

EFFECT OF CLASS SIZE ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN SOCIAL STUDIES AMONG PUPILS OF SELECTED PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN ZARIA, KADUNA STATE, NIGERIA

TAWA ABDULRAHEEM

Department of Adult Education and Extension,
Faculty of Education and Extension Services,
Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto, Sokoto State, Nigeria
E-mail: abdulraheemtawa1990@gmail.com

MURTALA AKANBI YUSUF

Department of Adult Education and Extension,
Faculty of Education and Extension Services,
Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto, Sokoto State, Nigeria
E-Mail: murtalayusf2004@gmail.com, akanbi.murtata@udusok.edu.ng
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2637-0926>

Abstract

The introduction of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) in Nigeria in 1999 led to an expansion in primary school enrollment rates, including in Zaria, Kaduna. This study investigates the impact of class size on the academic performance of primary school pupils in Social Studies. A quasi-experimental research design was adopted. The population of the study consisted of 193 primary 6 pupils purposively selected from four public primary schools in Zaria. A self-formulated Social Studies Performance Test (SPT) was designed and used for data collection. The test was piloted in schools not included in the study, resulting in a reliability index of 0.72. Mean and standard deviation were used to analyze the research question, while a t-test was used to test the hypotheses. The mean results obtained for pupils in normal class size and large class size were 13.45 and 7.10, respectively. The results indicated a significant difference in academic performance between pupils taught in large and normal class sizes in Social Studies, with pupils in normal classes performing better. The study concludes that normal class size is more effective in impacting knowledge and results in better academic performance of pupils in Social Studies. The study recommends that the government should control school enrollment by ensuring that pupils are admitted based on the recommendations outlined in the National Policy on Education 2013.

Keywords: Class size; Academic Performance; public primary schools; Social Studies; UBE

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Introduction

Class size has become a significant factor influencing teaching and learning, particularly at the primary school level. As school populations increase, larger class sizes can negatively impact the quality of teaching and learning (Englehart, 2007; Fan, 2012). The introduction of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) in 1999 led to a rise in school enrollment rates, further exacerbated by a lack of infrastructure to accommodate the increased number of students, affecting pupil engagement and performance. Ale (2010) supports the idea of normal classroom sizes, arguing that increased enrollment is not associated with higher performance but rather with a decline in standards and pupil performance. Many teachers view teaching in large classes negatively, associating it with disorderliness, lack of control, decreased learner attentiveness, and limited teacher-learner interaction (Olajide, 2012).

Social Studies is a compulsory subject at the primary level in Nigeria, designed to develop problem-solving skills, attitudes, values, and knowledge that enable pupils to socialize well and understand their society (Meziebi, 2016). Social Studies is the study of people in relation to each other and their world (Nwokah, 2013). It provides knowledge and understanding of fundamental responsibilities and rights, and effective participation in social studies classrooms is a vital part of effective learning for academic performance (Joof & Joof, 2007). Academic performance is the behavior exhibited by an individual after completing a school program, demonstrating the knowledge acquired through the program (Steinmayr et al., 2014).

In this study, class size refers to the number of pupils a teacher attends to at a particular time (Aderson & Omwirirhiren, 2016). It is an educational tool used to determine the average number of pupils in a classroom (Smaill, 2005). Batunde (2003) notes that class size and pupils' academic performance have been a significant interest in the field of education. The Nigeria National Policy on Education (NPE, 2013) stipulates that there should be 25 to 35 pupils in pre-primary and primary classes for effective teaching and learning.

Class size can be defined as the number of pupils in the classroom. It can be described as a place within the school where tutors and pupils can be located regularly (Asodike & Onyeike, 2016). The issues of class size and pupils' academic performance have been of serious interest to educational planners (Holloway, 2002 & Wilson, 2006). Many studies have shown that class size is an important factor that determines how pupils learn. Attah (2002) suggests that pupils who learn in small class sizes tend to be superior to their counterparts in large classes, including in terms of attainment of social studies concepts, classroom participation, and attendance. This underscores the importance of class size in the academic performance of pupils in social studies. The study concludes that class size has a significant influence on pupils' learning and academic performance, particularly in relation to social studies.

