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Overcoming the Limitations of Teaching Citizenship Education Lessons in Large Class Sizes, the Case of Glorious Complex School in Sekondi-Takoradi

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Abstract:

The study was undertaken in Glorious Basic School in Sekondi-Takoradi to ascertain the relationship between class size and pupils' class participation and performance. The population sample consisted of 160 pupils and 10 teachers selected mainly through purposive sampling. The main research instruments used were Observation Checklist and Interview Schedule. The study was guided by three research questions. The study concluded that pupils' participation and performance in Citizenship Education lessons can be enhanced if class sizes are reduced. This will help teachers to use more interactive strategies to promote pupils' active participation in lessons.

Keywords: *Class participation, Class performance, effective teaching*

1. Introduction

Class size has been explained by many educationists and authorities in education in various ways. This is because of the importance of a class size to teaching and learning. According to the Hidden Curriculum (2014), Class size refers to the number of students in a given course or classroom, specifically either, the number of students being taught by individual teachers in a course or classroom or the average number of students being taught by teachers in a school, district, or education system. It was further explained that the term could be extended to cover the number of students participating in learning experiences that may not take place in a traditional classroom setting.

In the view of Ehrenberg et al 2001, Class size refers to the actual number of pupils taught by a teacher at a particular time. Thus, the pupil/teacher ratio is always lower than the average class size, and the discrepancy between the two can vary, depending on teachers' roles and the amount of time teachers spend in the classroom during the school day. Class size is not the same thing as the pupil/teacher ratio. Indeed, it is quite different. The calculation of a pupil/teacher ratio typically includes teachers who spend all or part of their day as administrators, librarians, special education support staff, itinerant teachers, or other roles outside the classroom. Thus, pupil/teacher ratio is a global measure of the human resources brought to bear, directly and indirectly, on children's learning. Class size refers to the actual number of pupils taught by a teacher at a particular time. (Ehrenberg et al 2011)

What is an ideal class size in Ghana? An ideal class, based on Ghana Education Service policy, should be between twenty-five and thirty-five students. This implies that if the number of students in a class exceeds thirty-five such a class can be considered as large (Mintah 2014). Zainul-Deen (2011) conducted a study on an assessment of Ghana's policy on quality education in the public Senior High Schools: a case study at Ahafo Ano North and South Districts. He explained that the number of students in a class in most Ghanaian Senior High Schools on average is sixty-five. At the basic school level, the situation is worse. This is as a result of the school feeding programme introduced at the basic level by the Government of Ghana.

In Ghana, the Government has introduced some far reaching measures aimed at achieving the Education strategic plan (ESP) of 2003-2015 which included: The Ghana School Feeding programme, the Capitation grant for schools since 2005, and quite recently, in 2009 Free School Uniforms and Free Exercise Books. These measures among others have resulted in unprecedented increases in gross enrolment rates in schools since the implementation of the Education Strategic plan from 2003/04 to 2008/09. Dordunoo & Wereko (2010) pointed out that, there have been dramatic increases in GER at all levels of education in Ghana since the introduction of the social intervention policies on education.

The effects of large class sizes on teaching and learning becomes an obvious issue to tackle now and how to minimize these effects especially in teaching core subjects such as Citizenship Education in Ghanaian schools. Schiming, 2013, cited by Mintah (2014) pointed out that one significant issue that appears constantly in many researches is that, when it comes to attainment of higher-order academic skills such as problem solving, written expressions and critical thinking, students in smaller classes do acquire more of these skills than do students in larger classes. Angmor et al (1999) on their part identified the following as effects of large class sizes on teaching and learning; insufficient participation of students in class lessons; students sometimes appear to be passive; control tends to

be a major problem; feedback from assignments and tests are not effective in the sense that marking of students exercises are usually on periphery; insufficient furniture becomes a problem; and cheating in examinations and class exercises becomes a nagging problem which makes assessment very difficult.

Greyling (1995), cited by Mintah (2014) further explained that, “the situation of large class is impersonal- perhaps even overpowering-when students fill thousands of seats in a large amphitheatre that seemingly dwarfs the lecturer and this result in students’ failure”. It is clear from this that large class size is being correlated to ineffective methods of teaching. Newble and Cannon (1995) also opined that large class sizes does not allow for critical thing; it stifles students’ creativity when activity based and child-centred teaching methods are not used.

