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Pupil – Teacher Ratio: Implication for Quality Education in Nigeria Primary Schools

Ikediashi, Nwanneka N.
School of Education
Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education
Owerri, Imo State
Tel Phone: +2348033317869

Amaechi, Oliver N.C., *Rev. Fr.*
Imo State University, Owerri
Tel Phone: +2348037793811

Abstract

Significantly, pupil-teacher ratios are very essential to quality of education. They perhaps rank alongside professional knowledge, skill, as well as strategies, in genuinely determining educational success and performance. This paper discusses pupil-teacher ratio and relevance that pupils seem to

have a greater impact on teaching and learning, as teachers and pupils may not perform optimally. The implications for pupil-teacher ratio to enhance quality and equity in public education are discussed. Suggestions on how to address pupil-teacher ratio for quality education were also made.

Introduction

Many things affect the quality of education. Such things as teacher educational quality, the pupil intellectual quotient, pupil health condition, quality teaching in the school, location of school, social and environmental factors, curriculum, the type of instruction i.e. teacher-centred (e.g. pupils listen, answer questions, practice, etc.) or pupil-centred, (e.g. problem solving, creative projects, etc.) as well as pupil-teacher ratio among other things.

Every formal education setting involves teacher-pupil relationship. However, the nomenclature of the teacher depends on the model of interaction. The teacher can be described as a tutor if he gives private lessons to one pupil or a small group and he is directly paid by them. He is called a director (rector) if he gives instruction to the learners on how to go about the learning process. He is described as a monitor if he observes how the pupil is learning, and he is called a supervisor if he oversees the pupils' learning activity. The nature of the subject also has a part to play in determining the effect of the teacher-pupil ratio. If the subject is basically theoretical; or basically practical or both; the ratio will not be the same in all the cases.

The problem at stake is whether pupil-teacher ratio has any implication for the quality of education. Based on the foregoing, this paper discuss as pupil-teacher ratio as an essential ingredient of quality education. It also suggests how the school teacher could use it to enrich the learning environment of the Nigerian school child.

An Overview of pupil -teacher ratio

It must be noted ab initio that pupil-teacher ratio is not the same thing as class size. According to The Heros, (2001) in the pupil Teacher Achievement Ratio Study, class size and pupil teacher ratio are not the same and that arguments using these two terms as synonyms are flawed. Class size is the number of children in a teacher's room daily for whom the teacher is accountable; while the pupil-teacher ratio is generated by dividing the number of pupils in one school by all educators, including administrators,

counselors, special teachers, etc. and other adults who serve in the school. To this view, pupil teacher-ratio change does not influence pupil outcome or quality. According to this paper, although, the results pointedly show that smaller classes help children in many ways, the researchers do not present small classes as the cure-all, end-all solution to improving public education.

If the subject is theoretically based, the teacher- pupil ratio can accommodate high ratio like 30:1. If it is both theory and practice, a lower ratio of 20:1 may obtain; while if it is only practically based, a very low ratio of 10:1 may be ideal.

If the teacher is a tutor, the ratio may be 1:1 or a little more. If the teacher is a director, the ratio may be a bit higher, e.g. 10:1. If the teacher is a monitor, the ratio may be 2:1. As a supervisor, the ratio may be within the range of 3:1. As a classroom instructor, the ratio may be between 20:1 and 30:1. (Duflo, Dupas and Kremer 2007)

According to another study, The Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE), in all cases, classrooms with more affluent children far outperformed classrooms with children from poorer families irrespective of the pupil-teacher ratio. However, classrooms with fewer pupils are more likely to have higher class average achievement scores. As regards reduced class size and life, the SAGE study said that individualization is made possible because having fewer pupils enables teachers to know pupils better, it reduces the need for discipline which results in more time for instruction, and it increases teacher enthusiasm for teaching.(Walker 2011)

A Poll by Japan's National Institute for Educational Policy Research Shows (Small Classes Yield Better Academic Performance in 2001) shows that classes of 20 students or less in primary schools showed better academic performance, created a better classroom atmosphere and developed better relationships with teachers and also developed a desirable attitude toward learning.

Huebler, (2008) in a presentation in International Education Statistics on Pupil/teacher ratio in primary school, said that the pupil/teacher ratio is an indication of education quality. He presented class size as pupil/teacher ratio. According to him, in crowded classrooms with a high number of pupils per teacher the quality of education suffers. It is not easy for the pupils to follow the course and the teacher will not have enough time to take care of the needs of each individual pupil. Data from UNESCO on the issue of ratio show that

crowded classrooms are more common in Sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia than in other parts of the world with 40 or more pupils per school teacher. In Nigeria, for effective teaching and learning, the teacher-pupil ratio be 1:35 (NPE 2004)

Some factors influencing quality education

By educational quality is meant the expected output of a pupil as a mark of knowledge putting into consideration the age and class. It is the intellectual ability of the pupil vis-a-vis his expected intellectual standard. By standard is meant the level that is considered to be acceptable, or the level that someone has achieved. When the output is found to be below expectation, the pupil is described as having low quality and vice versa. When an entire class or school is involved, the average performance is used as a yardstick for measurement to determine the educational quality. Above average is high while below it is low. However certain factors are known to influence quality education. These include:

1. Number of pupils per classroom

It is the view of NYC Private Schools in the United States of America that one of the important measures of quality in searching for a good school is the number of pupils per classroom which is said to be a measure of teacher to pupil ratio. Schools with overcrowded classrooms are not admired at all. In US, 20 or more pupils in a class is frowned at not to talk of 30. While here in Nigeria, officially it is pegged at 35 though some well populated schools especially in urban areas may be close to 50 if not more. However, it is generally agreed that a lower tea cher-pupil ratio leads to a higher quality education. The importance of teacher-pupil ratio is to make personalized teaching as close as possible so that the teacher will give each child his maximum attention. The higher the number of pupils in a class, the lesser the amount of attention each child will get. The implication is that the challenges and obstacles a child faces in the classroom are less likely to be overcome, or it will require a longer time to pass those obstacles. Another fact is that not all pupils need as much one-on-one attention, as every pupil has a particular learning style that works better for him.