Birabil (2020) investigated the effect of class size on Junior Secondary School Students' academic performance in Social Studies in Port-Harcourt, Nigeria. Findings show that class size has significant effects on pupils' performance in social studies. Pupils in small classes performed better than pupils in large classes. Aside from this study, other scholars have examined the influence of class size on pupils' academic performance in social studies. For instance, previous studies by Buhari (2012) and Essien (2018) evaluated the effects of class size on social studies students' academic performance in junior secondary schools. Results demonstrated that pupils' mean scores were higher in small class sizes than in large class sizes. Based on the results, it is recommended that small class sizes in teaching enhance pupils' learning ability in junior secondary schools. Adesemowo and Ayodele (2006), in a survey study on pupils' participation in the classroom learning process, revealed that large class sizes with as many as 80 pupils do not allow for effective classroom interaction, engagement, and participation during lessons, which can tend to affect learning outcomes. This underscores the significance of the NPE's stipulation regarding the appropriate number of pupils (either 25 or 35) in a class to ensure enhanced teaching and learning. This evidence is in consonance with the findings of Olatunde (2010), which indicated that class size is directly related to the performance of pupils. It was

suggested that class sizes should be moderate to help pupils who may have problems understanding the concepts being taught.

Meanwhile, the importance of social studies cannot be overemphasized. It is a part of the curriculum that enables pupils to acquire valuable knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values for proper socialization and engagement in public life (Meziebi, 2016). This can be achieved in a well-structured environment. Learning takes place among learners who assemble in a small group, and such learning can be difficult to receive in a large class (Ayodele, 2008). Against these aforementioned problems, the study investigates the impact of class size on primary school pupils' academic performance in Social Studies among pupils of public schools in Zaria, Kaduna State.

Research Question and Hypothesis

- i. Research Question: What is the difference in Social Studies performance of pupils taught in normal classes and those taught in large classes?
- ii. Research Hypothesis (H₀): There is no significant difference in Social Studies performance of pupils taught in normal classes and those taught in large classes.

Methodology

The research design used was a quasi-experimental design aimed at establishing a relationship between two variables to determine a cause-and-effect relationship. The population of the study comprised primary six (6) pupils from four (4) primary schools in Zaria, Kaduna State. A sample of 193 pupils was drawn from these four schools. Purposive sampling was used to select four intact classes from the selected schools. Two primary schools with two intact classes were chosen as large classes, with 65 and 62 pupils, respectively. Simultaneously, two primary schools with two intact classes were selected as normal classes, with 32 and 34 pupils, respectively. The pupils in normal classes made up the experimental group (66 pupils), while those in large classes made up the control group (127 pupils).

The instrument used for the study was a self-formulated Social Studies academic performance Test (SAPT). It consisted of a 10-item multiple-choice questions with options A-D. The test was validated by two experts in the Department of Adult Education and Extension Services, Usamanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto. To determine its reliability, a pilot test was carried out, resulting in a reliability coefficient of 0.72 using Cronbach Alpha. This indicates that the test is reliable. The test was administered to the respondents in person and lasted for 20 minutes, making it two minutes per question. The researcher collected all the booklets after the test for final analysis. The statistical tools used were mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions, while a t-test analysis was used to test the null hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance.

Results and Discussion

Results

Research Question one:

What is the mean difference in Social Studies performance of pupils taught in large classes and those taught in normal classes?

Table 1: Descriptive statistics showing the mean and standard deviation of Social Studies Performance of Pupils taught in large classes (Control Group) and those taught in normal classes (Experimental Group)

Classes	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean Difference
Control (Large) Class	127	7.10	2.98	6.35
Experimental (Normal)	66	13.45	2.59	

Table 1 shows the mean difference in Social Studies performance of pupils taught in large class and those taught in normal class. From the result, the mean performances of experimental and control groups were 13.45 and 7.10 respectively. The mean difference was 6.35; while the standard deviation was 2.59 and 2.98 respectively. The experimental group with higher mean performed better than the control group. This shows that pupils in normal classes performed better than those in large classes.