Citizenship Education is one of the subjects studied in primary schools in Ghana. It is specifically taught and learnt in the upper primary (Primary 4-6). All pupils who go through primary education in Ghana have a taste of Citizenship Education. What then is Citizenship Education? This question has been answered by many authorities of the subject. The Citizenship Education syllabus in Ghana (2007) defines Citizenship education as a subject that aims at producing competent, reflective, concerned, and participatory citizens who will contribute to the development of the communities and the country in the spirit of patriotism and democracy”. This definition unequivocal underscores the importance of the subject to nation building. Four key attributes of a good citizen has been mentioned as prerequisites needed to be able to contribute to national development in Ghana. First, Competent citizen is one who is knowledgeable and skillful and is capable of utilizing the knowledge and skills in development. Second, Reflective citizen can be explained as a citizen who critically thinks over issues before making a decision. Reflective citizens therefore take careful decisions and do not haste in decision making. Third, concerned citizen is someone who cares so much about the country such that he/she will not do anything negatively to affect the country such as littering, desecrating the environment, exhibiting negative attitudes to work like, absenteeism, etc. Fourth, a participatory citizen is always ever ready to take part in activities that will promote the country. So citizenship Education is a subject so important that every Ghanaian must study before getting into higher education. Writing on Citizenship Education, Aggarwal (1982) linked Citizenship education to the development of ideas, habits, behaviors and useful attitudes in the individual which enables him to be a useful member of the society. Aggarwal’s assertion deepens the understanding of what the syllabus outlined.

The importance of the subject underscores the reason why it must be taught well for pupils to actual imbibe the good principles therein. Teaching it in a large class therefore becomes an issue as research indicates that large classes affect teaching methods and pupils’ understanding. It is significant to note that by teaching citizenship education, one needs to be abreast with the nature and philosophy of the subject. According to Cobbold (2010) “The nature and philosophy of social studies imply that the teacher who handles the subject at any level should adequately exemplify scholarly and professional competence. Given appropriate resources and adequate time, the teacher should be able to concoct a special mix of content and pedagogy to achieve desired objectives with learners possessing the requisite background knowledge, skills and experiences” (pp.67). It is recommended to head teachers of Basic schools in Ghana to ensure that only trained citizenship education/social studies teachers are made to teach the subject. This will offset the problem of putting square pegs in round holes and help in using the right techniques in teaching the subject even if classes are large.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

The research was conducted in one of the highly patronized Government basic schools in Sekondi Takoradi Metropolitan area where class sizes are very large. For the purpose of this study, the school has been given the pseudonym “Glorious Complex Basic School”. In Glorious Basic School, class sizes ranges between 50 and 60 which are ostensibly large. However, each class especially at the primary level is entrusted with one teacher. One teacher to a class is obviously not helpful due to the large class sizes.

The major problem observed with the large class was low participation of pupils in lessons. Questions were unevenly distributed because of the large sizes. In most cases, teachers restricted responses to few students who put up their hands. Those who did not put up their hands were consciously or unconsciously ignored by the teachers. The large class sizes also affected teachers’ commitment to giving exercises and marking them. These were the issues that reared their heads in the course of the observation that preceded the interventions engineered.

1.2. Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How does class size influence pupils’ ability to answer questions in Citizenship Education
2. How are pupils’ performance related to class size in Citizenship Education?
3. To what extent does class size promote effective teaching of Citizenship Education?

3. Methodology

A descriptive study and Action Study designs were adopted. Descriptive study is one in which information is collected without changing the environment. It is a study that is not truly experimental. In human research, a descriptive study can provide information about the naturally occurring health status, behavior, attitudes or other characteristics of a particular group. Descriptive studies are usually the best methods for collecting information that will demonstrate relationships and describe the world as it exists.

Action research design on the other hand enabled the researcher to put in place the interventions outlined. The target population consisted of all pupils and teachers in Glorious Complex Basic School. Though the study focused on all the pupils in the school, the sample size consisted of all the 160 pupils in the upper primary classes and 10 teachers. Purposive sampling technique was solely used

to select the three upper primary classes and their pupils and as well as the 10 teachers. The average age of the sampled pupils was eight (8) years. The main research instruments used were Observation Checklist and Interview Schedule.

