LLT Journal, e-ISSN 2579-9533, p-ISSN 1410-7201, Vol. 24, No. 1, April 2021

LLT Journal: A Journal on Language and Language Teaching
http://e-journal.usd.ac.id/index.php/LLT
Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

EFFECTS OF CLASS SIZE ON STUDENTS' ATTITUDE AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ADO LOCAL GOVERNMENT, EKITI STATE

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DOI: doi.org/10.24071/llt.2020.230201
received 19 May 2020; accepted 1 September 2020

Abstract

The need to get every individual educated in Nigeria necessitated the introduction of education policies like the Universal Primary Education, UPE (1976) and the Universal Basic Education, UBE (1999). The resultant effect of these policies is a steady and constant increase in schools' enrolment, especially at the primary and secondary school levels. This led to overpopulation in the schools with some classes having as many as sixty students and sometimes above in a single arm. This study, through the analysis of questionnaires administered to students and their teachers, as well as the analysis of the examination results of selected students in JSS2 class looks at the effects of class size on students' attitude and academic performance in the English language. The result of the analysis confirms a negative effect of large class size on the attitude and academic performance of students in the English language while the effect of small class size is positive on the students' attitude to the learning of English language and consequently on their academic performance. As a corollary, the study establishes that teachers' productivity is more positively enhanced in small classes than in large classes. On the basis of the findings, appropriate recommendations are made to ameliorate these negative effects and to reduce the incidence of large class size in our secondary schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria.

Keywords: class size; attitude; performance; teacher-pupil ratio; English language

Introduction

The need to get every individual educated in Nigeria necessitated the introduction of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) policy which provides free education for students in the primary and secondary school levels. The precursor to this was the introduction of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) in 1976 by the government of General Yakubu Gowon. Previous attempts had been made to introduce universal primary education and this was particularly successful in the Western Region which introduced it in 1955 under Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the

then Premier of the Western Region. The various attempts resulted in increased enrolment in schools and a steady rise in the number of students and consequently, a rise in the number of students per class. As the school population increases, class sizes also increase. The increase in class population is also a function of the general increase in the nation's population which dictates the quest for education beyond primary and secondary school levels of education. The effect of large class size is also felt in the higher institutions. This assertion is backed up by the findings of Babalola (2009) that as the population was growing at an alarming rate, so was the desire by all to obtain higher qualifications in academic kept increasing.

The National Policy on Education (2014) states that the teacher-pupil ratio shall be 1:25 for pre-primary education; 1:35 for primary education and 1:40 for secondary education but it is observed that the number of students per class in most schools, especially public schools nowadays is at variance with the dictates of the National Policy on Education. It is common to see overcrowded classrooms in schools with hard space for teachers to move up and down let alone students. Overpopulation of most of our schools has often had a negative impact on students' academic performance.

Several other factors that can be the determinants of students' academic performance include lack of funds, lack of curriculum innovation, school structure and organization, teacher quality, curriculum, teaching philosophies, economic background of the students, and poor attitude to studies. However, this work is concerned with the effects of class size and students' attitude on their academic performance in the English language.

Literature Review

Class size can be defined as the total number of students in a class. It is an educational tool that can be used to describe the average number of students per class in a school; it is an important factor that determines students' learning outcomes and one that can be directly controlled by policy put in place by the government.

Adeoye (2013) and Togunloju (2015) believe that class size has a very strong influence on students' academic performance. Large classes are often too crowded to allow effective supervision when teaching while small classes also allow the teacher to create smaller groups for group instruction, resulting in more opportunities for teachers to interact with individual students and to provide more meaningful instruction to all students in the class (Finn J. D., et al., 2003).

Attitude, according to the online Collins dictionary, is the way a person views something or tends to behave towards it, often in an evaluative way. Attitude is also seen as involving beliefs, emotional reactions and behavioural tendencies related to the object of the attitudes.