2. The impact of pupils intellectual ability

The fact that there are special schools for gifted children is a clear indication that the disparity in children's intellectual ability is formally acknowledged.

In some pupil schools, very intelligent ones are grouped in "A" classes while others form their own classes such as "B," "C" etc. Teachers love to teach in the "A" classes and feel very reluctant to enter low intelligent classes even if they have low class size. No matter the class size, the low intelligent pupils cannot perform better or achieve better quality than the high intelligent ones even if the latter has very high class size. As regards pupil-teacher ratio, the educational quality achievable in Gifted Children Schools can never be at par with that of any ordinary primary school even with a very low ratio. Hence, pupils' intellectual ability cannot be ignored while considering the impact of pupil-teacher ratio on educational quality.

3. **Teacher quality**

This is another important aspect that must be noted in pupil-teacher ratio. A Latin adage says: *nemo dat quod non habet* (no one gives what he does not have). The quality of the teaching depends on the quality of the teacher, the ratio notwithstanding. A research done on teacher quality shows that good teaching matters. According to this research, effective teachers are capable of inspiring significantly greater learning gains in their pupils when compared with their weaker colleagues. Inaddition, the study showed that in Texas, economists have amassed a body of work that further emphasized the measurable influence that teachers have on student performance (Hanushek, Kain and Rivin, 1998).

Even if the teacher is a tutor, he can only teach what he knows. If he is reading from a textbook, he can only explain the much he understands; and if is a Mathematical problem, he can only tackle those he can comfortably solve and avoid the others. No matter the number of students in his class, a teacher can only teach the much he knows, and the students will ordinarily learn the much they are taught. (Walker 2011).

4. The influence of motivation

Motivation of both the teacher and the pupils has a lot of influence on the teacher's readiness to do his work zealously and the pupils' eagerness or disposition to learn respectively. Whether the pupil-teacher ratio is high or low, the achievement quality will be determined by the pupils' disposition to learn and the teacher's readiness to give what he has. If both are properly motivated, the teacher will deliver and the pupils will grasp the knowledge and an educational achievement will be recorded. This is why the Governor of Imo State is paying the teachers heavily and giving the pupils and students

monetary and material incentives to motivate both. The target is the improvement of educational quality. However, the practice has caused influx of children to the schools creating the problem of very high pupil-teacher ratio in the state and negatively affecting the much-desired quality.

The Nigerian situation

In Nigeria, parents do not care about either the teacher- pupil ratio or the class size of their wards' schools. They are only interested in the ordinal positions of the children after each summative examination. Unlike in some other countries, there are no teachers' aids in most primary schools. According to Walker, (2011) in a write up captioned: Is Lower Teacher-pupil Ratio Better? There are five Kindergarten classes with 15 to 16 pupils. Each class has a teacher and a full-time teacher's aid which makes the ratio better. Pupil teacher ratio is generally used as a measure of school quality and state effort, on one hand, and efficiency, on the other, by politicians, policy makers, the press, local educators, and education researchers, reporting the view of John Sietsema, data consultant with the National Centre for Educational Statistics in America.

Though teacher- pupil ratio and class size are not the same thing, however, they are closely related. This is partly because the former determines the latter. If the teacher- pupil ratio is low, there is no way the class size will be on a high side, and ipso facto, if the class size is high, it becomes unimaginable to have a low teacher-pupil ratio. It therefore means that the ratio of the school affects the size of the classes.

Our interest is on the effect of teacher-pupil ratio on pupil's performance, or quality of learning. Walker, (2011) said that the premise is that in large classes there will be a wide variance in pupils' learning abilities. The teacher will have to spend more time working with the less academic pupils, which would in turn, hold back the pupils who progress faster. Though research may vary, it is hard to push aside the benefits of a lower ratio, he asserted. On the other hand, according to Centre for Public Education, some researchers have not found a connection between smaller classes and higher pupil achievement, all the same, pupil achievement rises as class size drops.(Wikipedia 2011).

Suggestions

There is no doubt that the smaller the pupil-teacher ratio, the better the educational quality of both high and low intelligent schools. Those in charge of this arrangement should endeavour to scale down the number of pupils per class by employing more high quality teachers.

The teachers and the pupils should be properly motivated for optimum productivity.

Efforts should be made to improve the intellectual ability of the not-so-gifted pupils by teaching them at their own pace and being patient with them.

The practice of separating the low from the high performing pupils should be discouraged as that creates room for the feelings of inferiority and superiority complexes amongst them which is unhealthy. Mixing them promotes the spirit of healthy competition as the low achievers will feel challenged to struggle harder to meet up with their class mates.

Teachers in schools that practice separation should know that the low performers need extra attention from them instead of shying away from entering their classes or paying good attention to help them improve.

Counseling services should be given to the low performers from time to time to encourage them not to lose hope but work harder to perform better.

Conclusion

While teacher-pupil ratios are important, it is hard to say whether there is an ideal ratio. Again, individualized attention does not necessarily mean that a child will learn faster or slower. This is just one measure of educational quality and not the only measure. There are many other factors that influence educational quality as stated in the introduction. However, it must be noted that the lower the teacher- pupil ratio is, the better the educational quality of the pupils involved.

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