

**TEACHERS' PERCEPTION ON TEACHING LARGE CLASSES  
IN NIGERIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS: IMPLICATIONS  
FOR QUALITATIVE EDUCATIONAL PLANNING.**

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**Abstract.**

This study was designed to investigate the perception of teachers towards teaching large classes as prevalent in Nigerian schools today due to the present social demand for education.

The samples used for the study were 300 teachers randomly selected among teachers in Ondo state. The instrument used for this study was tagged "Teaching Large Classes Questionnaire" (TLCQ), this was used for the collection of data, which were analyzed using frequency count, percentages and t- test statistical tools. The findings revealed that the teachers were not favorably disposed to teaching large, poorly resourced classes. The majority were of the view that in such classes, it is difficult to engage in practical work, there was less concentration on the part of the pupil, teaching is teacher – centered, the level of pupil participation is low and there are heavier demands on facilities and instructional materials. The study further revealed that teachers have the attitude that coping

strategies such as peer tutoring and instructor – expressiveness and teaching behavior can be employed by the teachers in order to assure quality in teaching and learning in Nigerian schools. The study also indicated that there was no significant difference between male and female teachers' disposition but a significant difference was established between young and old teachers' dispositions. The implication of this study is that teaching large classes shows negative impact on the quality of learning by the students but can, however be reduced by concerted efforts to employ suitable teaching methods on the part of teachers.

### **Introduction and Background.**

Since western education became firmly rooted in Nigeria, It has faced myriads of problems (Ijaiya, 1999). Most of Nigerian governments have been battling with this problem during the colonial or post – independence era. It has resulted in the setting up of various commissions(e.g. the Ashby Commission of 1960, the 1969 Curriculum Conference, the Longe commission of 1993, Education Reform Committee of 2006 e.t.c.) to examine Nigeria's educational problems and make recommendations. Among the problems facing the Nigeria educational system is large and poorly resourced classes. This has become a reality that educators must see as a challenge and must face squarely. The social -demand for formal education in Nigeria resulted into an upsurge increase in school enrolment with a dramatic increase in class size thereby resulting into high teacher – pupil rates (Onwu, 1998). Class size is a big factor in determining the attainment of educational goals and objectives. The recommended

students population in a single classroom should not exceed 1: 30 or at most a maximum of 35 (teacher: student ratio; 1:35) (UNESCO, 2000, FGN, 2006). In view of this principle which is generally affirmed by many people, one might expect that strict adherence to this. But statistics from the Federal ministry of Education shows that in 1994 there, 782 teachers and 18,296,202 pupils given teacher- pupil ratio of about 1:50 in 39,221 primary schools, this keep escalating annually. For public secondary schools in Nigeria, as at 2005, students' enrolment was 5, 422,611 and 122,477 teachers; given teacher – pupil ratio of about 1: 45. The situation still remain same till now.

The above situation become worsen with the recent economic downturn in the country, thereby making it difficult for government to provide adequate funds in addressing the provision of more facilities in school as a way to ameliorating the large class syndrome facing Nigeria educational system and the teachers.

This was confirmed by Arikewuyo (2005) who observed that the quality of education is determined by the level of instructional facilities available in schools. Nwagwu (1997), World Bank,(1995) and Abdulkareem (1997) reported on the state of instructional facilities in Nigeria secondary schools.

According to them, library facilities and books are grossly inadequate and so is the provision of classrooms, furniture, laboratories and workshops and other facilities such as biros, pens, cardboards, wall charts, maps, globes,

e.t.c. The above scenario paved way for saddling teachers with more responsibility than what is required; handling large classes with limited resources to facilitate effective teaching and learning.

Teaching and learning as well as classroom management becomes ineffective because teachers were predisposing to more stress in handling the students.

The introduction of Universal Basic Education in the county depicts the fact that teachers' are being saddled with greater responsibility because many schools have become congested at the detriment of poor staffing cum overcrowded classrooms. Overpopulated classrooms are considered to be uncondusive for both teachers and students when it comes to the issue of continuous assessment marking and the ability to give individualized attention to students needing extra help. (FME, 2005).