Positive attitude towards a subject can lead to higher achievement. Mostyn (1978) notes that "attitude affects almost every facet of personal life and every field of endeavour". Attitude is a very important variable in an educational programme. Negative attitudes towards specific subject area can prevent further study or make it dry and unproductive. Attitudes towards the processes of learning can also have a very far-reaching effect on students' performance in their academic pursuit. Attitudes developed towards the topics of study can affect future behaviour with good or bad effects on the individual's outputs.

Attitude towards the English language denotes feeling, interest or otherwise towards the study of the English language. The way a student perceives the English language influences his attitude towards it and goes a long way to determine his performance. The development of students' positive attitudes regarding the English language as a school subject is one of the major responsibilities of every English language teacher.

English language which is the official language in Nigeria and the general language of communication among Nigerians is a medium of instruction in schools. This makes it a compulsory subject and a prerequisite to gaining admission into tertiary institutions. This points to the important place occupied by the English language in the life of a student in the country. According to Babalola (2015), the English language is the language of utility in Nigeria while other local regional languages remain the languages of identity. It is, therefore, important for the teacher to develop students' positive attitudes regarding the English language as a school subject and a tool of the language of wider communication (LWC) to enhance their academic performance in the language.

Poor academic performances of students are traceable to teachers, the student/pupil, parents and government apart from other problems that are caused by environmental factors. However, teachers are always at the receiving end of students' poor performance without considering the other factors which also include infrastructural facilities, class size, and students' attitude to learning.

Teachers generally prefer smaller classes in order to identify students' needs and to provide better individual attention. Available teaching bits of help are better managed in a sizeable class. Small classes seem to have positive effects on students' achievement and increase the amount of individual contact between students and teachers. The more students a teacher is responsible for, the harder it is to teach. For instance, of what importance is a dictation class where the teacher is not able to mark or correct the words dictated as a result of a large number of students in the class?

A large classroom population hinders the teacher's ability to monitor students' behaviour closely. However, smaller classes (15 or fewer students) help teachers to curtail discipline problems through personal relationships the teachers establish with their students (Halbeck, Ehrte, Zahorik, and Molar, 2001). In a moderate English language class, teachers are able to identify students' linguistic problems and gives prompt remedial assistance. Timely pedagogical intervention helps students develop a positive attitude to the task of language learning. This may not be easily possible in a large class. When teachers give the needed attention to students, serious frustrating linguistic problems are solved and language learning activities become exciting and pleasurable.

Having students in groups during English language lessons enhances students' proficiency and competence in language performance. Meaningful interactions are generated through which confidence will be built up as the students rapidly improve on their use of the language as reflects in their language outputs.

Overpopulated classrooms are considered to be counterproductive for both teachers and students when it comes to the issue of continuous assessment marking and the ability to give individualized attention to students that need extra help (FME, 2005). Edge (1980) reports that in large classes, the provision of opportunity for discussion or any kind of oral input to the written work is difficult and there is

the possibility of students copying or cheating when the class is large. A large number of students in a class also allows almost no opportunity for a genuine exchange of arguments and opinions. All these will eventually have a negative impact on students' academic performance.

The quality of education acquired in Nigeria schools is increasingly declining due to the problem of large class size. The trend is getting worse by the day. In many cases, the problem of students not performing well in their academics is not the fault of the teachers who often have no choice but to teach a class with an overwhelming number of students in a classroom built to accommodate about forty (40) students. The class becomes so overcrowded that most times students are seen standing inside and outside the classroom.

It is worthy of note that students in large classes usually have a lackadaisical attitude towards their studies because they are aware that their teachers will not be able to adequately monitor them. Blatchford, et al (2007) discover that larger classes are often cited as being harder for the teachers to maintain student discipline. This results in the focus of the classroom environment is more on students' behaviour than on students' academic achievement.

Blatchford, Edmonds, and Martins (2003) however observe that students in smaller classes (average of 19 students per class) utilize more time on instructional purposes and less time is utilized on non-instructional purposes such as talking to one's peers about non-academic topics, than students in larger classes (average of 32 students per class). It has also been discovered that larger classes prevent teachers from providing in-depth content coverage due to the loss of instructional time occurring since the teachers are spending more time handling students' behavioural issues.

