



Effect of Large Classes on Teaching Methods in Enhancing English Language Learning at Senior Secondary Schools in Yobe State

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ABSTRACT

Original Research Article

Applied linguists concur that there is low-level achievement in English language use among Nigerian secondary school students. One of the factors that exacerbates this is classroom features, of which large class size is obvious. This study investigated the impact of large classes on teaching methods in the enhancement of learning English as a second language (ESL) at senior secondary schools in Yobe State. To achieve this, Solomon four-group experimental design was used. 382 subjects were divided into four groups and taught ESL for thirteen weeks. All the subjects wrote the post-test. Data from the systematic observation and post-test were analyzed using chi-square and ANOVA. It was found that the learners in large classes (LLC) attained lower linguistic progress than learners in small classes (LSC). This study recommends that strategies that prioritize individualization, grouping, the use of language teaching aides, and the theorization of innovative models with respect to large classes should be considered.

Keywords: Large Class, Teaching Method, English as a Second Language, Language Learning.

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Introduction

English is a second language in Nigeria (Wolf, 2022). In consequence, most Nigerian users of English as a second language learn it in school. The rise in the need for education by Nigerians has led to an increase in school enrolment. Furthermore, governmental and non-governmental stakeholders are establishing schools, thus making education accessible to people. The establishment of schools by public and private institutions aligns with the provisions in the National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013), and the 1999 the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria [as amended] (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). Furthermore, education is one of the focal points of the Sustainable Development Goals and Nigeria's Development

Plans. Given that education is the fundamental right of every child and realizing that the learners' population is also growing, one would fathom that these have brought a problem that needs to be addressed. This problem is that of the demand and supply of teachers that would meet the normal teacher-student ratio in schools (Matsuda & Matsuda, 2018). The normal teacher-student ratio for senior secondary school, which is the major concern of this study, is 1:40.

This study opines that even though English is not a native language in the Nigerian context, it has a domineering influence in so many domains of human endeavour in Nigeria in particular, and many parts of the world (Bamgbose, 2020). The National Policy on Education identifies English language and gives it the status of being a school subject right from the

point of formal early childhood care and education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). The language education provision in the policy also recognizes it as the medium of instruction for school subjects (except other language courses) from the beginning of a learner's fourth year in primary school. This will continue until the learner graduates from a tertiary institution. This, therefore, gives the school the vantage position of being the propeller of English language education. This is because the development of the individuals' command of language is widely agreed to be one of the central concerns of schooling. Language, besides being the medium through which teachers and students primarily communicate in any subject, is also a major element within most subjects.

Conscious of the fact that the school is recognized as one of the key places where explicit and conscious English language teaching and learning take place, a description of the major elements that make up the school system would be very important. The primary elements that guarantee a significant composition of the school include availability of teachers, learners, defined content and learning experiences, objectives, delivery processes and materials, as well as adequate evaluation strategies. All these elements do help in engendering effective teaching and learning when harnessed to the utmost. As a result, any deficiency or abnormality in any of these elements could make teaching and learning defective instead of being fruitful and worthwhile.

Most of the classes in Nigeria's senior secondary schools are over-crowded beyond the stipulated teacher-learner ratios. Such class sizes could be debilitating factors towards learning English as a second language. This assertion is made because some learners could be shy or reserved. These two affective attributes would incapacitate the learners of English as a second language, who possess them, from expressing themselves in an over-crowded class. Furthermore, there are some learners of English as a second language who large classes could prompt or activate to be nervous and thence become vulnerable to high communication anxiety. In a situation where these disadvantaged learners of English as a second language are left in large classes, their rights to English language education could be jeopardized. This is because they would not learn English conveniently in such situations. Given the background presented above and considering that research has the potential to unveil the situation of this kind, this study was conceived with the intention of appraising the effect of large classes on teaching methods in the enhancement of learning English as a second language.

