

MANAGING LARGE CLASSES IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

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ABSTRACT

The reasons for large classes in developing countries are not far from the favourable government policies in the provision for free and compulsory basic education. This is in line with the global initiative for universal basic education coupled with the rapid population growth and awareness that a literate population is more productive than an illiterate one. Experience has shown that large classes or overcrowded classrooms affect the quality of education delivered in the school system. Teachers find it difficult to manage and teach effectively in large classes. This article explored the concept of large class size, its characteristics and management. The suggestions on processes of effective teaching and evaluating learning in large classes in developing economies like Nigeria preferred in this article will not only contribute to the existing literature but also assist teachers in their efforts to meet the expectations of the teaching profession.

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INTRODUCTION

The classroom can be described as that place within the school where the teacher and students can be located regularly, where everyone supposedly knows one another and one in which everyone works together. Class size refers to the actual number of students/pupils in any natural classroom. It is the number of students/pupils for whom a teacher is primarily assigned during a school year. Therefore, when classes are large, effective teaching becomes a very big problem teacher. There are problems of identification and that of being able to organise students to work together as a group.

Large classes or overcrowded classrooms are those where the students/pupils–teacher ratio (S/PTR) exceeds the recommendation of the educational policy of a given country. S/PTR is the number of students/pupils in a school with respect to the number of teaching staff. In the developed countries 25-30 students per teacher is considered large, while in the developing countries like Nigeria, it is seen to be normal or even small. Practical experience points to the fact that small classes are easier to manage, easier for teachers to provide individualized help to students, they facilitate teaching effectiveness, and above all mean less work for teachers. These seem to be sufficient reason for any

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teacher to prefer teaching small classes. The very high student/pupil-teacher ratios common in some developing countries make it virtually impossible for teachers to deliver effectively. Although the benefits of smaller classes are endless, some teachers have no choice in this matter of class size.

The reasons for large classes in developing countries are not far from the favourable government policies in the provisions for free and compulsory basic education. This is in line with global initiative for universal basic education coupled with rapid population growth and the awareness that a literate population is more productive than an illiterate one. Between 1960 and 1998, primary school enrolment in Nigeria increased from 2,912,619 to 17, 942, 000, or 516 percent rate increase (Okobiah, 2002). Within the same period secondary school enrolment increased from 55, 235 to 6,056,700, or 10,865 percent increase (Okobiah, 2002). Since the 1990 World Conference on Education for All (EFA) in Jomtien, there has been five to seven percent increase in pupil enrolment in primary education. Ten years later, the 2000 Dakar World Conference convened to assess the progress made towards EFA and set interim goals. These Dakar Goals include:

- expanded access for early childhood education;
- free and compulsory education;
- increased use of life-skill education;
- increased adult literacy;
- reduced gender disparities; and
- overall enhanced educational quality.

Of these afore-mentioned 2000 Dakar World Conference goals, Benbow, Mizrache, Oliver, and Said-Moshior (2007) report that many governments in Sub-Saharan Africa including that of Nigeria have made educational access

central to their national development strategy through the elimination of school fees, or significant reduction in the costs of schooling. These factors have contributed to large classes or overcrowded classrooms, which invariably impact on the quality of education delivered in the school system. This article therefore, attempts to explore the characteristics, management, and challenges of teaching large classes in developing countries.

What is a Large Class?

Groups become large when they reach about 40, because it is at this point that the number of students begins to inhibit a teacher's ability to make individual connections, and students begin to feel anonymous (Davis & McLeod, 1996). As earlier stated, a large class is determined by student/pupil-teacher ratio (S/PTR). Primary school pupil-teacher ratio is the number of pupils enrolled in primary school divided by the number of primary school teachers [regardless of their teaching assignment] while secondary school pupil-teacher ratio is the number of pupils enrolled in secondary school divided by the number of secondary school teachers [regardless of their teaching assignment] (Index Mundi n.d.). The value of these in some African countries is shown on Table 1. In Nigeria, the recommended S/PTR is 40:1 for secondary schools, 35:1 for primary schools and 20:1 in nursery schools (FRN, 2014).

The phenomenon of large classes in developing countries, which is due to the present social demand for formal education, is a reality. The demand for this type of education, led to increase in school enrolment and invariably increase in class size. This resulted to high pupils-teacher ratio in most African countries as revealed from table I.