Teachers with smaller classes have fewer discipline problems than larger classes; there are more intimate relationship and interaction in smaller classes which enables teachers to prevent negative behaviour issues from developing. Through personal relationships, they are able to flow with their students.

Adodo (2005) and Yara (2009) claim that students' attitude towards learning goes a long way to record their achievement in the English language. Adeyela (2000) in her study finds out that large class size is not conducive for serious academic work while Yara (2010) in his studies on class size and academic achievement of students finds out that the performance of students in large classes was very low compared to those students in smaller classes. This, however, contradicts the findings of Pong and Pallas (2001) who discover that students do better in large classes; they attributed this probably to the fact that more experienced teachers are given larger classes. However, Resnick (2003) is of the view that the poor performance in large class size may be due to the more restricted range of teaching and learning activities accorded to students as well as the reduced level of interactions.

Since there is a close association between students' attitudes and their achievements, it is not all that easy to identify individual attitudinal traits in an overpopulated class. Once the attitudes of students are known by the teachers, suitable instructional methods can be devised to meet the interest of the students. Therefore, class size has the most significant impact on the academic performance of secondary school students.

It has been observed that most classes in public secondary schools are overcrowded as a result of the mass desire to get an education. Despite the stipulation of the National Policy on Education that the teacher-pupil ratio in secondary schools should be 1:40, what is obtainable in the secondary schools are large classes of over 45 pupils.

Large class size is a great challenge to achieving success in the teaching and learning of English language. Teachers could hardly prove their professional efficiency in classes thereby resulting in poor output from students. Large class size also affects students' attitude to their studies which ultimately leads to poor academic performance.

The purpose of this study is to examine the effect of class size and students' attitude on academic performance in the English language among secondary school students in Ekiti State, Nigeria.

Also, the study investigates the extent to which teacher-pupil ratio affects students' attitude and academic performance in English language programme.

The following research questions were generated to guide the study: First, is there any relationship between class size and students' attitude to the learning of the English language? Second, is there any relationship between class size and students' attitude to their academic performance in the English language? Third, is there any relationship between class size and students' academic performance in the English language? Fourth, is there any relationship between class size and teacher's productivity?

Method

Research Design

The research design used is a descriptive survey which aims at finding out the effects of class size and students' attitude on academic performance in the English language among secondary school students in Ekiti State.

Population and Sampling Technique

The population consists of secondary school students in Ado Local Government Area of Ekiti State, Nigeria. There are seventeen thousand four hundred and two (17,402) students in the local government for the 2017/2018 academic session as sourced from the Ekiti State Ministry of Education. Four secondary schools in the local government were selected and from these four secondary schools, two hundred (200) students drawn from JSS Two and SSS Two classes were randomly selected as the sample of the population. One hundred (100) students were in classes having below forty students per arm and the other one hundred (100) students from classes of between forty-one and sixty students per arm. The English language promotion examination results of ninety (90) students were also analysed to determine the influence of class size on their academic performance. All the students were from two arms of the same JSS Two class of one of the selected Secondary Schools in the State. They were given the same examination under the same condition. Their scripts were graded by the same examiner using the same marking scheme. The first arm has thirty-seven students while the second arm has fifty-three students. The results of the students in the arm with thirty-seven students were thereafter juxtaposed with the results of students in the other arm with fifty-three students.

Twenty English language teachers were equally selected from the four schools. Ten of the teachers are from classes having students below forty students in an arm while the other ten is from classes with students between forty-one and sixty students to an arm.

The instrument used is a self-constructed questionnaire given to the selected students and teachers. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. Part A introduced the survey to the respondents and solicited their cooperation; it also requested for the respondents to give their particulars such as the name of the school, gender, class/class taught, qualification, local government and the total number of students in the class. Part B has a16 item questionnaire for students and 12 item questionnaire for teachers.

The questionnaire for the students and that for the teachers are both on a two-point scale of Agree (A) Disagree (D).

