
LARGE CLASS-SIZE IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN PORT-HARCOURT CITY LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF RIVERS STATE

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ABSTRACT: *The study was carried out to find out some characteristics and causes of large class-size in public secondary schools in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. A sample of 1,332 respondents was drawn comprising 12 teachers and 1,320 JSS2 and JSS3 students. Two research questions guided the study. A questionnaire titled “Large Class-Size Characteristics and Causes Assessment Scale” (LCSCCAS), was used for data collection. The statistical tools used for data analysis were mean and standard deviation. Major findings were: Indiscipline, crowdedness, poor evaluation of students work, were major characteristics of large class-size while urbanization, free education, and handover of schools to missions, were the causes of large class-size in public secondary schools in Port Harcourt City LGA of Rivers State. To address this problem, it was suggested that government at all levels pay attention to the building of more classrooms, provide infrastructural facilities and adhere to the 1:40 teacher-students ratio as recommended by the National Policy on Education.*

KEY WORDS: large class-size, public secondary schools, Port Harcourt city.

INTRODUCTION

Education is considered to be a lifelong process which continues until one’s death. To stop being educable is a sort of death and to be denied educational resources at any stage in one’s life amounts to knowledge starvation. In the words of late Saro-wiwa, as reported in Dienye (1998), advocated for an education for discovery. This discovery, to him, is not necessarily a scientific or technological one, but a discovery of what we were, what we are and where we are going. It is a discovery of our rights and privileges and what we need, to enable us achieve our desired goals. But, how can one become the best that one wants to be through education? Also, how can we discover our rights and privileges through education? Or how can we achieve all these when the issue of large class-size as an emergent curriculum issue has remained unresolved. This invariably has dealt a blow to quality teaching and learning in public secondary schools in Rivers State. This negates useful and better classroom interaction among teachers, students and learning materials. The fact is glaring that one of the fundamental problems of our public schools today is that of overcrowded classrooms. This has invariably made interaction in the classroom a problem. If we choose to ignore or talk less about it, this position will never reduce the gravity of the problem nor will it diminish the enormity of the consequences.

The National Policy on Education (NPE) has made provision for teacher-pupil ratios which are deemed appropriate for effective teaching and learning especially as it relates to classroom

interaction in Nigerian schools (FRN, 2004). According to the policy, the stipulated class-sizes are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Teacher-Pupil Ratio

Primary School	1:35
Secondary School	1:40
Technical Education	1:20
Special Education	1:10

Source: Adapted from NPE (2004, p.16, 22)

What this means, is that in primary school one teacher should teach thirty five students (1:35), 1:40 in secondary, 1:20 in technical schools, while the ratio for special Education is 1:10. These stipulations are in recognition of the need for teaching and learning to be carried out in a classroom setting that allows adequate teacher-students relationship. An appropriate teacher-students relationship enables the teacher to give proper attention to students in both class work and in character formation. This presupposes that, the number of teachers in each school should be adequate enough to match the stipulated relational size of students coupled with adequate teaching spaces and facilities (Taiwo, 2004).

In Rivers State, the population of students in relation to teachers in public secondary schools is far from the ideal. The registers for instance make provision for fifty (50) students per class, as against the 1:35 and 1:40 recommended by the National Policy on Education, for primary and secondary schools respectively. However, in many of the schools, the number of students in a class is over one hundred, and this creates instructional and management problems for the teachers who teach in these classes. According to Bajah (2003), the innovation with respect to the class population arrangement was as a result of the introduction of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) in 1976 now known as Universal Basic Education. This led to the rise in population of primary school pupils.

Large class-size creates a lot of problems to the application of teaching methods such as excursion/field trips, projects and demonstrations (Joof & Amadi, 1994). Those who attempt to apply them encounter a lot of difficulties because of the class-size. In large classes, the distance between students and the teachers becomes wide and thus, teachers may not give the much personal attention to each student. The picture of the agony of the teacher in handling over-populated class has been captured by Osomtu (2006, p.11), when he observed that: “A common sight in Nigerian schools shows that most students stand by the window to receive their lessons thereby compelling the teacher to shout on top of his/her voice with tremendous amount of energy lost in order that the students might hear him/her”.