Test of Hypotheses

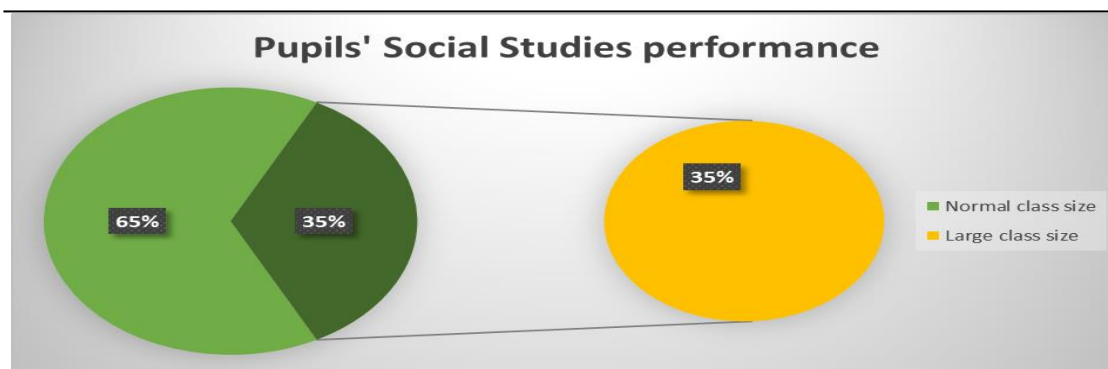
There is no significant difference in mathematics performance of pupils taught in large classes and those in normal classes

Table 2: t-test of the mean Performance Difference of pupils taught English Language in large class (Control Group) and normal class (Experimental Group)

Classes	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-cal.	P-value	Decision
Control (Large)	127	7.10	2.98	191	14.71	0.000	H ₀ - Rejected
Experimental (Normal)	66	13.45	2.57				

Table 2 shows the t-test analysis of the difference between the mean performance of pupils in normal class and those in the large class. Results on the table revealed that calculated t-value (14.71), at 191 degree of freedom and at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. This means that a significant difference exists in the mean scores of pupils taught in normal class and those in the large class. Moreover, figure 1 also shows that pupils in normal class size performed better than those in large class size with mean score of 13.45 and 7.10 respectively.

Figure 1: Pie chart depicts the difference in the performance of pupils taught in large and normal class sizes in the Social Studies



Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study revealed that pupils in normal classes performed better than those in large classes. This finding was presented in Table 1, where the experimental group outperformed the control group. The t-test analysis used to test null hypothesis 1, as presented in Table 2, revealed a significant difference in the mean scores of pupils taught in normal classes and those taught in large classes.

This finding aligns with the research by Birabil (2020), which demonstrated that class size has an effect on pupils' academic performance in social studies in Port-Harcourt. In support of the current study, Birabil (2020) established that pupils in small/normal classes perform better than those in large classes.

The findings were also consistent with those of other researchers (Buhari, 2012; Essien, 2018) who evaluated the effect of class size on social studies students' academic performance in junior secondary schools in Kaduna. These studies found that pupils' mean score performance was higher in small/normal classes than in larger classes. Furthermore, the findings were consistent with those of Attah (2002), which indicated that pupils who learn in small class sizes tend to be superior to their counterparts in large classes in terms of attainment of social studies concepts, classroom participation, and attendance. This demonstrates the significant influence of class size on pupils' learning and academic performance.

Conclusion

The study concludes that normal class size is more effective in imparting knowledge in the classroom as it enables teachers to provide individual attention, understanding learners' abilities, and tailoring instruction for better performance. Large class sizes, on the other hand, have been shown to contribute to poor pupil performance in the classroom.

Recommendations

Government and Stakeholders: Government and other stakeholders in Kaduna State should address the problems associated with teaching in large classes in primary schools by ensuring adequate classrooms are available to accommodate the increasing number of pupils enrolled annually.

School Administrators: Primary school administrators in Kaduna State should control school enrollment to ensure that pupils are admitted based on the recommendations

outlined in the National Policy on Education 2013. This will help ensure effective assessment and feedback in teaching and learning.

Teacher Strategies: Teachers handling Social Studies should encourage the use of teaching strategies and methodologies that promote teacher support for pupils during learning.

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