

Original Research Article

An Evaluation of Teachers' Techniques for Managing Large Social Studies Classes in Calabar Educational Zone, Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract

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This was a survey research aimed at evaluating the effectiveness or otherwise of the techniques used by teachers to manage large Social Studies classes in Calabar Educational Zone, Cross River State, Nigeria. 73 teachers in JSSIIIA were used for the study with a student population of 3650. A structured questionnaire tagged "Evaluation of Teachers' Large Social Studies Classes Management Techniques" ETLSSCMT was used. This was a 20-item questionnaire on a Likert-Scale containing various large class management indices. The data generated were coded and their mean (\bar{x}) scores and standard deviation (sd) derived appropriately. Data analysis revealed that all the teachers were effective in twelve indices and ineffective in eight, among which were breaking students into groups 2.32), using name tags (1.95), swapping students sitting positions regularly (2.14), encouraging students to see you in post-class hours (2.25), improvising instructional materials (2.14), delivering lessons with enthusiasm (1.37), using microphones in teaching (1.37) and motivating students with gift items (1.73). It was recommended, inter alia, that more Social Studies teachers be recruited and adequately motivated to perform the onerous task of catering for the ever increasing school enrolment.

Keywords: Academic Achievements, Class Size, Strategies, Teachers, Management

INTRODUCTION

The classroom as an information system exhibits three general characteristics (Doyle, 1979 in Fan, Aaron and Ekpo, 2012). First, there appears to be an abundance of information resources. That is, classrooms contain a complex array of interacting objects and media, including textbooks, workbook exercises, bulletin board displays, files, and tests besides the range of verbal and non-verbal behaviour on the part of both teachers and students. And one of these resources may assume instructional significance depending upon particular sets of circumstances. Secondly, not all elements of the classroom are equally reliable as instructional cues.

Teacher instructions, for example, are sometimes ambiguous and incomplete and teacher feedback is not always consistent or accurate. There is also evidence that instructional materials used in classrooms place extraordinarily complex logical demands on students. Thus, in spite of the number of sources, the information available for a particular instructional task may be inadequate. Since the classroom is a mass-producing system, the degree to which the level of information and flow of activities necessarily match the individual student's interests or abilities is limited. The classroom, owing to the range of purposes, number of participants,

and duration of existence is a complex environment. Effective teaching demands both intellectual skills and inter-personal rapport. Skills used in creating intellectual excitement comprise the clarity of instructor's communications and their positive emotional impact on students. In describing classrooms in the context of social studies education, Mezieobi (1994) explains that they could be one of the rooms in the school premises or in the community – open classroom or classroom without walls. Social Studies classroom outside the formal school is the wider society, or classroom without walls. Students are usually exposed to their community as a learning theatre in order to make them understand and appreciate the reality of their socio-political environment. The exposure to practical societal experiences in Social Studies context is a classroom teaching-learning strategy. This study focuses on the conventional classroom i.e. classroom with walls.

Teacher quality matters. In fact, it is the most important school-related factor influencing student achievement. The role of the teacher in cooperative learning, according to Brandt (1996), becomes predominantly that of planner and facilitator of active learning, as opposed to that of instructor. Each teacher has a repertoire of teaching strategies and materials that are potentially useful in a particular teaching situation. The elementary teacher today is much more a manager of students, materials and tasks than a discussion leader.

Social Studies in the primary and Junior Secondary School (JSS1 – III) in Nigeria are core subject. The population in each class therefore becomes overwhelmingly more than the teacher can handle with ease and the instructional materials are inadequate (Fan, 2013). Additionally, the classrooms may lack adequate seats. The students themselves have varying abilities and interests. The recommended methods and strategies for teaching this subject encourage lots of child-centred activities that provide first-hand experiences which would allow the students to develop some process, manipulative and social skills. Classroom environment may differ from one class to another. It has been found that an enriched environment influences learning. The objective of this study therefore is to evaluate the various techniques used by teachers to manage these classes with the sole aim of determining their effectiveness.