The validity of the questionnaire was ascertained by experts in the English language to ensure that the items in the questionnaire are relevant to both the aims and the objectives of the study. The questionnaires were administered by the researchers to the selected teachers and students. The data collected was subjected to frequency count and simple percentages were used to analyse the data collected. The responses of respondents with a class size of forty students and below were compared with the responses from respondents with class sizes of between forty-one and sixty. The below forty class size is classified as normal/average class size while those between forty-one and sixty are classified as large class size.

Findings and Discussion

The results of the data collected were analysed based on the research questions.

Research Question 1

Is there any relationship between class size and student's attitude to the learning of the English language?

Table 1. Students' Response

	Class Size	**Below 40 Students**				**Between 41 and 60 Students**			
	Question	**A**	**%**	**D**	**%**	**A**	**%**	**D**	**%**
1	I really like the English language.	97	97	03	03	**87**	**87**	**13**	**13**
2	I am willing to spend more time learning the English language.	97	97	03	03	**87**	**87**	**13**	**13**
3	I enjoy studying the English language as a subject.	97	97	03	03	**75**	**75**	**25**	**25**
4	I speak the English language always.	72	72	28	28	**80**	**80**	**20**	**20**
5	Learning the English language is boring.	42	42	58	58	**56**	**56**	**44**	**44**
6	I am always present in my English language class.	91	91	09	09	**77**	**77**	**23**	**23**

7	I personally like the number of students in my English language class.	86	86	14	14	**30**	**30**	**70**	**70**
8	The number of students in my English language class has a positive effect on my attitude to the study of the language.	86	86	14	14	**52**	**52**	**48**	**48**

From the table above, 97% of the students from perceived normal class size agrees that they like English and they are willing to spend more time learning the language as well as enjoy studying it. Also, 97% of the students in the large classes agree to that they like English and want to spend more time studying it while only 75%of students in the large classes enjoy studying it as a language. This result shows that a large percentage of the students not minding the number of students in their classes are willing to learn the English language. This is not unexpected considering the place of the language as a language of instruction in the secondary schools and the fact that a credit pass in it is necessary for admission into tertiary institutions. 91 % of the students with the normal class size is always present in class while the percentage is less in the large class size where it is 77 %. While 86% of the respondents in average class size classes agrees that the number of students in the class has a positive effect on their attitude to the study of the language, only 52% of large class size agrees. One important thing to note is that as much as 42% of the normal class size sees English as boring; a higher percentage of 56% of the large class students sees it as boring. This response generally calls for teachers of English to come up with more ingenious ways of making students enjoy the teaching/learning of the language. The table also shows that students in large classes do not like the size of the class as only 29% of them agrees to like their class size while as high as 86% of students in the perceived normal class size likes the number of students in their classes. In a large class, lots of social relationships may occur outside the control of the teachers which may not contribute to the needed knowledge in the subject.

Research Question 2

Is there any relationship between class size and students' attitude to their academic performance in the English language?

Table 2. Students' Response

	Class Size	**Below 40 students**				**Between 41 & 60 Students**			
	Question	**A**	**%**	**D**	**%**	**A**	**%**	**D**	**%**
1	The number of students in my English language class motivates and helps my academic achievement.	94	94	06	06	**48**	**48**	**52**	**52**
2	I am always motivated to attend class because of the class population.	83	83	17	17	**48**	**48**	**52**	**52**

3	I think the class population influences my frequency of participation in class.	76	76	24	24	**71**	**71**	**29**	**29**
4	More than one English language teacher should be allocated to my class.	89	89	11	11	**80**	**80**	**20**	**20**
5	The number of students in my class should be reduced.	22	22	78	78	**61**	**61**	**39**	**39**
6	I enjoy English language lessons better when students are not many in my class.	64	64	36	36	**64**	**64**	**36**	**36**
7	My English language teacher always gives us personal attention.	97	97	03	03	**46**	**46**	**54**	**54**
8	My English language teacher always marks our assignments.	97	97	03	03	**44**	**44**	**56**	**56**

The responses from the above table (table 2) show that the students in the average classes are motivated to attend classes; they participate actively in class activities, (94% and 76% respectively). On the other hand, only 48% of students in large classes have the motivation to attend classes because of the class population. While as much as 97% of the students in the average class size population agree that their teachers always give them the personal attention and mark their assignments, only 46% of the students in the large class agree that their teachers always give them the personal attention and only 44% say that their English teacher always marks their assignments.