Table 1: Value of Primary and Secondary Pupil/Student – Teacher Ratio In Some African Countries

Country	Primary Pupils-teacher Ratio	Secondary Student-teacher Ratio	Year
1. Mali	41.3	19.28	2013
2. Niger	38.76	34.6	2011
3. Chad	62.43	29.7	2012
4. Sudan	46.1	31.9	2012
5. Cote d Ivoire	41	22.68	2013
6. Central African Republic	68.13	68.13	2012
7. Ethiopia	53.75	38.78	2012
8. Angola	42.54	27.42	2013
9. Guinea	43.56	33.14	2011
10. Mozambique	54.52	31.18	2013
11. Cameroon	45.56	21.43	2012
12. Kenya	56.57	41.13	2012
13. Nigeria	37.55	33.08	2010
14. Ghana	30.08	15.82	2014
15. Burkina Faso	46.1	26.91	2013
16. Algeria	23.16	17.23	1977
17. Congo	15.35	18.68	2012
18. Tanzania	43.44	26.39	2012
19. South Africa	28.69	25.05	2009
20. Namibia	29.78	24.62	2007
21. Zambia	47.95	25.41	1988
22. Guinea Bissau	51.93	37.28	2006
23. Morocco	25.67	18.73	2004
24. Tunisia	13.68	13.62	2011

SOURCE: Adapted from Index Mundi (n.d). UNESCO, Institutes for statistics.

Table 1 shows that Central Africa Republic had the highest value (68. 13) at the Primary and Secondary levels while Tunisia had the lowest values (13.68 & 13.62) at the Primary and Secondary levels respectively.

One of the biggest problems facing large classes in developing countries is the quality and quantity of learning resources available to each student, such as desk, textbooks, and other teaching and learning support supplies (Hanushak, 1995). This situation is not different from what applies in some schools in Nigeria. While in some schools students go to school without basic writing materials, others sit on bare

floor in dilapidated classrooms, while others sit under trees to learn. Adding to this fact are Nwagwu (1997), World bank (1995) and Abdulkareem (1997) expression that library facilities and books are grossly inadequate and so is the provision of classrooms, furniture, laboratories and workshops and other facilities such as biros, pencils, cardboards, wall charts, maps, globes and so. The benefits of small classes notwithstanding, students in large classes can learn just as those in small classes. While most students prefer small classes, teachers believe that quality teaching is also possible in large classes. What matters is the quality of the teaching.

Characteristics of Large Classes

The description of 'large' is often associated with situations/objects that deviate from normal size. "Large is in the eye of the beholder and may be related to thresholds above which it seems impossible to things such as have a discussion, learn all students names or possible to do other things such as in-class experiment" (Bernstein, in *Psychology Teaching*, 2009, p. 2). This is not far from the picture of large classes being portrayed in this chapter. The characteristics of large classes therefore include among others

- Limited space – space is often a luxury in school with large classes
- The classes are often hot as a result of the number of students
- Large classes are also small classrooms over-flowing with many students
- In large classes, students have a feeling of crowdedness, confusion, and sometimes frustration.

Wilson (2006) stresses that large classes are noisier and that pushing, crowding, and hitting occur more often in larger classes than smaller ones. The situation makes it difficult for teachers to use individualised learning methods as practised in smaller classes. While teachers have difficulties managing marking; dealing with students' deliberate naughtiness and incivilities and finding ways to get students pay attention, students in large classes also highlight difficulties in asking questions, getting to know others, approaching teachers, and getting enough feedback on work. Ives (2006, p.2) notes that students in large classes also experience significant challenges to their learning, especially if they are new to the college experience. These experiences include:

- Not knowing what is relevant or important information
 - Hesitation in asking questions or in other ways indicating lack of knowledge

- Hesitation in appearing "smart" to their peers
- Lack of experience with time management, studying, or other skills necessary for success in college
- Perceived anonymity, which allows them to challenge authority and push boundaries.

These are indeed challenges that teachers need to overcome and still keep the class under control in order to perform the duties for which they are paid. However, teaching in large classes gives teachers the opportunities to improve their teaching and presentational skills, organizational and managerial skills, interpersonal skills, and above all evaluation skills. With so many students, there are many opportunities to get people to work together, compare, discuss, and benefit from the variety of voices. Students in large classes also have the opportunity to share ideas and interesting experiences. During project work, students learn to share responsibilities, listen to each other, and express themselves thereby developing valuable skills that would be of help to them in future.

Managing Large Classes

The negative effects of large classes on teachers' practice about instructional time and classroom management calls for adequate planning in the management of large classes. There is need for the teacher to plan lessons to overcome the issue of instructional time, plan the physical and psychosocial environment to manage the classroom effectively. Large classes take a toll on the teacher's ability to manage time, requiring more time to be devoted to instruction (i.e. complete an exercise rather than substantive instruction) task management and behaviour management, thus leaving less time for actual instruction (Wilson, 2006; Holloway, 2002).