The ESA situation report on teachers' selection of five de- motivators from a list of 25 factors, as regards their profession; among the five picked was lack of instructional materials and facilities to cope with the large students population within the schools (FME, 2004). In addition to this Arikewuyo(2005) opined that government, communities and parents should not fold arms and watch the present predicament of teachers. This is so because in recent times, the issue of quality of education being provided by the State appears to be the main focus of the State government and its entire indigenes as regards the huge investment involved. Teachers are the prime mover and the supporting pillars for the realization of educational

goals and objectives. Therefore every kind of assistance possible should be made available to enhance their work if qualitative education will become obtainable in achieving Education for All and the Millennium Development goals.

Some educationists have tried to investigate the relative effectiveness of large class instruction and the problems associated with teaching and learning in large classes. In his contribution, Powell (1969) observed that large numbers of students in a class allow almost no opportunity for genuine exchange of arguments and opinions. In large French Classes, Obanya (1975) states that large group instruction tends to be carried on in a singsong manner. This result into a distortion of the pronunciation and the intonation pattern of the oral French of pupils. In the process of group or collective speaking, the peculiar problems of the individual students are not well catered for.

Edge (1980) reports that in large classes, the provision of an opportunity for discussion or for any kind of oral input to the written work is difficult. To Hayes (1997), there is the possibility of students copying or cheating. In teaching large classes in Nigeria, Ihebuzor(1989), Halliday et al (1989) Holliday(1989) and Nolasco and Arthur(1991) cited in Osasona(1996) enumerated the following as problems of teaching large classes :students negative attitude to learning new things ;discipline problems ;students using the mother tongue when asked to work in pairs or group. noise making ;lack of opportunity for developing individuals communicative skills and problems of boredom in teaching and testing as well as teacher domination. As Coleman (1989) in Osasona (1996) puts it, large classes are

obsessions for teachers. In summarizing the problems associated with the large classes, Hayes (1997) list that discomfort, control, individual attention, evaluation and learning effectiveness are the key problems of teaching large classes. Kolo and Ojo (2006) noted that teacher perceived that class work take a lot of time in teaching large classes. Other view of teacher are that exercises are not finished during the forty minutes allocated for teaching making class work to be cumbersome to handle by one teachers; there is stress and boredom and fatigue in marking and class control. Due to these problems, many good teachers have either resigned or are frustrated. The frustration leads to some teachers not attending classes regularly.

Against this background, this study sought to examine the perception of teachers to teaching large and poorly resourced classes in Nigerian secondary schools. Moreover the study further investigated the influence of sex and experience of teachers' perception on this issue.

### **Research Questions.**

Specifically, the study addressed the following questions:

1. What is the class enrolment in the sampled schools?
2. What is the perception of teachers as regards teaching large and poorly resourced classes?
3. Is there any significant difference between the male and female teachers' perception on teaching large and poorly resourced classes?
4. Is there any significant difference between the old and young teachers' perception to teaching large and poorly resourced classes?

## **Methodology.**

### **Design.**

Descriptive survey research design was employed in carrying out this study. Teachers' perception on teaching large classes was surveyed and the data collected were subjected to statistical analysis.

### **Sample.**

The sample used for this study consisted of teachers from secondary schools in Odigbo Local Government Area of Ondo, Ondo State, Nigeria. Using simple random sampling technique, ten schools were selected out of the existing sixteen secondary schools in the L.G.A given a sample percentage of 67.%. From the school selected, a total of 300 teachers were sampled using stratified random sampling techniques based on the following strata: Old and young, male and female. Those teachers with with teaching experience for more than five years were regarded as old teachers while teachers with teaching experience of less five years and below were regarded as young teachers.

### **The Instrument.**

Two types of instruments were used. One involved the use of class registers to obtain students enrolment by classroom from Junior secondary class 1 to senior secondary class 1 of all the sampled schools based on the assumption that most Senior secondary class 1 students would eventually make it to Senior Secondary class 3. The schools are indicated by



letters A – J. (Table 1). The second instrument was a questionnaire developed by the researcher titled “Teaching Large Class Questionnaire” (TLCQ) it consisted of two sections. Section A asks for information on teacher’s and their experience while section B consisted of fifteen items designed to determine the perception of teachers on teaching large classes in Nigerian secondary schools. The items were placed against a two point Likert scale of – Agree (A), and Disagree (D). The validity of the instrument was ensured through rational analysis of the items on the instrument by some experts in Educational management and test construction. The reliability of the questionnaire was tested using test-retest method on five schools that were not part of the sampled schools and the reliability coefficient obtained was 0.85; this was found highly reliable.