One curious finding is that majority of the students in both the average classes and the large classes agree that more than one teacher should be allocated to teach them (89% and 80% respectively). However, while only 22% of the students in the average class size agree that the number of students in their class should be reduced as much as 61% of the respondents in large classes has the same view which is a pointer to the negative effect of large class size on them. A large percentage of the respondents agrees that they enjoy their lessons better when students are not many in their class, 64% of students in both average classes and large classes share the same view.

It should be evident that when students are not motivated to attend and participate actively in class lessons, when they do not receive personal attention from their teachers who do not always mark their assignments and when they expect more teachers to teach them, one can only expect poor attitude to their academic performances.

Research Question 3

Is there any relationship between class size and students' academic performance in the English language?

The following table contains the summary of the pass levels of students in JSS2 English language promotion examination. The students are in two different arms of the same class. The first class contains thirty-seven (37) students and the other contained fifty-three (53) students. All the students sat for the same examination

under the same condition and their answer scripts were graded by the same teacher using the same marking guide.

Table 3. The Summary of the Pass Levels of Students in JSS2

	Thirty-seven (37) Students		**Fifty-three (53) Students**	
Score out of 100	Number	%	Number	%
50 and above	17	45.95	09	16.99
40-49	14	37.84	14	26.41
39 and below	04	10.81	30	56.60
Total	**37**	**100**	**53**	**100**
Class Average Score		54		37

The above table shows that while only 16.99% of students in the class with fifty-three students pass the English language with scores above 50%, a higher percentage, 45.95% of their counterparts in the class with thirty-seven students pass with scores above 50%. Also, while as much as 56.60% of students in the large class fail with a score of 39% and below, the percentage of failure in the other class is 10.81%. Even at the level of average scores of between 40%and 50%, students in the class of thirty-seven perform better with a percentage of 37.84 as compared to the large class with 26.42% pass rate. The results in the above table show the extent to which class size can affect the academic performance of students.

Research Question 4

Is there any relationship between class size and teacher's productivity?

Table 4. From Teachers' Responses

	Class Size	**Below 40 Students**				**Between 41 &60 Students**			
	Question	**Yes**	**%**	**No**	**%**	**Yes**	**%**	**No**	**%**
1	I enjoy teaching large classes.	03	30	07	70	**5**	**50**	**5**	**50**
2	Students in small classes perform better in the English language than those in large classes.	08	80	02	20	**07**	**70**	**03**	**30**
3	I find it difficult to mark students' assignments in large classes.	07	70	03	30	**07**	**70**	**03**	**30**
4	I hate going to lessons in large classes because of the students' population.	06	60	04	40	**06**	**60**	**04**	**40**
5	The size of my class is an encouraging factor to my teaching.	09	90	01	10	**03**	**30**	**07**	**70**
6	It is easy for me to give Individual attention to students during my lessons.	06	60	04	40	**03**	**30**	**07**	**70**
7	The size of my class allows effective teaching	08	80	02	20	**02**	**20**	**08**	**80**

	of all the aspects of the English language.								
8	I am able to regularly mark my students' assignments.	07	70	03	30	**04**	**40**	**06**	**60**
9	I enjoy the teaching/learning process better when some students in my class are absent.	06	60	04	40	**06**	**60**	**04**	**40**
10	The students' population in my class always make class management and control difficult.	06	60	04	40	**06**	**60**	**04**	**40**

One of the ways to measure teachers' productivity is their attitude to their work which can also determine how they enjoy their work. Teachers' response, show that most of them do not enjoy teaching large classes, 70% of those teaching in the classes with average population do not enjoy teaching in large classes while 50% of those teaching in large classes do not enjoy it. The other 50% who seem to enjoy it could possibly be talking from the point of adapting to teaching in large classes. However, 70% of all the respondents agree that they find it difficult to mark students' assignments in large classes and 60% of them hates going for lessons in large classes. While 90% of teachers in average classes are encouraged to teach because of the class size, 70% of those in large classes is discouraged to teach because of the large size of the classes.

