

## DEVELOPING THE 21ST CENTURY ENGLISH TEACHER TO HANDLE LARGE CLASSES

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**ABSTRACT:** *This is a survey research on 100 teacher trainees on part time programme in our university. They are career teachers with professional experience. The focus was managing the multi challenges of a 21st century English teacher in a developing country with multiple anti-teachings and learning factors.*

**KEYWORDS:** Century English, Teacher, Large Classes, Teacher Trainees

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### INTRODUCTION

One of the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century teaching is getting the right approach, strategy or method to confront the multiple problems of a large class with reference to students' comfort, teacher's efficiency and application of modern technology for effective management and best practice. In developing countries like Nigeria where this study took place, teachers had had to manage the phenomenon of prioritizing teaching to make learners pass examination more than leading them in the path of acquiring everyday skills for social living, community participation and economic sustenance. From groping in the darkness of ill equipment in terms of inadequate training to managing the scarce resources for teaching, the teacher is seen as a magician who could change the lives of learners with improvised media.

In public schools, enrolment and actual classroom attendance range from 50 to 150 (one class). This is a clear indicator of a nation where quite a lot of people who want to be educated or want to 'inspire' education are, more often than not, besieged with inadequate resources to make both teaching and learning effective. Nigerian scholars are not alone in the quest for academic, professional and social solution to the problem of large classes and absurd school environment.

Dala (2013) Writing on "the effect of class size on teaching and learning English as a foreign language (EFL) in Saudi Arabia" postulated two objectives: "(1) to ascertain the impact of large classes on the teaching and learning outcomes, and (2) to suggest appropriate strategies Saudi secondary teachers can utilize in their large classes to facilitate English teaching and learning". Pursuing both objectives to a positive occlusion turned out to be almost a mirage as in the first instance over 75% of the teachers found it rather daunting and inexplicably outrageous to ever think of large classes as ideal. Secondly, the teachers also came short of getting appropriate strategy to ever improve the learning outcome in such an inconceivable situation. While Harmer (2000) identifies large classes to be a threat to paying attention to individual learners Lazear (2003) and Pedder, (2006) believe that curbing indiscipline associated with distractions in large classes reduces the pace of teacher's progress in lesson delivery and consequently slows down the quality expected in serious learning.

Like most Commonwealth countries that are still battling with evolving a national language (a lingua franca) which is supposed to emanate from one of the indigenous languages, English is

the official language of Nigerian people. It is the language of government and parliament, language of commerce and industry, language of law and justice, language of instruction in schools, language of social intelligibility and perhaps, surprisingly, language of religion and culture. English is everything in Nigeria. It is a yardstick for measuring literacy and quite a number of private schools 'trade' on this cliché to boast their performance.

The search for methodologies to address the diverse problems of proper handling of the language is always the concern of all stakeholders – teachers' association, colleges of education, and faculties of education in universities, the ministries of education at both state and federal levels as well as writers and publishers. What most people find difficult to fix is the growing number of students desiring education and the attendant lip service the government is paying to providing adequate infrastructures in schools and colleges and making proper training available to manage modern technology suitable to teaching – learning processes.

### **Objectives of the study**

This paper was presented as a pilot study in the NILE @21 Conference with the following two objectives:

- (a) To present a – two hypotheses research report on respondents' opinion about teaching English to large audience of learners
- (b) To “compare notes” with nationals of other countries on best practice in English teaching to large classes

### **Hypotheses**

H01: There is no significant difference between class size and teaches' efficiency in teaching the English language.

H02: There is no significant difference between class size and teachers' method of teaching

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In countries where English is taught as a second language teachers are required to acquire skills that will qualify them to meet up with the challenge of making learning real irrespective of prevailing circumstances.

There are few countries that share the problem of Nigeria in the area of English teaching and learning. One of such countries is Nepal. English is neither a second nor an official language in Nepal. According to Krishna (2011), English is considered a foreign language in Nepal, taught initially, essentially, to give the required literacy and competence to access the media, especially the radio and possibly television. The role of English in the modern time is inclusive of providing academic skills to function properly in the university. Courses are now offered at this level in English in private institutions. The public schools keep to Nepal language. The analogy we are drawing here is that while many members of the Nepal public consider the clamour for English usage a mania, Nigerian government keeps making the use of English compulsory without providing the necessary tools for its fantastic operations. Neither in the training of English teachers nor in the transmission of the subject to wider users at both formal and informal settings do we really have the adequate requirements for successful operation.