### **Data Analysis.**

Data collected were collated and analyzed using percentages, mean, standard deviation and t. test statistics.

### **Result and Discussion.**

Research Question 1.

What is the class enrolment in all the sampled schools?

Table 1. Class enrolment of the sampled schools.

**Schools.**

<b>class</b>	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
Jss1A	80	72	101	93	71	62	71	77	58	68
Jss 1B	88	69	98	96	69	69	74	81	52	65
Jss 1C	82	70	95	97		71	73	86	50	66
Jss 1D	61		88			69		83		59
Jss1E			94			66				
Jss 1F						62				
Jss 2A	90	53	88	89	72	59	61	80	61	71
Jss 2B	93	50	96	91	73	70	59	79	60	70
Jss 2C	89	56	101	94		69	55	85	55	69
Jss 2D	61		93	81		58		77		64
Jss 2E			89			50				
Jss 2F						63				
Jss 3A	85	45	92	85	52	58	52	60	49	62
Jss 3B	73	49	79	74	50	52	48	58	47	60
Jss 3C	77		85	75	48	46		65	49	59
Jss 3D	69		79	74		47		70		58
Jss 3E			83			56				
Jss 3F						50				
SS 1A	83	71	60	21	33	56	45	30	51	55
SS 1B	101		71	85	68	53	50	65	50	51
SS 1C	115		91	96	67	59		70		
SS 1D			86	61		63				
SS 1E			67			65				
SS 1F						60				

Source: Class Registers through the counseling Department of each school.

Note that all classes are large in terms of students number in all the sampled schools except SS 1A in school D, E and H which are science classes.

**Research Question 2.**

What are the perceptions of teachers as regards teaching large classes in Nigerian Secondary Schools?

The response to the above question is presented on table 2 below:

Table 2: Frequencies and percentages of teachers' perception on teaching large and poorly resourced classes in Nigerian secondary schools.

	Items	Agree		Disagree	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%
1	In Large classes, teacher- centred teaching is encouraged making student participation to be very low.	220	73	80	27
2	Frequent practical work becomes difficult to arrange with too many students in a class.	195	65	105	35
3	Quiet students often get neglected.	201	67	99	33
4	There is maximum class control and supervision.	80	27	220	73
5	Teachers find it difficult to give follow-up assignment due to workload in marking.	198	66	102	34
6	In large and poorly resourced classes, less teaching and assessment	202	67	98	33

	strategies are restricted, making it difficult to identify students' learning difficulties, or needs.				
7	Securing students' total attention during lessons is almost impossible.	230	77	70	23
8	In large and poorly resourced classes, there are heavier demands on the available facilities and instructional materials.	191	64	109	36
9	In large classes, there are little or no individual practical activities.	225	75	75	25
10	Making use of laboratory for practical works may be difficult.	199	66	101	34
11	In coping with teaching large, poorly resourced classes, students must be encouraged to work in groups.	230	77	70	23
12	As a coping strategy for teaching large, poorly resourced class, cooperative learning should be employed.	235	78	65	22
13	Adoption of expressive teaching behaviours makes teaching in large classes productive.	240	80	60	20
14	Punishment for students who disturb.	211	70	89	30
15	Re-arranging students from time to	120	40	180	60

	time so that those at the back come to the front for some part of the term.				
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Table 2 shows the perception of secondary school teachers in Ondo State on teaching of large classes. From the table, response to the first question shows that 220 or 80% of the teachers sampled did not support teaching large, poorly resourced classes. Teachers in the sampled school were of the opinion that the best approach to teach under this situation is to make the teaching teacher- centred with low students 'participation. Their response to item 2 from the table shows that 65% of the teacher sampled agreed that in teaching large classes, practical work becomes difficult to arrange. In addition on the statement that quiet students are often neglected, 67% of the teachers sampled agreed with this statement. 73% of the sampled teachers disagreed with the statement that there is maximum control and supervision in large, poorly resourced classes. 665 of the teachers agreed that they find it difficult to give follow- up assignment due to workload involved in marking the assignment of the large number of students. Likewise to the above, 67% of the teacher perceived that it becomes difficult to identify the less academically motivated students in large, poorly resourced classes. 70% of the teacher sampled perceived that securing students' total attention during lessons is almost impossible. Also 64% of them perceived that there are heavier demands on the available facilities and instructional materials while 66% agreed that making use of laboratory for practical works might be difficult because the available apparatus may not likely go round for effective teaching.