3.1. Pre – intervention Stage

An observation was conducted on each class to ascertain pupils' participation in class lessons. It was observed that, the number of pupils in each class was up to fifty and above with only one teacher. Due to this, pupils failed to participate in the lessons observed. This made the work load tedious for the teacher. Class control became a big problem for the class teachers who taught the pre-intervention lessons in all the three upper primary classes. Most of the pupils did not pay attention in lessons and this seriously affected the level of indiscipline in the three classrooms as teachers struggled to maintain pupils' attention in the lessons. Due to the large class sizes, the teachers only listened to few pupils. This made a few brilliant pupils in the three classes hijacked the lessons on most occasions and rendering the rest of the pupil's passive. Large class sizes also prevented the teachers from attending to the weak ones because they assumed that the whole class understood whatever they taught. These pre-intervention observation lessons were taught by the regular class teachers and observed by the researcher. One week was used for the observation to collect the primary data of what actually pertained on the ground. Another one week was used to observe the post intervention lessons.

3.2. Intervention Stage

After observing the situation on the ground for one week, the researcher put in the following interventions to help stem the tide of the problem to assist the upper primary pupils of Glorious Basic School Complex to improve upon their participation in Citizenship Education lessons. The researcher used Small Group as a technique of ensuring pupils' effective participation. The larger classes were divided into small groups and adequately engaged to ascertain their responses and their potential behaviours in small class sizes.

3.2.1. Step by Step Procedures Involved in the Use of the Small Groups

1. Larger classes were divided into small groups of varying intellectual ability
2. Tasks were assigned to each group.
3. Group leaders and secretaries were appointed by members of each group to lead the discussion and write down key points in each group.
4. The purpose of the task was clearly given and a time limit was imposed.
5. Modalities for group presentations was explained
6. Pupils were allowed to undertake the discussion in-groups.
7. Leaders were given the opportunity to present their group work to the larger class.
8. The researcher together with the class appraised each presentation.
9. Blackboard summaries used to ensure definite conclusions were arrived at.

Class	No on Roll	No of groups	Teachers/Facilitators	Topic	Lesson Duration
4	60	6 groups of 10	Class teacher plus researcher	Values and responsibilities in our community	70 mins
5	50	5 groups of 10	Class teacher plus researcher	Peer groups and Nation building	70 mins
6	50	5 groups of 10	Class teacher plus researcher	Avoiding waste at Home, School and Work	70 mins

Table 1: Class, Number of Groups and Topics
(Source: Field Survey, 2014)

The upper primary classes were used for the study because lower primary classes do not study Citizenship Education as a taught subject in Ghana. Primary 4 had the highest population of pupils (60), while primary 5 and 6 had the same number (50 apiece). In each of the classes the researcher engaged the services of the permanent class teacher who provided credible cooperation and wholeheartedly assisted in the exercise.

As can be seen from Table 1, different topics were treated in the three classes with the lesson duration of 70 minutes in each case. The groups formed in each class were given specific tasks to perform within a stipulated period of time after which presentations were done. However, since the object of this study was to find out pupils' participation in lessons and how pupils answer and ask questions, premium was not placed on the presentations they made. The researcher was however critical to find out the kind of interactions and pupils willingness to answer questions and also ask questions during the group discussion stages. The outcome was compared to the whole class teaching especially in this situation where all the classes were very large. The results are captured in Tables 2 and 3.

3.2.2. Group Tasks

Primary 4: Values and responsibilities in our community

- Group 1: Meaning of values and responsibilities
- Group 2: Characteristics of values
- Group 3: Importance of societal values

- Group 4: Examples of societal values
- Group 5: Examples of responsibilities in the community
- Group 6: Importance of responsibilities in the community

Primary 5: Peer Groups and Nation building

- Group 1: Meaning of peer groups
- Group 2: Types of peer groups
- Group 3: Meaning of nation building
- Group 4: Role of peer groups in nation building
- Group 5: Characteristics of a nation

Primary 6: Avoiding waste at Home, School and Work

- Group 1: The concept of waste
- Group 2: Types of waste
- Group 3: Avoiding waste at home
- Group 4: Avoiding waste in School
- Group 5: Avoiding waste at work

4. Results and Discussions

4.1. Analysis of Pre- Intervention and Post-Intervention Results

The pre-intervention class participation activity was conducted basically on pupils answering skills. These are the number of pupils who answered questions in each class when the classes were large.

Class	Number on Roll	Number of Pupils who Answered Questions	Percentage (%)
4	60	9	15
5	50	3	6
6	50	10	20

Table 2: Pre-intervention: Number of pupils who answered questions in the various classes (Source: Field Survey 2014)

Table 2 shows the number of pupils who answered questions when the classes were large. The information above shows that when the classes were large pupils did not effectively answer questions and often became passive during lessons. From the statistics in Table 1, none of the classes recorded even 40% of pupils' responsiveness to answering questions. The highest number of pupils who answered questions came from Primary 6. Out of the 50 pupils, only 10 representing 20% answered questions during the researcher's engagement with the class. This was followed by primary 4 and 5 which recorded 15% and 6% respectively.

