learning in large class is always hectic for students	52 (10.4)	106 (21.2)	254 (50.8)	88 (17.6)
How large a class is determines our academic performance in that class.	138 (27.2)	66 (33.2)	118 (23.6)	80 (16.0)
Reduction in the admission of students is the best solution to the problem of class.	80 (16.0)	128 (25.6)	196 (39.2)	96 (19.2)
It is always boring attending a large class.	78 (15.6)	136 (27.2)	182 (36.4)	104 (20.8)
The class is always rowdy.	102 (20.4)	182 (36.4)	144 (28.8)	72 (14.4)
Students prefer –learning in a large class than learning in a large.	104 (20.8)	162 (32.4)	154 (30.8)	80 (16.0)
There should not really be problem in managing a large class.	78 (15.6)	172 (34.4)	158 (31.6)	92 (18.4)
It is most exciting when you belong to a large class.	102 (20.4)	140 (28.0)	182 (36.4)	76 (15.2)
I prefer learning in a small class than learning in a large.	46 (9.2)	94 (18.8)	186 (37.2)	74 (34.8)
Teacher prefers teaching large class to small size class.	138 (27.6)	150 (30.0)	154 (30.8)	58 (11.6)
Large class is conducive for learning.	90 (18.0)	188 (37.6)	164 (32.8)	58 (11.6)
I feel more motivated to learn in large class than in a small class.	96 (19.2)	152 (30.4)	174 (32.4)	90 (18.0)
Class control is the biggest problem of large class.	52 (10.4)	56 (11.2)	204 (40.8)	188 (37.6)
Teaching is the biggest problem of large class.	52 (10.4)	124 (24.0)	220 (44.0)	104 (20.8)
Teaching aids make learning more effective in large class.	26 (5.2)	72 (14.4)	334 (66.8)	68 (13.6)

work is not easy to carry out with 50 teachers (45.5%) agree and 20 (18.2%) strongly agree.

Question 2: Do students perceive any problem in learning in large class?

Results in Table 2 above show the problems associated with large class as perceived by the students. The following were identified as major problems of large classes by the students (i) Discipline is not easily maintained with 232 students (46.4%) indicating agree and 146 (29.2%) indicating strongly agree. This is immediately followed by the fact that large class does not allow the teacher and students to interact very well with 202 students (46.4%) indicating agree and 146 (29.2%) indicating strongly agree. The next identifiable problem with large classes as indicated by the students is, learning

in large class is always hectic for students, with 254 (50.8%) majority indicating agree, 88 (17.6%) indicating strongly agree. Following this is that it is always boring attending a large class with 182 (36.4%) agree, 104 (20.8%) strongly agree. Other problems associated with large classes as indicated by the students are: the class is always rowdy and that class control is the biggest problem of large class with 204 (40.8%) agree and 188 (37.6%) strongly agree.

Question 3: Do teachers perceived teaching aids as making learning more effective?.

Items 11, 12 and 14 on Table 1 provide answer to this research question. It is clear from the table that 70 teachers (63.6%) which is the majority agreed that teachers need to select relevant teaching aids for effective teaching in a large class. Also item 12 that state that 'teaching aids are important for large class teaching with 70 teachers (63.6%) agree and 40 (36.4%) strongly agree. Similarly, item 14 that states that 'teaching aid cannot be used effectively in a large class with 80 teachers i.e., 72.7% indicating disagree, which shows that teaching aid is indispensable in teaching the large class.

Question 4: Does large class give room for student/teacher relationship?

Item 3 on Table 2 which states that 'large classes does not allow the teacher and the student to interact very well provide answer to this question, with 202 students (46.4%) indicating strongly agree and 146 (29.2%) indicating strongly agree as against 46 (15.2%) and 122 (24.4%) that indicate strongly disagree and disagree respectively.

Question 5: What is the perception of teachers and students on the influence of class size on students' achievement?

Item 2 on Table 1 that 'an average student will perform better in a small class than a large class' answer this question with 50 teachers (45.5%) and 60 (54.5%) indicating agree and strongly agree respectively, all the teachers responded in the affirmative.

Question 6: What is the level of availability of teaching and learning materials in the schools?