Problem Statement/Justification

Conscious of the existence of over-crowded English language classes in some secondary schools in Yobe State, which in principle negate the provision of the National Policy on Education, and realizing that teacher-pupil ratios as provided in the National Policy on Education must have been

conceived and enshrined in the policy based on some empirical considerations that deem such beneficial; this study was proposed to establish whether large classes have any adverse impact or positive effects on learning English as a second language. As such, the primary objective of this study is to establish the efficacy of the direct teaching method in enhancing learners' linguistic progress in learning English as a second language in large classes when compared with grouping or other methods at senior secondary schools in Yobe State. Thus, this study hypothesizes that there is no significant difference in learners' linguistic progress between learners of English as a second language taught via whole class approach in large classes and those taught English as a second language via whole class approach or other methods in small classes.

Review of Related Literature

English is a second language in Nigeria, and Yobe State in particular. As such, most learners learn it in school. For the learning of English as a second language (ESL) to be effective, instructions should be dominated by English. For this reason, it can be stated that ESL instruction, however, relies exclusively on English for teaching and learning. It should be noted that ESL learning is done in large classes in Yobe State. It is expected that as students' enrollment increases there would be proportionate supply of teachers of English and provision of proportionate learning spaces and instructional materials. This is given the fact that Ryan and Cooper (1998) emphasize that when there are more student enrollments in schools, more teachers are needed.

Berns (1990) asserts that a large class is one of the factors affecting the development of communicative ability among learners. This indicates that whether the whole class approach (otherwise called the direct approach) is used or any of pairing, grouping or self-learning is used, large classes impede learners' progress in language use. In consonance with the position expressed by Berns, Meighan and Siraj-Blatchford (1997), provide that a group of 30 to 40 under the surveillance of one adult is often believed to be the most suitable for the learning process. In addition, Engling et al. (2002), realizing the daunting task involved in teaching large classes conclude that many classes have the support of a teaching assistant. More empirical evidence exists on the application of approaches to class-size on learners' linguistic achievement. For instance, Bartlett et al. (2001) submit that these groups of factors were found to affect pupils' progress; a teacher's professional characteristics, teaching skill and classroom climate. The climate of a small class is different from that of a large class. The climate of a small class is less tense than that of a large class. A tense climate affects learning negatively. This is because Davies and Pearse (2002) state that with a group, or many groups, of forty initially unmotivated learners for two hours a week, goals of enabling the learners to communicate in real English, both spoken and written, will present a much greater challenge, and results

will inevitably be modest. It should be noted that a tense climate demotivates learners. This agrees with the findings of Blatchford et al. (2003), who report that however, the research on students working in small groups shows that those who help others generally benefit most.

Commenting on a study conducted by Michaelowa (2001) in Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Madagascar and Senegal, Benbow et al. (2007) report that there was an inverse relationship between class size and learning outcomes. That is, as class sizes increased, student learning decreased. Bahanshal (2013) conducted a study on the effect of large classes on English teaching and learning in Saudi Secondary Schools. The study interviewed six Saudi English teachers from two public schools to ascertain their perceptions about teaching in large classes. The result indicates that all participants find it daunting to teach large classes. The respondents commented that despite their efforts to elevate the level of language learning in such context, the outcome of their students is unsatisfactory. This study is also concerned with how direct teaching method has effect on the linguistic and communicative progress of learners in large classes. However, while the study by Bahanshal was conducted in Saudi Arabia using interview method, this study has Yobe State in Nigeria as its setting and uses experimental method instead of interview method.

Aoumeur (2017) investigated the impact of class size on teaching and learning English as a foreign language at the Department of English at Abdelhamid Ibn Badis University. The study administered questionnaires to 200 students and 40 teachers. The findings of the survey clearly demonstrate that large class sizes have an adverse impact on the quality of teaching and learning. This study is also concerned with the effect of large classes on the students' progress in English language. However, while the study by Aoumeur was conducted in a university context, using a questionnaire as instrument for data collection, this study has secondary school as its setting and uses experimental method instead of questionnaire for data collection.

The specific objective of the study by Marzulina et al. (2021) was to find out English teachers' strategies in managing large classes. To achieve this, they used qualitative research with emphasis on a case study approach focusing on four English teachers and ten students at one state Madrasah Tsanawiyah in Palembang, Indonesia. The study found planning the lesson, organizing and controlling the students, managing classroom communication and talking time, then giving written and timely feedback on students' works were the strategies applied by the English teachers. The study by Marzulina et al. did not reveal whether the use of the strategy in a large class led to the progress of learners in English language skills. This study attempts to fill the gap via an experimental method.