Krieger (2005) recommends debate as this will promote all the four skills of listening, reading, speaking and writing but then they meet another challenge of teaching a new language in another people's culture.

It is a common knowledge that foreign language education does not offer cultural dimension of language to learners. The view of (Cheng, Yi & Tsai, 2009; Kubota, Austin, & Saito-Abbott, 2003; Paige et al., 1999; Sercu, 2005) is that since the social and cultural immersion that comes with the learning of second or foreign language carries with it the exposition of students to a new world different from what they are used to teachers need to acquire skills that would assist them to properly teach learners the process of adjustment.

### Design

Descriptive survey research was conducted on one hundred respondents all of whom were teacher trainees on part time programme. The research instrument adopted was a 20-item likert type questionnaire tagged "Trainees Assessment of Teachers Performance in Large Classes (TATPLC)." It was used to conduct the survey. Section A enables the participants to provide demographic data which include: gender, qualification, year(s) of experience, school type, and class taught; Section B deals with the items that elicit the teachers' response on the subject under consideration. Statements were assigned weight as follows: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A) Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). After giving sufficient briefing on the purpose of the research, subjects were allowed sufficient time to provide on the spot responses to statements like:

- (a) I am not trained to teach in large classes
- (b) I enjoy teaching only essays and letter writing in large classes
- (c) Grammar cannot be taught effectively in large classes.
- (d) Teaching English in large classes will reduce my proficiency
- (e) It does not matter if any aspects of English are taught to large or small classes; the result will remain the same.
- (f) All the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing could be handled effectively in English etc.,

### Data analysis

H01: There is no significant difference between class size and teaches' efficiency in teaching the English language.

**Table 1**

Group	Size	Degree of freedom	X <sup>2</sup> cal	X <sup>2</sup> tab	Sig	Remark
Agreed	81	4	31.57	13.28	0.01	H01 rejected
Disagreed	19					

Discussion: At the level of significance 0.01, the value of  $\chi^2$  cal (31.57) is greater than, the  $\chi^2$  tab (13.28), therefore the null hypothesis was rejected. It implies there is significant difference between class size and teachers' efficiency in teaching the English language.

H<sub>02</sub>: There is no significant difference between class size and teachers' method of teaching

**Table 2:**

Group	Size	Degree of freedom	$\chi^2$ cal	$\chi^2$ tab	Sig	Remark
Agreed	45	4	84.85	13.28	0.01	H <sub>02</sub> rejected and alternative hypothesis accepted
Disagreed	55					

Discussion: At the level of significance 0.01, the value of  $\chi^2$  cal which is 84.85 is greater than  $\chi^2$  tab (13.28), therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected, that is, there is significant difference between class size and method of teaching

## DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The interpretation of the data under each of the two tables is based on the first objective as stated. That there is significant difference between class size and teacher's efficiency in the teaching of English language is expected. Small size would allow for proper class management, opportunity to do more activities, and the possibility of identifying learners by their categories – weak, average and intelligent. Such identification will assist the teachers to give specific attention to specific candidates so that no learners are unusually behind. Method of teaching *with* class size is not a mismatch as revealed in the second hypotheses. The researcher's personal finding is that small size classrooms in English teaching do inspire the teacher to work better. Teachers are poorly paid in Nigeria and morale is dampened because of lack of job satisfaction. Coming face to face with large classes is regarded as further punishment from the authority. A hand on small classes, therefore, whenever this happens, is counted as a comic relief in one long unending drama of professional woe called teaching.

The other objective that has to do with 'comparing notes with nationals of different countries, with reference to what operates in other parts of the world, was the thrust of the discussion in the conference. With fairly disturbing graphics and videos of learners in a place like the metropolitan city of Abuja, participants believe that indeed something is wrong that has to be made right. The idea that similar cases exist in other countries was confirmed but how the problem is managed differs from place to place. Discussants felt it is disturbing to note that a country of the magnitude of Nigeria will operate, after 56 years of independence, schools and colleges without electricity, classrooms without up-to-date learning kits and teachers struggling for advanced training in managing modern resources. One of the suggestions that came up was the need for a total review of the learning process of adolescents. From the fore going improved method of teaching is required. The following strategies are recommended:

- (a) Team Learning
- (b) Group-re-group Strategy
- (c) Collaborative Language Learning
- (d) Central focus of class activity
- (e) Allowing heterogeneous learning group

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