Drawing from the ideas of experienced teachers across the globe, Hadded (2006) suggests the following points that will facilitate teaching large classes.

- Creating a well managed learning in large classes
- Teaching effectively in large classes and
- Evaluating learning and teaching in large classes.

Creating a Well Managed Learning in Large Classes

Harmony in the classroom is dependent upon the keeping of rules and good relationship by members of the class. Any breakdown in the personal relationships or in the observance of rule leads to disorder especially in large classes. Farrant (2004, p. 200) lists examples of such disorder as

- *Struggles that result from several children trying to enter or leave the classroom at once instead of one at a time.*
- *Teaching demonstrations for which the children are brought round the teacher's table often bring about a good deal of pushing and bad behaviour.*
- *Selfish children, who are not discipline, will rush forward to get a place first or be the first to collect equipment when it is clear there will not be sufficient for everybody.*

For large classes, teachers should anticipate such causes of trouble in the classroom and plan ahead to prevent them. Teachers should tell them early the boundaries and be prepared to stick to their rules. Teachers should establish simple rules for acceptable behaviour such how to speak softly, how to take turns and how to work together (Passigna, 1997). Planning will bring order into the classroom environment, even though it may be crowded. Teachers handling large classes should manage the physical environment by maximising classroom space taking into consideration the following:

- Remove unnecessary furniture to reduce the feeling of overcrowding and to facilitate movement.
- Sitting arrangements should be such that students are able to get to the teacher and the conveniences without disturbing others
- Store books, instructional material, and teaching tools so that they can be obtained and put away easily. These materials can be stored in the schools' store or in the Vice principal's office or in another safe place outside the classroom when not in use.
- Plan on how students can best be conducted such as handing out written assignment and then handing them back to students after grading. Other classroom chores such as how to enter and leave the classroom when classes start; at break and dismissal time and how to keep the classroom tidy should be planned.
- Plan also, how students' individual need can be met such as when they need to get supplies for learning.

Try these arrangements and seek student's suggestions, as they may not be final. Make changes when you observe some individual needs, or if students feel uncomfortable or whenever they feel bored with sitting in the classroom

A classroom is often described as a learning community. Therefore, it is important to create a sense of community if learning is to be achieved in large classes. The attitude of deliberate naughtiness exhibited by students in form of rudeness, disobedience, lying, stealing and incivilities such as students arriving late, leaving early, sleeping in class, using mobile phone or talking to each other during classes can be frustrating and particularly difficult to manage in large classes. Teachers must treat these

problems with full understanding considering the fact that there may be explanations for certain behaviours. It is also necessary to be calm and reasonable when addressing these problems for calm is strength and upset is weakness. Students should be made to understand that their behaviour affects others. A positive psychosocial environment emanating from the creation of this sense of community can motivate students to learn to their fullest. The following are some strategies to create this environment:

- Arrive early and spend few minutes talking to different groups of students before each class. Start classes on time and introduce yourself.
- Discuss with students during the first class what is expected of them and what they expect. Issues such as phone use, arriving late, leaving early, and talking in class should be discussed.
- Make a large class feel small. These could be done through the type of movement adopted while teaching. It is necessary that the teacher moves closer to students by walking around, moving towards a student who asked a question to reduce physical and social distance.
- Learn student's names and use at least some of them while teaching, this has a positive impact on students. It makes teachers seem friendlier and more approachable.

Students' misbehaviour and violation of rules are common occurrences, class size notwithstanding. Use positive discipline to develop student's behaviour especially in matters of conduct. Hadded (2006) suggests the following disciplinary actions that can be taken to guide students' whose misbehaviour is demanding attention:

- Catch them being good: praise them when they are seeking attention and correct them when they are misbehaving.

- Ignore the behaviour when possible, giving the student positive attention during pleasant time.
- Teach them to ask for attention (for instance, make "notice me, please" cards that they raise when they have a question).
- Give them a stern "eye" (look), but do not speak.
- Stand close-by rather than far away (there is no need for attention-getting behaviours when standing next to them).
- Target-stop-do; that is, target the student by name, identify the behaviour to be stopped, tell the student what he is expected to do at the moment, let him make decision about what he does next and its consequences.
- Do the unexpected, such as turn the light off, play a musical sound, lower your voice, change your voice, and talk to the wall.
- Distract the student, such as ask a direct question, ask a favour, give choices, and change the activity.

Teaching Effectively in Large Classes

Teaching is one of those activities that can be said to have no general rule to determine the best way to deliver lessons. Circumstances present so many variables that are right in one and wrong in another. There is no stereotyped teaching style. Therefore, there is no best way to teach large classes. Nevertheless, the teacher should develop approaches that work best for him based on his teaching style and of course experience. He should consider the characteristics of the students, the goals, objectives of the lesson, the curriculum and above all materials or resources that will aid his teaching and students learning.