Wadesango (2021) investigated the challenges encountered by teachers teaching students in large classes with the aim of exploring the root causes of these challenges. The study

suggested possible methods of teaching large classes and making recommendations for teachers of larger classes so they can improve certain areas of their teaching styles/patterns as this will impact their effectiveness in service delivery. Unlike the study by Wadesango which focuses on the challenges encountered by teachers of English in large classes, this study is primarily concerned with the impact of using the direct method in large classes on the linguistic progress of English as a second language students in the secondary schools in Yobe State.

Dada (2021) found that teachers perceived influence of large classes on the teaching and learning of English language in terms of difficulty in teaching and learning include poor academic performance on the part of the students among others. Also, teachers perceived that large classes can be managed using appropriate methods. The population consisted of all English language teachers teaching English language in all the public secondary schools in the Ado-Ekiti metropolis, Ekiti State, Nigeria. Thirty teachers of English were sampled and administered a researcher-made questionnaire. This study is also concerned with the effect of large classes on the linguistic and communicative progress of learners of English as second language. However, while the study by Dada was conducted in Ekiti State using a questionnaire as an instrument for data collection, this study has Yobe State as its setting and uses an experimental method instead of a questionnaire for data collection.

Roshan et al. (2022), in a meta-analysis, examined the challenges regarding teaching and learning in large classes. The study found that some of the challenges include inability to give effective feedback, marking load, lack of class discipline and monitoring, timely evaluation and noise. The study also found that in terms of engaging students in activities and learning, not all students could participate in the activities and teachers could not pay attention to every individual student. This has an inimical effect on learners' linguistic and communicative progress. This study, like the study by Roshan et al., is concerned with the effect of large classes on learning English as a second language. However, their study used meta-analysis, and most of the studies they reviewed were not experimental. This study attempts to fill the gap by providing the results of an experimental study.

The study by Ibrahim (2024) investigated the impact of large class sizes on the academic performance of English Language students in the Colleges of Education Waka-Biu and Bama, Borno State, Nigeria. Structured questionnaires were administered to 400 students and 30 teachers. The findings reveal that large class sizes negatively affect student performance by limiting participation, feedback, and teacher-student interaction. However, while the study by Ibrahim was conducted in Borno State, for colleges of education, using a questionnaire as an instrument for data collection, this study has Yobe State secondary schools as its setting and uses an experimental method instead of a questionnaire for data collection.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

The research design adopted by the study is the experimental research method. This method is effective because it enables researchers in education and applied educational linguistics to investigate problems arising from teaching and learning instead of using the usual survey method (Avineri, 2017). It would be of interest to state that control is imposed by experimental researchers. Furthermore, Blatchford et al. (2003) opine that it is often assumed that the problems of survey research on class size effects are best overcome using experimental or randomized controlled trials.

Given that the experimental research method has a plethora of designs (Hashemi, 2020), the randomized Solomon four-group design was applied by the study. In this design, the experimental group and one of the control groups are administered a pre-test. The other two control groups are not given a pre-test (Phakiti, 2014). However, all four groups are given a post-test after the administration of the treatment. This will enable the researcher to ascertain the performance of each group after the treatment, thus enabling the researcher to draw a conclusion on the impact of class-size on learning English as a second language.

Designation\Group	Size
(a) Experimental group	One hundred and fifty-one subjects
(b) Control group 1	Forty subjects
(c) Control group 2	One hundred and fifty-one subjects
(d) Control group 3	Forty subjects
Total	382 subjects

The subjects in the experimental group and control group 1 were subjected to a pre-test at the start of the experiment. Those in control group 2 and control group 3 were not given a pre-test. The researcher used language testing and observation as research instruments. This is because even though the study is experimental research, it followed a “multimethod research approach” (Blatchford et al., 2003; Hashemi, 2020). The multiple data collection method was deliberately used by the researcher to enable the study to achieve its objective.