The classroom space that was used for 30 pupils in the 1960’s and 40 pupils in the 1980’s is now used for 96 or more pupils today, yet the teacher is expected to interact with the pupils individually, mark and record their assignments, tests and examinations. Surely, no effective pupil-teacher interaction or individualized teaching can go on with the large population of pupils or students in a class meant for 40.

In such classes, according to Gabriel (2008), many do not participate in the teaching/learning process. The teachers themselves find it absolutely difficult to maintain control over their classes. Teachers, also find it impossible to apply the process of continuous assessment. What they do then is that, they simply “manufacture” scores which lack validity and reliability to fill the continuous assessment sheets. Even when a teacher tries to assess the students, the process for marking and scoring the students is usually exceptionally cumbersome, making it difficult to establish scorer reliability.

Accordingly, Okpobiri (2007) summarized the problems of teaching overcrowded classes by stating the following: Poor teacher-student communication/relationship; Poor class management; Inadequateness in the use of instructional materials; Unmanageable level of noise and Poor teaching and learning. Large class-size is a major educational flaw in our present day secondary school system especially in the public schools. It is a flaw because of the great harm it has done to the standard of secondary school education. Additional problems of large class-size include: the use of lecture method in the teaching/learning process to the detriment of other methods that will help instill in the learner an inquiry or a problem solving attitude and examination malpractices since it negates effective teaching and learning.

Effective teaching and learning occur when the following happens; students achieve many of the instructional objectives and not just the single goal of being able to repeat knowledge content; students are participating; students are writing, thinking, concluding, explaining and asking questions; students are contributing, arguing, brain storming and working in groups; students are physically active; and students take increased responsibility for their own learning, and the teacher facilitates rather than dictates.

In the same vein, large class-size puts strains on the available and the inadequate infrastructural facilities, instructional materials, and in most cases, students sit on the floor to learn, thereby making them vulnerable to health hazards like contacting communicable diseases. It has also been discovered that large class-size leads to large scale destruction of school equipment, as three students or more may have to sit on a chair meant for one student, while many teachers find it difficult to cope with the teaching, using the unaided voice. Examination scripts are hardly marked and never thoroughly marked. The increase in population coupled with the need for education and inadequate funding have led to large class sizes in our schools today, and this is one, among the many factors influencing classroom interaction.

Some studies such as Okpobiri, (2007) identified inadequate infrastructural facilities as a major cause of large class-sizes in public secondary schools in Rivers State. This according to the study, is attributed to the increase in the enrolment of children in school, which outnumber the quantity of the existing facilities, coupled with insufficient funds allocated to the education sector, which impede the corresponding expansion of facilities in the school system. Worst still, the study revealed the inability of the existing facilities to be maintained. Some are left to rot or decay in a dilapidated building.

Similarly in a study by Yetunde, (2007) on the effects of over-crowded classrooms on teacher-student interaction in Ilorin metropolis, identified noise making, restriction of teachers movement to the front, teachers inability to catch students cheating, late comers, and truants sneaking in and going out unnoticed, teaching aids not being able to go round among others as characteristics of overcrowded classrooms (large class-size). Also, Ovundah (2006), in a study, identified the use of lecture method, inadequate attention to individual students, poor assessment/ evaluation of students, negative attitude towards school and negative attitude to work on the part of teachers as major effects of large class-size on the teaching of school subjects.

Nonetheless, the current research investigated into the characteristics and causes of large class-sizes in public secondary schools in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area of Rivers State and providing insight into ways of ameliorating its damaging consequences. Thus, the following objectives which are transformed into research questions guided the study.

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the characteristics of large class-size in secondary schools in Port City Local Government Area.
2. To determine the causes of large class-size in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area.

Research Questions

1. What are the characteristics of large class-size in public secondary schools in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area?
2. What are the causes of large class-size in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area?

