

Large Class Size and Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

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Abstract. This paper discussed the impact of large class sizes on tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Secondary data were used in the paper. The data were collected from print and online publications. The paper concluded that large class sizes in tertiary institutions have negatively affected the implementation of teaching programmes, research programmes, and student's academic performance and have led to brain-drain in the various institutions across the country. Based on the findings, of the paper, the study recommended among others that, the federal and state governments of Nigeria should ensure that the lecturer-student ratio policy of the government is strictly adhered to. The suggested solution will increase student academic performance and the quality of students the tertiary institutions are graduating.

Key words: Educational institutions, subsidy removal, student academic performance, brain-drain

INTRODUCTION

Ogunode, Edinoh and Okolie (2023) defined tertiary education as a planned and organized educational system designed for the total development of man/woman and for the total transformation of society through the utilization of teaching, research and provision of community service. Tertiary education can also be viewed as post-basic and secondary school education that embraces advanced teaching, research and community service. Tertiary education is viewed by the National Policy on Education (2013) as the education given after Post Basic Education in institutions such as Universities and Inter-University Centres such as the Nigeria French Language Village, Nigeria Arabic Language Village, National Institute of Nigerian Languages, institutions such as Innovation Enterprise Institutions (IEIs), and Colleges of Education, Monotechnics, Polytechnics, and other specialized institutions such as Colleges of Agriculture, Schools of Health and Technology and the National Teachers' Institutes (NTI).

Tertiary education is an advanced educational system meant for human capital development through teaching, research and provision of community service (Ogunode, Iyabode, & Olatunde-Aiyedun, 2022). Tertiary education is the third tier of education that is designed for the production of skilled professionals for socio-economic and technological advancement. Tertiary institutions are a micro section of the larger society. Tertiary institutions are an organized fraction of the whole society curved out for teaching programmes, research and provision of community service. Tertiary institutions can also be seen as a subset of the general society that is made of a collection of different people, different cultures, different lifestyles and different values (Ogunode & Odo, 2023).

Tertiary education is an instrument for national development and manpower development. Tertiary education can be described as an organized education saddled with the production and reproduction of knowledge for the betterment of the whole country. Tertiary education is a social agent of development for self and national realisation and for manpower production. Tertiary education in particular is fundamental to the construction of a knowledge economy and society in all nations. The nation looks up to higher education through its traditional functions of teaching, research and community service to develop manpower and disseminate necessary knowledge that is needed in industry and other sectors (NOUN 2012).

To ensure quality tertiary institutions in Nigeria standard policy ensures quality was formulated on the lecturer-students ratio. The National Universities Commission an agency established for the supervision of universities drafted a Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS) policy in 2007. The NUC policy stipulated the following teacher/students ratio: 1:20 in science; 1:15 in Engineering and technology; 1:10 in medicine, veterinary medicine and pharmacy, 1:15 in agricultural and environmental sciences and 1:30 in education, management science, social sciences, law and arts. The Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS) on lecturer students' ratio have not been fully implemented in many higher institutions in Nigeria (National Universities Commission [NUC] of Nigeria, 2007; Arubayi, 2009; Teacher Registration Council of Nigeria, 2010; National Commission for Colleges of Education [NCCE], 2012). The non-implementation of NUC BMAS on the lecturers-student ratio by tertiary institutions in Nigeria is what is referred to as a 'lack of integrity'. According to Ayeni (2018), integrity is doing what you are supposed to do. The tertiary institutions' non-implementation of the lecturer-students ratio policy is a poser that it lacks integrity.

Unfortunately, this policy of lecturer-student ratio appears to be poorly implemented across the

universities in the country. For instance, Egu, Ogbonna, Obike and Obiuto (2014), who worked on managing stress among lecturers in polytechnics of Southeast, Nigeria, revealed among others that poor teaching and laboratory tools constitute stress among teaching staff in the university, hence overstretched class enrolment had a mean of 2.90, poorly equipped laboratory/technical workshop had a mean of 2.90 and lack of teaching facilities recorded mean of 3.10. The National Open University of Nigeria was reported to have a faculty-to-student ratio of 1:363; the University of Abuja, 1:122; and Lagos State University, 1:114 (NEEDS, 2014). Also, Bala (2013) observed that the teacher-student ratio in tertiary institutions in Katsina State is estimated to be 1:500. A situation where what the government or its agent says she wants to do is not what she is doing is what Ayeni, Tusayi, Joseph and Obatayo (2018) refer to as weak institutions in Nigeria. Muhammad et al. (2021) say that the majority of Sub-Saharan African and Asian nations have staff-to-student ratios that are greater than 1:40, with the Congo, Ethiopia, and Malawi having a ratio of about 1:70, South and East Asia's Afghanistan and Cambodia having a ratio of more than 1:55, and Nigeria recording large class sizes of 1:40, 1:50, and occasionally 1:100. Based on the foregoing, this study aimed to assess the impact of large class size on tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