The statistical instrument that was used for data analysis is analysis of variance (ANOVA). This is because the primary aim of the study is to establish the influence of large classes on teaching methods in the enhancement of learning English as a second language.

The study also used a mixed theoretical framework, viz., Lev Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory (SCT), Stephen Krashen’s Second Language Acquisition Theory, and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) Theory (Mitchell, 2019; Sato & Loewen, 2019). Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory (SCT) underscores that learning occurs through social interaction, collaboration, and guided support from teachers and peers. But then, even though effective ESL learning requires meaningful interaction and scaffolding, large classes reduce

The population of this study is all the senior secondary school students of English in all the public and private secondary schools in Yobe State. They are more than one hundred thousand. Sampling involves using available resources efficiently and effectively (Woodrow, 2020). Because the entire size of the population of this study is very large and given that the time and resources available for this study are limited, one can consider sampling (Tian, 2023). For this reason, this study used a proportionate random sampling technique to select the two (2) schools from which the sample size of the study was derived. The purposive sampling technique is convenient in situations where the sample to be selected is very small, and the researcher wants to get some ideas of the population characteristics in a short time (Tian, 2023; Woodrow, 2020). However, the proportionate random sampling (as provided by Krejcie and Morgan, 1970) was used in selecting the Three Hundred and Eighty-two (382) subjects that formed the sample size of the study. This becomes pertinent to give each of the subjects representing the population an equal chance of being selected.

The instruments were administered to the research subjects by the researcher and research assistants. The subjects were divided into the following groups, sizes and designations:

opportunities for personalized support and communicative engagement. On the other hand, Second Language Acquisition Theory posits that language acquisition happens when learners receive understandable and meaningful input in a low-anxiety environment. However, large classes can create limited teacher-student interaction, insufficient feedback, classroom noise, anxiety and fear of participation, therefore raising the affective filter and reducing comprehensible input, thus making language acquisition more difficult. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) Theory postulates that language is learned through communication and active use. Conversely, large classes can hinder pair work, group discussions, oral practice, and communicative activities, making teachers resort to lecture methods instead of interactive language teaching.

Results

Effects of Large Classes on the Utilization of Teaching Methods toward Enhancing Learning English as a Second Language at Senior Secondary Schools in Yobe State

Learners who learn ESL do not gain some declarative and/or procedural knowledge and skills in respect of English studies. These learners could be taught in large or small classes. As such, the objective of this study is to establish the efficacy of the direct teaching method in enhancing learners’ linguistic

progress in learning English as a second language when compared with grouping or other methods in the same context. To achieve this, a summative English studies test

was administered to the four groups that made up this study. The groups that took the test are the experimental group and the three control groups. The following data were obtained:

Table 1: Data Collected from Post-test

	EG	CG1	CG2	CG3
ΣScore	5510	2121	7426	2775
Subjects	132	39	145	40
Mean	41.74	54.38	51.21	69.37

The data collected were analyzed by means of using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and the following result was obtained.

Table 2: Class Size, Teaching Methods and Learners' Linguistic Progress in Learning English as a Second Language

Sources of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P	F _{crit}
Between conditions	22744	3	7581	77	0.01	3.782
Within conditions	34856	352	99			
Total	57600	355				

F value $77 > F_{crit} 3.782$ at $\alpha 0.01$

Table 2 shows that the F Value (77) is greater than the F critical at $P = 0.01$ (3.782). As a result, this study rejects the hypothesis which assumes that there is no significant difference in learners' linguistic progress between learners of English as a second language taught via whole class approach in large classes and those taught English as a second language via whole class approach or other methods in small classes.

Discussion

The data presented in Table 2 reveals that there is a significant difference between the linguistic achievement of learners taught in large classes and those taught in small classes when considered from using the same instructional approach and even different instructional approaches. This concurs with the positions of (Aoumeur, 2017; Bahanshal, 2013; Benbow et al., 2007; Dada, 2021; Ibrahim, 2024; Marzulina et al., 2021; Roshan et al., 2022; Wadesango, 2021) who identified large class as one of the factors affecting the development of linguistic and communicative ability among learners. This indicates that whether whole class approach (otherwise called direct approach) is used or any of pairing, grouping or self-learning is used, large classes impede learners' progress in language use.