Literature review

A number of authors have studied the effects of various styles of classroom management on learners. Hall (1977) in Fan, Etim and Osunrinade, (2012) found a connection between spatial distance and classroom order. The greater the spatial distance between teacher and student, the more some students became passive listeners and engaged in off-task behaviour. As the

teacher moved closer to students, communication tended to be more interactive, with more students following the wishes of the teacher. Tharp and Gallimore (1989), Dillon (1989), and Bowers and Flinders (1991) present convincing arguments that different cultures react differently to non-verbal and verbal classroom management techniques that use space and distance (called proximity control), eye contact, warnings and classroom arrangement. Dillon (1989) points out that many actions of teachers may diminish participation among students and/or build resentment because their actions are culturally incongruent.

Emmer, Evertson and Anderson (1980) recruited 27 teachers in eight elementary schools into a year-long observation study. Using the average rate of student engagement and student off-task behaviour obtained after the first three weeks of school, the teachers were classified into two groups: the more effective managers and the less effective ones. The teachers categorized as more effective classroom managers had significantly higher students' engagement rates (more students actively engaged in the goals of the lesson) and significantly lower student off-task behaviour (fewer reprimands and warnings) throughout the school year. Ileancho and Ikpeme (1997) in the study to find out if organizational variables had a role to play in high performance among university athletes used 100 university athletes who were made to respond to a standardized questionnaire. The data collected were subjected to chi-square statistical test at 0.05 significance level. The result showed that organization variables were pre-requisites to high performance among university athletes. Mbakwem (2001) supports the above finding by positing that classroom management entails organizing and integrating certain activities which are geared towards effective teaching. Such activities include handling instructional materials, observing conduct, improving classroom-working conditions, accommodating all types of situations that may arise in the class, and removing all distracters in the teaching-learning process.

Okpara (1997) opines that the classroom teacher needs to perform activities that would lure children to work together in the classroom situation and achieve individual and group objectives. To be able to do this, the teacher must exhibit maturity and good sense of authority, justice and fair play in handling conflicts or restoring morale in his class. When the teacher and pupils maintain a cordial relationship, there is an intellectual stimulation in the learners. In such situations, the pupils are at their best and learning becomes very effective with little or no disciplinary problems. Ijaiya (2000) was of the opinion that the teachers' behaviour in the teaching/learning process could either make or mar the attainment of educational objectives by the learners. Farrant (1984) enumerated certain skills which a teacher must display in order to achieve efficient classroom management. These included recognizing attention and

lack of it; gaining maximum pupil involvement; displaying awareness of group and individual pupil behaviour, displaying authority and confidence; giving clear instructions and controlling classroom equipment efficiently. Vikoo (2003) warns that failure to manage a classroom adequately could result in an environment replete with confusion, misbehaviour, antagonism, anger and unpleasantness and concludes that creating a pleasant environment for the teacher and the students is within the ability levels of most, if not all, beginning and experienced teachers.

Nwideeduh (2003) posits that while spacious room allows for small and large group discussions and activities, narrow/overcrowded classrooms, on the other hand, tend to allow for teachers dominated teaching and no free communication among the learners and between the teacher and the learners. Christine and Porter (2002) maintain that large classes affect the quality of teaching as well as concentration of students. This situation poses constraint to what the teacher can do effectively especially in maintaining discipline in the classroom Davis (1993) suggests some strategies for teaching large classes. They are

- (i) Using teaching methods that could encourage students to think and learn
- (ii) Getting the students to be actively involved in the classes
- (iii) Planning small discussion groups with the class
- (iv) Avoiding coming late to classes
- (v) Planning and preparing lessons carefully
- (vi) Providing regular feedback on the assignments given to students.

More positive conclusions on the influence of class size have been drawn from an analysis of Texas schools. Using data from more than 800 districts containing more than 2.4 million students, Ferguson (1991) found significant relationships among teacher quality and class size. For first through to seventh grades, using student-teacher ratio as a measure of class size, Ferguson found that district student achievement fell as the student-teacher ratio increased for every student above an eighteen to one (18:1) ratio. Wenglinsky (1997) used data from fourth graders in more than 200 districts and found that smaller class size positively affected mathematics scores for fourth graders and improved the social environment for eighth graders, which in turn produced higher achievement. These effects were greatest for students of lower socio-economic status.