METHODOLOGY

This is a survey research hence; descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The study was carried out in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area (PHALGA). A sample of 6 schools out of 14 in the Local Government Area was used for the study. Simple random sampling technique was used to choose the schools, and all the J. S. S. 2 and 3 students of the selected schools formed the target sample. This gave a grand sample size of 12 teachers and marginal sample size of 1,320 students.

The instrument for data collection was a researcher constructed instrument titled 'Large Class Size Characteristics and Causes Assessment Scale (LCSCCAS) designed on a 5-point Likert type scale. The instrument was well validated and had reliability coefficients of 0.71 for characteristics section, 0.73 for causes and 0.72 for the entire instrument as a measure of the instrument stability over time via Pearson Product Moment Correlation Technique. The relevant data gathered by the researcher with the help of research assistants were scored and subjected to mean and standard deviation analysis as statistical tools.

RESULTS

In this section, the results are presented on tables in accordance with the research questions for the study.

Research Question 1: What are the characteristics of large class-size in public secondary schools in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation Analysis of the items on Characteristics of Large Class-Size

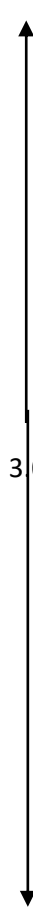
SN	Questionnaire Item	Mean	SD	Criterion Mean or mean Cut-off point	Result
1	Individual attention to students in class work and character formation is difficult to achieve.	3.9	2.00	 3.00	Agree
2	Three students share seat meant for two students	4.7	1.69		Agree
3	Desks in my class are placed wall to wall	4.2	1.42		Agree
4	Crowdedness creates instructional problems for teachers	5.0	1.69		Agree
5	The class is always noisy and difficult to control	4.7	1.69		Agree
6	Marking is usually cumbersome.	3.7	1.25		Agree
7	Examination scripts are thoroughly marked.	2.7	1.86		Disagree
8	Poor evaluation of teaching and learning process is always present.	3.1	2.14		Agree
9	Indiscipline is highly common in these classes.	3.6	1.50		Agree
10	Most students in my class have no seat	3.6	1.50		Agree
11	The state of infrastructure in my school is not adequate	5.0	1.69		Agree
12	The teacher/students ratio in my school is not adequate	3.9	1.45		Agree
13	The number of students in my class is 60 and above	4.1	1.71		Agree
14	In a large class, teachers prefer the use of lecture method to other methods of teaching.	4.7	1.69		Agree
15	Large class size encourages teachers to develop poor attitude to work.	3.9	1.45		Agree

Table 1 presents answer to research question one which is based on the characteristics of large class-size. A large class-size characteristics questionnaire was administered on the respondents who are made up of teachers and students. The 5 point scale used in the questionnaire means that, the maximum score for any items is 5, while the minimum is 1. The mean of this scale is therefore

three (3). Based on this value, any item with a mean score above the value (3) is regarded as a characteristic of a large class as perceived by the respondents while any item with a mean score below 3 is not truly regarded as a characteristic of a large class-size.

Consequently, items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15 are all true characteristics of large class-size as reported by the respondents for this study. That is, individual attention to students in class work, character formation, students share seat meant for two students, desks in my class are placed wall to wall, crowdedness, noisy and difficult to control, marking becomes cumbersome, poor evaluation of teaching and learning processes, indiscipline becomes common, inadequate seats for students in class, inadequate teacher-student- ratio, sixty (60) students and above are in my class, the preferred use of lecture method to other methods, encouraging teachers to develop poor attitude to work and the common spread of contagious diseases are all true characteristics of a Large Class-Size as indicated by the respondents in this study. However, item 7 which is examination scripts are thoroughly marked was not considered to be a characteristics of large class size as shown by the mean score obtained.