This study underscores that a class of 30 to 40 students under the surveillance of one adult is often believed to be the most suitable for learning process. This is because the findings of this study revealed that learners in small groups (39 and 40) as presented in Table1 performed better than their mates in large groups (132 and 142) when subjected to the same kind of treatment. It would be of interest to note that the experimental group and the first control group were taught by one research teacher (an adult). The researcher consulted the report of Engling et al. (2002) who having realized the daunting task involved in teaching large classes conclude that many classes utilize the support of a teaching assistant. For this reason, the second and third control groups were taught

with the support of teaching assistants who served as research assistants.

This study discovered that as learners are split into smaller groups, the high-achievers in respective groups do guide their peers in learning. By implication, these students who guide group members are prompted to learn by teaching, therefore consolidating their entry knowledge and enhancing their ability to retain what they learn for a long period of time. This helps in improving the linguistic achievement of those learners who learn by teaching.

English studies in the area of this study is a core course, thus, large class sizes for English were evident in the schools when compared to the sizes of other elective courses. Even within the context of this study, the study found that the quality of instruction for smaller groups was more effective when the experimental group versus control group 1, on one hand, and control group 2 versus control group 3, on the other hand, was compared. This could be realized from the illustration presented in Figure 1. In consequence, the more quality of instruction becomes weaker, the lesser the progress made by learners of English as a second language. But then, this depends on the quality of instruction and the level of learners' and teachers' commitment. Table 1 is explicit on the positive effect of smaller classes on learning ESL. Conversely, even though control groups 1 and 3 are small classes, there was a difference in the performance of the learners in both groups. Those in control group 3 performed better in the language test because of the quality of the instructional procedures used by the researcher and the research teaching assistants. This is because this study identified that as class size increases, the quality of instruction with respect to meeting the needs of individual students is jeopardized. For this reason, a large class size is inimical to learners' progress in a situation whereby teacher insists on guiding learners to learn ESL via the use of whole class or direct approach.

This study found that the quality of instruction between groups that have similar class size characteristics improves

learners' linguistic progress and achievement. This study discovered that as the teaching method was improved in control group 2, learners' performance was better than that of learners in the experimental group. Conversely, given that the size of the subjects in control group 3 is smaller, learners' performance was better in control group 3 than in control group 2. Given the results presented in Table 1, this study thus asserts that students' progress in English linguistic tasks is best achieved in small classes where teachers use effective teaching methods that engage learners in active English language study, as opposed to using or not using effective teaching methods in large and very large classes.

In addition, this study identified from the results on Table 1 and Figure 1 that even though there was improvement in the performance of learners taught in large classes by means of instructional procedures other than the whole class approach (those in control group 2), the performance of those taught in small classes via the whole class approach (control group 1) was greater but statistically insignificant. This study found

that when learners are exposed to the same kind of treatment in small and large classes, the performance of those in small classes would not only be greater but statistically significant.

The results of the continuous achievement language test administered to the learners revealed that large classes do not have a significant adverse impact on learners' progress when it comes to learning structural, mechanical and quasi-communicative English language elements in large classes and small classes. When the language item has to do with the definition of elements of English phonology, grammatical accuracy skill or literary terms and elements, learners in large classes performed well compared with those in small classes. However, when it comes to communicative acts, those in small classes performed better than those in large classes. Such tasks involve progress in spoken English expression, written English expression, explanations and descriptions of literary elements. The figure below illustrates the findings of this study:

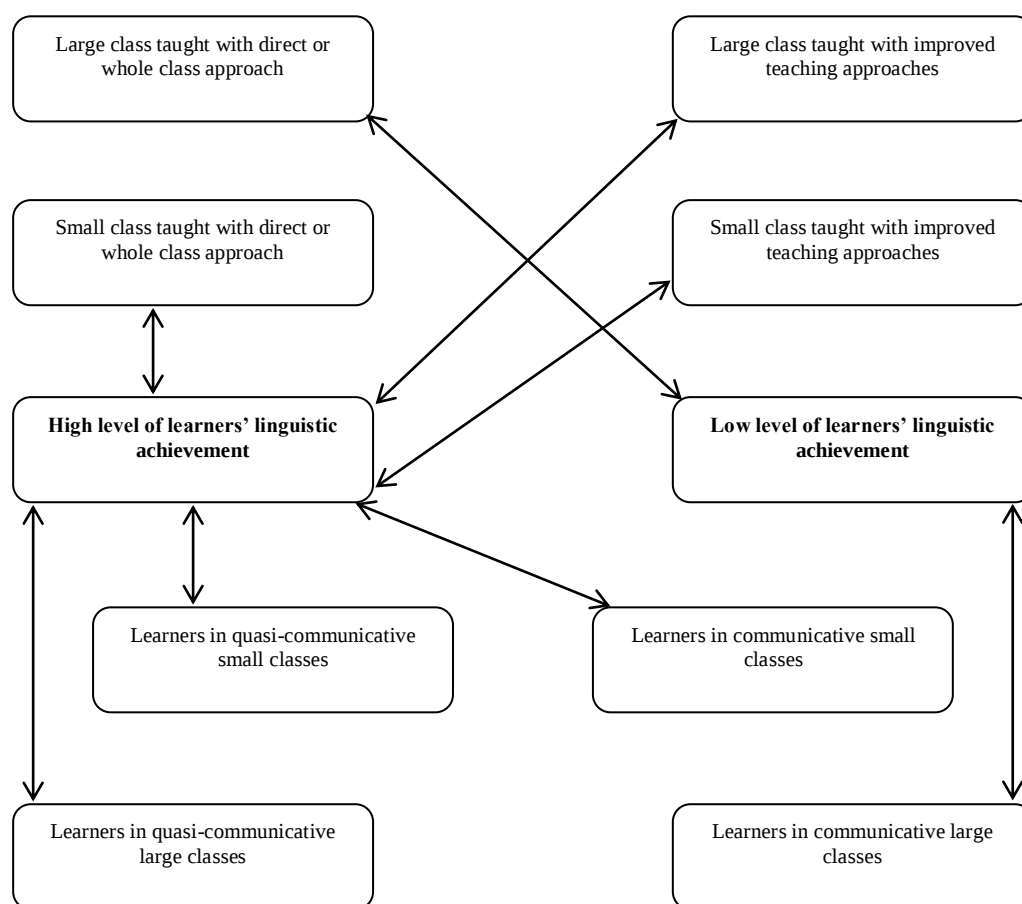


Figure 1. Effect of Class Size on Learners' Progress and Achievement in Learning English as a Second Language

Conclusion

This study investigated the impact of large classes on the effectiveness of content delivery approaches and methods. To achieve this, Solomon-four group experimental design was adopted. It was found that there is a significant difference in learners' linguistic progress when taught via the same approach or a different approach in large or small classes.

This study concludes that even though a large class is inimical to the effectiveness of content delivery approaches and methods in the teaching of English as a second language, some key quasi-communicative skills show no significant difference between learners' progress in large or small classes.

Recommendations

The following are recommended, given the findings of this study:

1. Teachers should encourage learners of ESL to embark on constant personal individualized learning after school hours;
2. Teachers should pair learners of ESL to enable them be ESL study buddies after school;
3. Teachers should maximize individualization and differentiation techniques by using pairing, grouping and relevant exercises that would activate learners to engage in language studies;
4. Teachers of ESL who have been exposed to the techniques of teaching large classes should be the ones to teach large ESL classes;
5. Parents and guardians should be sensitized on the need for them to encourage out-of-school lessons and incidental ESL learning for their children and wards;
6. Instructional time for large ESL classes should be a minimum of 80 minutes per period, three times a week. This would increase the percentage of learners who could participate actively in classroom discourse;
7. The services of English language teaching assistants should be prioritized. Retired teachers of ESL, corps members, students on teaching practicum and volunteers could be used in this respect to guide learners of ESL in large classes that are divided into groups;
8. Teachers of ESL should create room for out-of-class interactions, in respect of the language items taught, with students; and
9. Teachers of ESL and English language teaching assistants should regularly hold pre and post-lesson conferences to reflect on the impact of their intervention on the large classes.

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