The conclusion that smaller classes allow more time for instruction and require less time for discipline was reported by Molnar *et al.* (1999) in evaluating the first two years of the five-year Student Achievement Guarantee in 1996. The study compared thirty schools that entered the SAGE programme to a group of approximately fifteen comparison schools having similar demographics in order to gauge SAGE researchers' claims that reduced class sizes in early grades lead students to higher academic

achievements. Targeted towards low-income schools, the SAGE class-size education was quite large, ranging from twelve to fifteen students per teacher compared with twenty-one to twenty-five students per teacher in the comparison group. This reduction was larger than in the better known STAR (Student/Teacher Assessment Ratio) experiment in Tennessee. The gain in test scores was similar to gains attained with STAR and also consistent with STAR. Of numerous experiments around the country to reduce class size, the STAR programme authorised by the Tennessee legislature in 1985 has received the greatest attention. The programme established a class size of approximately fifteen students per teacher. It embraced seventy-nine schools, more than 300 classrooms and 7,000 students, and followed their progress for four years. STAR compared classes containing thirteen to seventeen students to those containing twenty-two to twenty-six student. Teachers and students were randomly assigned to different-sized classes so that the independent effect of class size could be measured more precisely. The results were clear: students in small classes did better in mathematics and reading tests at the end of kindergarten; the kindergartener achievement gap between the two class sizes remained the same in first, second and third grades; students from smaller classes behaved better than students from larger classes, and these differences persisted through to at least fourth grade, the effects were stronger for students of lower, rather than higher, socio-economic status. These outcomes have been identified by several researchers (Moseller, 1995; Krueger, 2000; Krueger and Whitmore, 2000). While much of the early work based on STAR data sought to identify short-term effects, many researchers wondered how durable the effects were. Nye, Hedges and Konstantopoulos (1999) show that the positive effects of small classes are evident in test scores for mathematics, reading and science at least through to eight grade. Controlling for a variety of confounding factors, such as attrition and variable time in small classes, the authors found that more time spent in small classes was positively related to higher achievement. Atadoga (2007) studied the effects of class size on 150 integrated science students in the Federal College of Education (FCE), Zaria. Data were analysed using a 2-way ANOVA. The conclusion reached was that a small class size group had closer interaction and rapport among student-student and student-teacher relationships than a large class size group. Based on this background, individual students' problems could easily be identified and prompt attention given. However, the finding of this study is at variance with those of Hanushek (1997), Hanushek (1999), Hoxby (2000) and Johnson (2000) who found no significant influence of class size on academic performances. The contrasting findings of these earlier researchers are interesting. Those who found no significant influence of class size on academic

performance may have had other favourable environmental factors in their study locale such as availability and effective use of computers, large classroom space and adequate ventilation. It should also be noted that researchers who found significant influence of class size on academic performances emphasised that the effects of class size were greatest for either disadvantaged and minority students or students of low socio-economic status.

Statement of the problem

The teacher is a significant figure to all students. He has the responsibility of providing opportunities and instruments for checking pupil's progress and knowledge – gain, attitude change and acquisition of relevant skills (Fan, 2012). Unfortunately, Social Studies classes in the schools used for this study exceeded the 1:40 student-teacher ratio prescribed by the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) in the National Policy on Education. This situation undoubtedly poses problems of

- (i) inability to provide instant feedback to a high percentage of learners;
- (ii) inability to individualize learning processes
- (iii) inability to use adequate instructional materials
- (iv) creating a negative effect on the quality of teaching as well as students' level of concentration; and
- (v) generating a feeling of anonymity and disruptive behaviour among students.

Teachers in large-sized classes are often perpetually in the struggle to maintain discipline in the class and this often leads to a loss of quality time and a reduction in the teacher-learner contact for supervision and identification of learning difficulties in the learner (Fan, 2012). The students thus carry their learning to the next lesson or class without opportunity for guidance and possible mediation. The question for this paper therefore is: are the techniques used by teachers in managing large Social Studies classes effective?

Research Question

Are the Social Studies Teachers' Techniques in managing large classes effective?