From Table 3 above it could be generally observed that a majority of the schools involved in the study virtually lacked all the essential features of well-resourced classroom. Apart from the chalkboard which is a permanent feature in all classrooms, other essential resources that could help the teachers and students are not available. More significant to note is that no public school (at least among those involved in this study) has internet connectivity. Also, only a small proportion

Table 3: Availability of teaching and learning resources

The resources	Yes		No	
	Teachers	Students	Teachers	Students
Chalkboard	110(100.0%)	500(100.0%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)
Overhead Projector	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	110(100%)	500(100%)
Computer	10(9.1%)	120(24.0%)	100(90.0%)	380(76.0%)
Internet Connectivity	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	110(100%)	500(100%)
Magnetic Board	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	110(100.0%)	500(100%)
Slide projector	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	110(100%)	500(100%)
Video machine	20(18.2%)	160(32.0%)	90(81.8%)	340(68.0%)
Electricity connectivity	25(22.7%)	170(34.0%)	85(77.3%)	330(66.0%)
Laboratories	60(54.5%)	210(42.0%)	50(45.5%)	290(58.0%)
Televisions	20(18.2%)	160(32.0%)	90(81.8%)	340(68.0%)

(teachers = 22.7%, students = 34.0%) of the schools sampled had electricity connectivity. Both the teachers and students reported that there is what they called laboratory (teachers = 54.5%, students 42.0%).

DISCUSSION

One of the major findings of this study is that as postulated in the literature, both the teachers and the students see large classes as a threat to academic success. The teachers felt that there were no sufficient teachers in their schools; hence, teacher-pupils ratio is very high. This has made it difficult for them to identify their students by their names and maintain discipline in the classrooms. The teachers also indicated that it is very difficult for them to engage in field work with such a tremendous large number of students. One could generally describe most classrooms in the schools sampled as chaotic. Even when the teachers says they give home work to students, it was discovered that in general subjects such as Mathematics, English Language and Social Studies teachers do not give more than one or two assignment in a term. These are core subjects that are offered by the entire students, hence, it was difficult for the teachers to give and grade home works. In this kind of circumstances, the continuous assessment practice in most school s have become questionable as teachers just ascribe marks to students without proper grading.

On the part of the students, learning in large classes seems to them to be a normal thing, since they have never experienced a different scenario. However, they were quick to point out that there is a problem of indiscipline and also there is no effective teacher pupil relationship in such large classes. A significant aspect of the findings in this study is that on the availability of materials in the sampled schools. Whereas, there could be a contention on the problems and issues in teaching and learning in

large classes, the situation becomes more aggravated when such large classes lacked appropriate teaching and learning resources. This is a case point with the schools sampled in this study which is not markedly different from what obtains in other public (i.e., government owned) secondary schools in Nigeria. In most of these schools, the buildings are dilapidated, classrooms are not sufficient, sitting and writing materials are not available and classrooms are generally chaotic. As reported in this study, no single secondary school among our sample is having internet connectivity. Even, electricity supply, which may be taken for granted in other countries, are generally lacking in most of these schools. This is not surprising in a country where electricity supply is highly epileptic. Whereas a few schools indicated they have televisions and video machines, one wonder how they will use them when electricity is not available .Even, when some of the teachers and students indicated they have laboratory in their schools, a visit to such laboratories will reveal the stark reality of empty buildings. At best, a few apparatus are locked up in some boxes in the so-called laboratories.

It is important therefore to stress at this stage, that whereas large classes constitute a problem to effective teaching and learning, the Nigeria situation becomes more problematic because of apparent lack of teaching and learning resources. Found in this situation, both the teachers and students become helpless and they just continue with 'routine' talk and chalk business. It is bad enough for the teacher to be confronted with a large number of students in their class, it is even worse to find out that there is nothing to support them to do their work. Taking into cognisance the importance of teaching and learning materials, one cannot but conclude that what is going on in these schools is just a charade, hence, the poor performance recorded in public examinations year in, year out in the country.

There is therefore an urgent need for the policy makers and the various governments in Nigeria (State and Federal) who own these schools to begin to address this problem of large classes and the attendant infrastructural facilities in the secondary schools. Provision of teaching and learning resources should be taken as a serious business and not a mere talk shop. It is when these problems are addressed that secondary schools in Nigeria could rise above the current low status it is rated.

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