Class management is easier in average classes as only 40% of teachers in such classes agree to difficulty in managing and controlling the class while that of the large class is 60%. It is difficult for teachers in large classes to pay individual attention to students, teach all aspects of the language to them and mark students' assignments. This difficulty level is reflected by their responses of 70%, 80% and 60% respectively while the ease with which the teachers in the average classes achieve these is 60%, 70% and 70% respectively.

Generally, it is noted that teachers enjoy the teaching/learning process better when carried out in classes with a manageable population. The class average score for the small class is 54 while that of the large class is 37.

Discussion

Multitude multiply maladies. This statement is brought to the fore and made real in the findings of this study. A very good percentage of the student respondents (above 80%) profess to love the study of English language, 70% of those in large classes do not like the large population of students in their classes, but 86% of those in the smaller classes like the size of the population. When students find their study boring, when they are not motivated to attend classes because of the large number of students in their classes and when teachers do not give personal attention to them, they are not likely to benefit from the teaching/learning process. Boredom is evident in the large classes (56%) as against the average class size (42%). The presence of boredom is also noticed even in the average size class; this may not be unconnected with the teaching methods of most English language teachers which generally focus

on competence teaching rather than performance. In the long run, the negative attitude of students to large class size also negatively affect their studies and ultimately affects their academic performance and achievement.

The study also confirms that teachers enjoy teaching small-sized classes as against large classes because they are encouraged to teach, they are able to give personal attention to students, teach all the aspects of the language, have time to give and mark students' assignments and able to have good class management and control. Over 70% of the teacher respondents agree that students in small classes perform better in the English language than students in large classes and the results of an examination conducted in the English language also confirm that students in small classes perform better academically than those in large classes with a class average score of 54 and 37 respectively.

Conclusion

Large class size is a reality in our secondary schools in Ekiti State and the effects this has on the attitude of the students and the teachers as well as on the students' academic performance is equally real. Most of the schools have classes above 40 and some up to 60 students per class, especially in the Junior Secondary levels. Large class size has negative effects on the ability of teachers to effectively teach students, give them assignments, give them individual attention and achieve good class management and effective class control.

To stem the steady rise in the decline of the performance of students in English language and the general tone of discipline in our secondary schools, necessary steps must be taken to reduce the number of students per class in the schools. More teachers need to be employed and additional schools need to be established to cater to the high population of persons seeking formal education in the state.

The findings in this study confirm the reality of the existence of large classes in Ekiti State and its attendant problems that affect the attitude and productivity of both the students and the teachers of the English language.

To confront this menace and solve the problems it creates, the government need to embark on a census of teachers and students in our secondary schools. The result of the census will assist the government in coming up with intervention strategies that will correct the situation. These may include correction of imbalances in school population (there may be the need for students' redistribution and or teachers' transfer). There may also be the need to employ more teachers and or establish more secondary schools to take care of the high population of students seeking secondary education in the state.

Nothing good is free. A modest fee should be attached to secondary school education in the state. This will discourage those who just attend school just because it is free and not because they genuinely covet secondary school education. This will reduce the number of students as the ones attending will be those who really want to be educated and they will be willing to pay the token being demanded of them.

A well-articulated reward programme, in form of scholarship and prizes, should be put in place with well-funded budgetary appropriation, systemically coordinated advances and painstakingly executed management to better improve students' attitude and enhance very good performances in the study of the language considering its utility value in the social life of the people. It should not be limited

to the academic achievement but should also cover aspects like students' attendance at classes and their ability to manipulate the tool of the language to organize their world within and outside the school social life.

It is recommended that teachers should encourage group work; students should be put in groups to increase their interest through meaningful interactions and participation in class activities to facilitate the teaching/learning process. When students work in groups, they socialize better, develop a sense of intimacy and inclusion, self-worth, safety, trust and learn are better enhanced despite the largeness of their classes. Group work must be dexterously carried out until individualized instruction is promoted.

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