METHODOLOGY

Sample

There are 73 public secondary schools in Calabar Educational Zone, Cross River State, Nigeria. All the Social Studies teachers in Junior Secondary School (JSS) IIIA were used as sample. That is, the sample for the study comprised 73 teachers with the student

population of 3,650. Social Studies is not offered in Senior Secondary Schools in Nigeria.

Instrument

This was a survey research. A questionnaire tagged "Evaluation of Teachers' Large Social Studies Classes Management Techniques", ETLSSCMT, was used. It was adopted from Amechebe and Faundi (2012). This was a 20-item questionnaire on a Likert-Scale containing various large class management indices. The scale was marked A = Very often done (4 points), B = often done (3 points), C = done occasionally (2 point), D = Never done (1 point). The instrument was subjected to three experts in test and measurement. The content validity index of 8.50 was obtained. This means that the items clearly tapped the responses on the scale and were therefore adopted for the exercise.

Administration of Instrument

The questionnaires were administered on the respondents by the researchers themselves. 73 copies of the questionnaire were distributed and all were returned for coding and analysis.

Data Analysis

The responses of all the 73 teachers on each attribute of classroom management effectiveness index were summated and their mean (\bar{x}) scores and the standard deviation (sd) derived appropriately. The mean (\bar{x}) of 2.5 was adopted as a criterion for an effective management technique. This mean score was adopted from Emechebe and Fuandai (2012) who conducted a similar survey in ten Inspectorate Areas in Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

RESULTS

The results of the analysis of responses on the suggested techniques are presented in Table I below:

DISCUSSION

This research revealed that the teachers were found to adopt effective strategies in twelve indices, viz, teaching with instructional materials (\bar{X} : 2.6); conducting and grading continuous assessments (\bar{X} : 2.71); using students in role play (\bar{X} : 2.94); moving around the class when the lesson is going on (\bar{X} : 2.93); establishing class rules to address undisciplined behaviour (\bar{X} : 3.22), getting

Table 1. Mean Responses of Teachers on the Effectiveness of the Techniques used for Managing large Social Studies Classes

S/N	Technique	\bar{x}	sd	Decision
1	Teach with instructional materials	2.67	0.55	E
2	Conduct and grade continuous assessments regularly	2.71	0.56	E
3	Break students into groups	2.31	0.41	NE
4	Use name tags	1.95	0.31	NE
5	Use a microphone in the class always	1.37	0.21	NE
6	Use students in role play	2.94	0.64	E
7	Swap students' sitting position regularly	2.14	0.51	NE
8	Move around the class when lesson is going on	2.93	0.70	E
9	Establish class rules to address undisciplined behaviour	3.22	0.56	E
10	Get to know the students by names	3.30	0.57	E
11	Plan lessons to be appropriate with the level of students' ability	3.37	0.59	E
12	Encourage students to see you in post-class hour	2.25	0.50	NE
13	Allow students to ask questions	3.48	0.62	E
14	Make teaching/learning learner-centred	2.67	0.55	E
15	Improvise instructional materials	2.14	0.41	NE
16	Engage all students in class activities	2.71	0.56	E
17	Deliver lessons with enthusiasm	1.73	0.44	NE
18	Revise previous lesson for three to five minutes before starting a new one	3.30	0.57	E
19	Motivate the best performer in tests with gift items like pencils, notebooks or textbooks	1.73	0.61	NE
20	Avoid coming to class late	2.55	0.56	E

Key: E = Effective **NE** = Not effective

to know students by names (\bar{X} : 3.30); planning lessons to be appropriate with the level of students' ability (\bar{X} : 3.37); allowing students to ask questions (\bar{X} : 3.48) making teaching/learning learner-centred (\bar{X} : 2.67); engaging all students in class activities (\bar{X} : 2.71); revising previous lesson for three to five minutes before starting a new one (\bar{X} : 3.30) and avoiding coming to class late (\bar{X} : 2.55). This is in consonance with Davis (1993) submission that teachers should avoid coming late to classes, get the students to be actively involved in the classes and provide regular feedback on the assignments given to students. Most important is the fact that the Federal Government of Nigeria organises Refresher Courses for all primary and secondary school teachers in its employ twice a year under the aegis of both the State Colleges of Education and the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB).