All these findings support those of Powell, (1964), Edge, (1980), and Osasona (1996) Ijaiya, (1999) whose study on the effects of overcrowded classrooms on teacher- students interactions revealed that teachers teaching large classes experienced noise- making from the students which restricted effective teaching and learning. The finding corroborates with Onwu, (1998) whose study revealed that teachers had negative views about teaching large science classes. Likewise the findings of this study support Lewis (2000), and Strischer, (2000). They discovered from their study that good facilities and conducive classroom had a major impact on learning. In addition, Raymid, (1999) aptly summarises the value of small class size. She says that students in these classes, "makes more rapid progress towards graduation, thereby minimize educational wastage".

Still on Table 2, statement 11 to 15 was on coping strategies in handling large classes. 78% of the sampled teachers perceived that cooperative learning should be adopted in making teaching in large and poorly resourced class effective. This finding support Stephen, (2003) and Kolo and Ojo, (2005) that learning becomes more effective when learners learn in a collectively way. On the statement that students must be encouraged to work in groups, 77% of the sampled teachers agreed with this statement. This support Okebukola, (1986) who opines that allocating students to groups in large classes makes teaching and learning effective and less stressful. As regards the adoption of expressive teaching behaviour , 80% of the teachers agreed with this statement. Expressive behaviour 's dimensions are physical movement I n the class, good voice

inflection, high eye contacts with the students and high sense of humour by the teacher(Perry, Abrami, and Leventhal,1979).

70% of the teachers agreed on the use of punishment of students who disturbs the class as coping strategy in handling teaching in large classes. This is not in the best interest of the students, although its use cannot be totally avoided, educationist would rather recommend the use of positive reinforcement (Fontana, 1981). Teachers' preference for this coping strategy seems to be as a result of the fact that it is the most convenient way of getting out of the problem of class control. 40% of the teachers agreed with re- arranging students from time to time, so that those at the back come to the front for some part of the term. Teachers' response on this statement as a coping strategy implies that this strategy seems likely to make more demands on their energy and time.

### **Research Question 3.**

Is there any significant difference between male and female teachers' perception on teaching large and poorly resourced classes?

Table 3. Difference between male and female teachers' perception on teaching large and poorly resourced classes.

Group	N	X	SD	Df	t.cal.	t. critical	Probability level	Remark
Male	150	36.42	7.68	298	0.015	1.86	0.05	Ns
Female	150	40.48	4.89					

NS = Not Significant.

Table 3 reveals the perception of male and female teachers on teaching large and poorly resourced classes. The means representing male and female teacher perceptions are 36.42 and 41.48 respectively. However, the t. calculated value of 0.015 is lower than the critical value of t. This is 1.86. The finding revealed that there is no significant difference in male and female teachers' perception on teaching large and poorly resourced class. The above findings run contrary to Ijaiya(1999) whose finding revealed that male teachers find it easier in handling large and overcrowded classes than their female counterpart. Nevertheless this finding confirm Obanyan (1975) and UNESCO(2000) that a well skilled and competent teachers will not like handling more than 40 students in a classroom, which is the prescribed fundamental principles of effective teaching and classroom management.

#### **Research Question 4.**

Is there any significant difference between old and young teachers' perception on teaching large and poorly resourced classes.

Table 4.

Difference between old and young teachers' perception on teaching large and poorly resourced classes.

Group	N	X	SD	Df	t. cal.	t. critical.	Probability level	Remark
Old	150	41.82	4.48	298	8.06	1.96	0.05	S*
Young	150	31.54	7.68					



S\* = Significant at  $P > 0.05$

From table 4, the means representing the perceptions of old and young teachers on teaching large and poorly resourced classes are 41.82 and 31.54 respectively. The t. calculated value is 8.06, which is higher than the t.critical value of 1.96 at 0.05 probability level. This finding suggests a significant difference between the perceptions of young and old teachers. This findings corroborates with Ajewole(1995), Hayes,(1997), Ogunkola, (2004) and Hoxby(2000) that old teachers have over the years found coping strategies to the problem of teaching large classes to the extent that they no longer seems to see the size of classes as a problem.