It is important for a teacher to be able to control a class firmly because an uncontrolled class can be like a runaway lorry and cause havoc and misery to a great many people (Farrant, 2004). To teach effectively in large classes require strategic

grouping of students. It is proper to break the classes into groups of 15 to 20 if new/difficult information is to be imparted. Assign students to smaller groups on regular basis, with each member of the group given the opportunity to lead the group. This will ensure that any member of a group can help the teacher lead group based exercise. In addition, the group leaders can:

- Report back on a speaking activity
- Collect written work and hand it back to the teacher (or exchange with another group and do peer correction)
- Be responsible for checking answers to exercise (you prepare copies of answers and give a copy to each group leader once they have finished doing the exercise).

For remedial and enrichment activities, pupils with similar learning needs should be grouped together.

Without adequate plan, a teacher is unlikely to be able to control a class whether small or large. He, who fails to plan, plans to fail. The teacher should plan lesson adequately for effective teaching in

large classes by considering the content and the process of delivering the lesson while planning. The following should be taken into account while planning:

- Be comfortable with what you are teaching
- Be clear about why you are teaching, the topic and its objectives
- Structure the lesson logically by planning the teaching strategies and activities in advance
- Identify resources and materials that will make the lesson lively
- Pay attention to students with more individual needs
- Develop, and follow a formal lesson plan. Table 2 is sample of lesson planning outline.
- Time management is very important in teaching large class as it takes a great deal of time and energy. Therefore, budget your time carefully to enable you achieve your objectives.

Table 2: Sample Lesson Planning Matrix

Topic	Objectives	Teaching Method	Classroom Arrangement	Main Activities	Resources	Feedback/ Assessments	Reflection

Source: Hadded. (2006, p.23). *Practical tips for teaching large class*

A good lesson plan coupled with effective class control will help to relieve the teachers' fear about teaching many students. It will help to deliver a lesson calmly, and the teachers' confidence will carry over to the students who in turn will be more comfortable in learning from the teacher.

There is also the need to plan to communicate information in such a manner that all the students will understand. For large classes, planning will bring order into the classroom environment, even though it may be crowded. However, Benbow, Mizrachi, Oliver and Said-Moshiro (2007, p.9) report anecdotal evidence revealing a list of potential teaching practices in the management of large classes and recommended as potentially effective to include:

- Use of small groups
- Pupil-to-pupil support and monitoring
- Effective use of existing space (i.e., largest classes in largest rooms)
- Using the most effective teachers in the larger classes
- Use of volunteers and teachers' aides
- Team teaching
- Shift instruction

These are practices that heads of schools in developing countries are encouraged to experiment on and adopt if found effective in the primary school system. However, there is clear indication that if adopted it will revolutionize the practice at that level of education where one teacher is solely in charge and responsible for teaching all the subjects in a class whether small or large (practices e-f), favouritism in class allocation (practices c & d) and improve teaching large classes skills (practices a & b).

Evaluating Learning and Teaching in Large Class

Whatever method adopted, there is need for evaluation to determine the effectiveness of practices adopted and which are most effective in improving academic achievement in large class. Those efforts will go a long way in improving the

quality of education in developing countries. Consider the following suggestions:

- Select assignments that are relevant to your learning objectives and outcomes
- Design assignments that reveal whether students can apply what they are learning to everyday situations not simply just understanding the processes
- Provide clear instructions for all assignments
- Give students examinations. These can be either objectives (for example multiple-choice, subjective such as essay examination) or a combination of both.
- Grade assignments and examinations and give prompt feedback.
- To reduce the burden of marking assessment, think about the tasks you assign each day. Avoid three written tasks in the same day. Involve the students by teaching them to self assess and mark their own/peer work

CONCLUSION

The ability to manage a large class depends on the teacher's ability to create a well-managed class, developing the ability to teach effectively by planning, adopting strategies that will enhance lesson-delivering and evaluating teaching and learning processes. These skills are achieved through experience. However, the most practised or learnt of all traits are endurance and tolerance when teaching a large class. It is not easy being a teacher. Nevertheless, teachers should bear in mind that magnified problems in large classes can be dealt with effectively. In spite of the foregoing, there should be government mandate on large class size reduction for effective teaching and achieving internal efficiency of the public schools' system in Nigeria. More teachers should be recruited to replace retired and resigned teachers to meet government stipulations on student/pupil-teacher

ratios as provided in the National Policy on Education (2004).

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