4.2. Post-Intervention Data Analysis

Class	Number on Roll	Number of Pupils who Answered Questions in Group Discussions	Percentage (%)
4	60	52	86.6
5	50	45	90
6	50	47	94

Table 3: Post-intervention: Number of pupils who answered questions after interventions (Source: Field Survey 2014)

Table 2 explains how pupils participated in class activities and answered questions after a set of interventions were put in place. All the classes recorded a dramatic increase in the number of pupils who answered questions. The response rate was between 86.6% and 94% which was quiet impressive. This explains that the interventions put in place actually worked successfully.

4.3. Analysis of Teachers' Responses

Interviews granted to teachers have been discussed based on four major headings namely; Class size and performance, Class participation and performance, and Class size and effective teaching. All the 10 teachers who granted the interview responded "Yes" to the question of whether class size affects academic performance. There wasn't any teacher who responded that class size has no effect on pupils' performance. This corroborates with Fischer and Grant (1983) who found that class size significantly affects the level of cognitive skills used by students in the classroom. On his part, Monsteller (1995) also gives credence to this finding by opining that reducing the size of classes in the primary stages reduces the distractions in the room and hence gives the teacher more time to devote to each child.

Concerning class participation and performance all the 10 teachers again answered in the affirmative which is a very strong resolution that class participation plays an important role in class performance. This undoubtedly means that when pupils participate in class lessons, it helps them to perform well whenever they are accessed all things being equal. Similarly, at North Dakota State University,

research on the university's first-year seminar suggests that student evaluations are significantly higher in course sections with class sizes of 15 or fewer students (Barefoot, 1993).

Class participation actually creates a conducive atmosphere for pupils to bring out their views and also helps pupils to perform well in class. In his review of close to 100 higher education studies over a 50-year period, Bligh (1972) reports that pupils who become involved in active discussion of their ideas with other pupils are more likely to stay "on task" in class and spend more time synthesizing and integrating concepts, relative to pupils who listen to teaching. Respondents again agreed unanimously with the assertion that class size has influence on effective teaching. Apart from three of the respondents who were of the view that effective teaching can take place irrespective of the class size, the greater majority of them thought otherwise.

4.4. Analysis of pupils' Responses

The study involved interview with some selected primary pupils. The researcher stuck to the use of close ended interviews. However, the questions were based basically on the number of pupils in the class and how they participate in class lesson. Here are some responses they gave when the interview was taken.

First, some of the pupils explained that though their teachers sometimes involved some of the pupils during teaching and learning, they on their part hardly gets opportunity to contribute in class because according to them, sometimes the hands lifted are too many so the teacher would not get enough time to listen to all of them. Some of the pupils also said that their teacher was able to control the class during teaching but sometimes the teacher could not notice when some pupils misbehaved.

Others indicated that their teachers always used teaching learning materials but not often. They often did not have access to learning materials because the materials used for lessons were not always enough to be shared among pupils in the class. Pupils were asked if they were able to ask questions in class during lessons. They answered in the affirmative. However, they remarked that most of the times they did not get the chance to answer questions before the teacher left the class. When asked if the number of pupils in the class affected the class in any way. They overwhelmingly responded "Yes" and added that they do not always get the chance to participate because they are many pupils in the class

4.5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The researcher found out that pupils in each class were more than enough. And due to that, few pupils contributed in class lessons. At the end of the study, the researcher realized that the reason why pupils do not perform well in class was because of the large class sizes and teacher's methods of teaching. It was seen that; the teachers do not put pupils into groups for them to participate in class activities during lessons. The results have shown clearly that there is ineffective participation in Citizenship Education lessons by pupils. Pupils were not able to understand Citizenship Education lessons and hence could not perform well in class. It was also found out that pupils more often become passive and therefore there is the need for them to be put into smaller groups to create the opportunities for them to be active.

The study also concluded that the use of appropriate teaching techniques, strategies and method coupled with the right use of teaching learning materials positively impact on pupils' participation in lessons. In the light of the findings, it is recommended that Staff development seminars be organized at least twice every term to help teachers upgrade themselves and also help them to identify appropriate techniques in teaching Citizenship Education in order to help pupils to participate effectively in class lessons. Children must be grouped and given series of experiment or exercises both in class and outside the classroom. Pupils' progress must be celebrated and rewarded.

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