### **Implications of the study on qualitative Educational Planning.**

Educational planners in Nigeria should be mindful of carrying capacity in each secondary school just as what is obtainable in our tertiary institutions when admitting students for education programme because there is general demand for information by parents, school teachers, school principals, provincial and state officials, and national officials in ministries of education who want to know more about student achievements, and the factors that affect it, at the level of the education system (that is, student, class, school, province/state, nation) for which they are responsible.

One of the problems associated with attending to these enquiries is that it is not always the same factors that affect student achievements for all decision-making levels, for all subjects, for all age groups, for all regions of a country, or for all countries, hence the need for a complete reconceptualization of what information should be collected in order to assist with planning the quality of education

This will greatly assist in effective implementation of teaching and learning in Nigerian secondary schools. Teaching large classes by teachers leads to drastic fall in quality of education which has an overall effect on every facility, materials, equipment, infrastructure, human resources, library services and other students' personnel services which likely leads to a situation of quality impairment.

The need for regular monitoring and supervision to assist in collection and collation of reliable data and to develop a meaningful two-way dialogue between information providers (educational planners) and information users (decision-makers operating at all levels of an education system) as regards situation analysis in our secondary schools will further assist to inform certain decisions by the policy makers. For instance when it comes to allocation of teachers to school.

This will pave way for successful implementation of teaching and learning in schools, which will further enhance educational productivity.

In addition, Educational planners need to come up with an action plan on the best way to respond to identify needs within the school. They need to take the following steps in doing this;

1. The identification of policy-related questions that are faced by decision makers (operating at different levels of an education system) when they are aiming to improve the quality of education.
2. The prioritization of these questions and precise linkage of them to potential future policy decisions at the appropriate decision-making level.

3. The use of these questions in order to: (i) identify what relevant information is available in existing data collections, (ii) indicate what new data need to be collected, (iii) eliminate redundancies due to overlaps in existing data collections, and (iv) terminate “traditional”, but rarely-used data collections.
4. The review of the appropriate coverage level of the data collection (census or survey), the timeliness of the data collection (yearly or less frequently), and major gaps that are common in most data collections (especially information describing student educational achievement, student time spend on various curriculum offerings, student “tracking” patterns, teacher knowledge of subject matter, competencies, efficiency and unit cost measures).
5. The detailed specification of the indicators of the quality of education that will be assessed (including the provision and justification of construct names, operational definitions, computer-based coding systems, techniques and materials to be used to collect data, and detailed test blueprints in association with reliability and validity information).
6. The collection, analysis, and preparation of appropriate data according to acceptable scientific standards and the creation of appropriate data archives that will be readily accessible for later secondary analyses.
7. The analysis of the data using approaches that is appropriate for the questions posed and the backgrounds of the audiences who will receive the research reports (including the presentation of appropriate measures of sampling and measurement errors).

8. The linkage of suitable information dissemination procedures with both the policy questions posed initially and the decision-making levels at which the policy decisions will be taken (including the formulation and testing of new policy questions that emerge during the conduct of the data analyses)

### **Conclusion and Recommendations.**

From the findings of this study, one can conclude that large and poorly resourced classes are not a better preference for teachers in Nigerian secondary schools. The findings also cast some doubts on the skills of the teachers in dealing with the problem. Indulging in the use of negative reinforcement like punishment is not educationally expedient. These are direct result of poor quality training of teachers.

In view of the above, the following suggestions are made;

Shortage of classrooms and teachers in Nigerian secondary schools need to be treated as a national crisis worthy of the attention of both the federal and state governments. This will go a long way in ensuring a national targets for school enrolment. A lasting solution is therefore building of additional classrooms and employing more teachers. A ratio of 1:35 teacher to students is hereby suggested judging on the finding of Table 1. In the realities of large and poorly resourced classes teachers should shift from just teaching to doing their best in facilitating learning rather than just supplying information. They should likewise encouraged group learning, through group work, debate, quiz and so on.

On the coping strategies skills of the teachers, a more positive approach as suggested by Nolasco and Arthur(1988) cited by Ijaiya (1999) is to

establish some formality in class activities right from the beginning of the lesson. This could be in form of class routines and conventions that would keep the students busy as soon as the lessons starts. Finally, seminars and workshops should be organized for teachers to sharpen their skills of teaching.

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