Teachers scored highly in these indices because of the training they had while undertaking professional courses in their various Institutions of Higher Learning. Indeed, these findings are in consonance with established best practices for effective classroom management worldwide and recommended by Awotua (1999) and Nwideduh (2003).

Teachers' management techniques failed below standard in eight indices. They were breaking students into groups (\bar{x} : 2.3), using name tags (\bar{x} : 1.95), using a microphone in the class always (\bar{x} : 1.37), swapping students' sitting position regularly (\bar{x} : 2.14), improvising

instructional materials (\bar{x} : 2.14), delivering lessons with enthusiasm (\bar{x} : 1.73) and motivating students with gift items like pencils, notebooks, or textbooks. The reason for this is obvious. This is in consonance with the submission of Nwideduh (2003) and Christine and Porter (2002). The teachers in that Zone work with very low morale. The Teachers' Salary Structure (TSS) mooted several years ago is still not implemented. The slogan on every teacher's lips is that "Teachers' take-home pay cannot take teachers home"! There is therefore a general sense of apathy and despair.

CONCLUSION

The major conclusion forwarded by this research is that the teachers passed the "acid test" in twelve large class management techniques and fell below expectations in eight. Excellence and enjoyment require teachers to assume responsibility for developing positive learning environments where learning is focused on individual child's needs. Teachers are required to provide the children with learning experiences in which Social Studies is taught "outstandingly" well. Indeed large classes can be frustrating. Teaching is a highly personal endeavour shaped by "funds of knowledge" and beliefs about teaching, learning and students. Teachers' positive emotions undoubtedly fuel psychological resilience. Social Studies teachers should value their career in

education and derive deep satisfaction in their work. Such teachers are more likely to have a stronger sense of identity, resilience and commitment. Handling large Social Studies classes is quite demanding and challenging. This need not demoralize them. Teachers should therefore be motivated through the implementation of Teachers Salary Structure (TSS) and regular training and retraining programmes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper finds the following recommendations apposite

(i) Social Studies teachers should not fix his gaze on one part of the class when in a static position. He/she should try to look around.

(ii) All the writing on the board should not only be legible but bold. This will enable the learners sitting in all positions in the class to see the items written on the board clearly. The teacher should make sure that the learners' sitting arrangement is such that can make them view the board directly.

(iii) A Social Studies teacher should make sure he speaks loudly and clearly. Teachers should repeat sentences for emphasis.

(iv) The teacher should make the learners realize that he is always available to attend to their Social Studies needs.

(v) The teacher should show commitment to the task of guiding the learners to learn. A good and friendly posture on the part of the teacher can make learners open up and share their challenges as well as cooperate with the teacher in many ways.

(vi) There is need for massive expansion and renovation of dilapidated classroom structures and construction of new ones to provide enough classroom accommodation for the large number of Social Studies students.

(vii) Social Studies teachers should be recruited and adequately motivated to perform the onerous task of catering for the ever increasing school enrolment. After all, positive emotions such as joy, satisfaction and interest can function to promote proactive efforts to deal with stressful situations and help the teachers build supportive interpersonal relationships, which may in turn contribute in developing better coping strategies in the face of challenging circumstances (Deater – Deckard, Ivy and Smith, 2006; Gu and Day, 2007; Tait, 2008).

(viii) In order to break learners' anonymity and breed identity, learners should be made to wear name-tags to class. This will enable the teacher to call a definite name for on-task behaviour or reprimand off-task behaviour without generally creating a situation whereby learners not really referred to begin to utter statements in respect of whether they were the ones the teacher wants to arouse.

(ix) Teachers should listen to students, get to know them and identify their interests

(x) Instructional approaches should always be varied in line with the characteristics of the learners, their cognitive potentials, interests and background experiences (Fan, 2012). It should be noted that some learners need fast-paced teaching while some need friendly pushing to get along.

(xi) Learners' seating positions should be swapped weekly. This will help in increasing participation. Most often, those who contribute to a lesson are these sitting in front seats. They are easily spotted by the teacher. In view of this, those who occupy the front seat this week can be asked to occupy the middle or back seat next week. Alternatively, the students should sit in circles while the teacher stands at the centre while teaching.

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