Research Question 2: What are the causes of large class-size in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation Analysis of the items on Causes of Large Class-Size

SN	Questionnaire Item	Mean	SD	Criterion Mean or mean Cut-off point	Result
1	Urbanization is an influential factor of large class size	4.2	1.42	3.0	Agree
2	Inadequate staff is responsible for large class size	1.8	3.22		Disagree
3	Government hand-over of schools to the Missions.	37	1.25		Agree
4	Free education is responsible for large class size.	3.8	1.22		Agree

The result for research question two as shown on Table 2 indicates that, items 1, 3, 4 are seen as true causes of large class-size by the respondents used in this study. This means that urbanization, Government hand-over of schools to the Missions, and free education are the causes of large class-size in our schools as presented by the respondents in this study. However, item number 2, which is inadequate staff in school, is not seen as a true cause of large class-size by the respondents.

DISCUSSION

The very first thing sort in this study was to determine some of the characteristics of large class-size as seen by the respondents. The results obtained after data analysis as shown in Table 1 indicated that, individual attention to students in class work and character formation is difficult to achieve, three students share seat meant for two students, desk placed wall to wall, crowdedness,

noisy class which make control difficult, cumbersomeness of marking test and examination scripts, poor evaluation of teaching and learning processes, indiscipline and lack of seats for students are all characteristics of large class-size.

These results are expected and not surprising in view of the fact that, all the schools visited by the researcher showed heavily crowded classrooms. The finding is in agreement with those of Okpobiri (2007), Gabriel (2008) and Yetunde (2007). They all reported that the above factors, especially noise, are major features of large class. The second issue in the study is that of causes of large class-size. Table 2 analysis of the data collected revealed some of the causes of large class-size included those of population explosion due to urbanization, the declaration of free education and government hand over of schools to missions are all causes of large class-size in schools as indicated by the respondents. The above results is expected and revealing, particularly on the part of free education, that is, ordinarily one would expect that free education is a good thing that will promote the education of all members of a particular society and not to lead to an overcrowded classrooms. This is an indication of the failure on the part of educational policy planners and administrators to adequately provide infrastructure that is commensurate with free education in a society like Nigeria. The present result is in agreement with some past research findings, like those of Ovundah (2006) and Yetunde (2007).

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

It could be concluded pedagogically from the findings of this study that the issue of large class size cannot be over-emphasized educationally. Inadequate infrastructure and non-proportionate teaching staff in schools is a sine-qua-non to effective classroom interaction which will in turn enhance effective teaching and learning that will promote good performance in various examinations (test). Both the teachers and students identified noise-making and poor teaching as the most serious problem of large class-size. Any experienced teacher would agree that very little meaningful learning, if at all, could take place in a noisy environment. Noise making implies that such students are not paying attention to the on-going lesson. Besides, noise making has been recognized as a barrier to effective communication and thus, effective teaching. The findings also indicated class control problems in large class-size. This therefore raises serious questions about the quality and quantity of teaching/learning in such classes.

The findings that teacher's questions cannot spread round the class due to wall to wall placement of students seats seem to suggest that many students have no opportunity to participate in the evaluation process. How then does the teacher identify their strengths and weaknesses so as to assist the students? Also, where teachers are glued to the front of the classroom, it becomes almost impossible to go round either to look at students work or guide them. They are also forced into using the lecture method all the time because of the rigidity in the seating arrangement. All these, no doubt, have serious implications for curriculum development and implementation. Consequently, the following are recommended:

1. Shortages of classrooms and teachers in public secondary schools need to be treated as a crisis worthy of the attention of the state government. A lasting solution is therefore building of additional classrooms and employing more teachers.
2. A ratio of 1:40 teacher to students is hereby suggested for secondary schools as stated in the National Policy on Education (2004).
3. Standard and uniform seats (chair and desk) for students should be provided for purchase at an affordable price.
4. On the coping skills of the teachers, a more positive approach should be adopted to establish some formality in class activities right from the beginning of the lesson. This could be in form of class routines and convention that would keep the students busy as soon as the lesson starts. Adequate planning and implementation of lessons would also keep them (students) busy throughout the lesson. To this end, seminars and workshop should be organized for teachers to sharpen their teaching skill.

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