Literature Review

Class size is defined by Ayeni and Olowe (2016) as the number of students enrolled in a particular course or classroom, the number of students being taught by a single teacher in a course or classroom, the average number of students being taught by teachers in a school or educational system, or the number of students participating in learning experiences. They emphasised that class size is essentially an administrative choice over which teachers have little or no influence. The lack of control over the number of students in learning that lecturers experience is the responsibility of the leadership of tertiary institutions. The above development necessitated the submission of Muhammed and Ayeni (2018) when they argued that the extent of success or failure of any human society or organisation has its roots in leadership at all levels. According to Yusuf, Onifade, and Bello (2016), class size has a highly significant effect on secondary school students' attitude towards learning, with the strongest effects being on attention, punctuality, motivation, and participation—but not on the rate of participation or asking or answering questions.

Class size is classified into large, medium and small class sizes.

Large classes are typically considered those held in large 'lecture' halls and often hold 75 or more students. This is a simplistic view as “the concept of large class size is subjective, largely contextualized and situational based,” (Ipinge, 2013). Some of these classes have numerous support systems, including teaching assistants, specific technologies and simplistic assessment systems which lessen the impact from purely a numbers perspective (Yelkpereri et al. 2012). Yelkpereri et al. (2012) went further to say that huge or overcrowded classes are now frequent problems in most educational institutions in developing countries, and Nigeria is no exception. This has been disempowering and posing several difficulties for lecturers at Nigerian higher schools. Having enough basic infrastructure will serve as empowerment. This is even as Ayeni (2017) noted that physical infrastructure is crucial in every society, because of its capacity to empower people. any negation to the provision of physical infrastructure to empower lecturers in their work will be difficult.

Yelkpereri et al. (2012) who attempted to list the difficulties lecturers and students encounter in

large courses, highlighted the low engagement rates of the students; the inability to organise quizzes and class tests on a regular basis; the inability to mark students' scripts and provide feedback in a timely manner; the difficulty of identifying truant students at lectures; the difficulty of conducting a class test without incident; the difficulty of students hearing the lecturers; the problem with the appropriate use of teaching and learning materials; the inadequacy of the public address system and power fluctuations; the difficulty of marking students' scripts and providing feedback in a timely manner; the challenge of recognising absentee pupils during lectures, the challenge of holding a smooth class examination, the challenge of delivering sufficient assignments, the challenge of maintaining class management; insufficient writing and seating areas; the majority of students are unable to read from the board, among other issues and difficulties, lecturers and students in large classes encounter.

Yelkpieri et al. (2012) lamented that large class sizes are one of the issues in the educational sector that developing countries have been facing. Muhammad, Mohammed, and Fatihi (2021) agreed that large class sizes are thought to be one-factor affecting teaching and learning in schools, especially in Nigerian tertiary institutions, as the average class size varies from one level of education to another and from one discipline to another. While the Nigerian University Commission recommends a class size of 30 students per lecturer in the faculty of education, it also states that anything above the recommended number is abnormal and that if the surplus is greater than 10, the class can be considered excessive. If a classroom is full, it is considered overcrowded. In Nigeria's postsecondary institutions, this type of overcrowding in the classroom has become an inescapable evil that teachers must deal with. Large class sizes in Nigerian postsecondary institutions are a necessity due to the country's population expansion and recent economic collapse. In almost all of Nigeria's public tertiary institutions today, the lecturer-to-student ratio exceeds the outlined guidelines. The circumstance must be addressed for enhanced student academic progress because it cannot be avoided ([Ayanwoye, 2021](#)).

Impact of Large Class Size on Tertiary Institutions

Tertiary institutions are saddled with three major responsibilities such as teaching, research and community services. Large class size in tertiary institutions negatively affects the implementation of teaching programmes, implementation of research programmes, and students' academic performance and lead to brain drain

Implementation of the Teaching Programme

The implementation of teaching programmes in tertiary institutions in most institutions is affected by large class sizes. The teaching programme is the first cardinal programme of tertiary institutions. The teaching programme is described by Ogunode & Ahaotu (2020a) as all activities in tertiary institutions that involve imparting knowledge. The lecturers are saddled with the responsibilities of lecturing the students in the tertiary institutions. Teaching or lecturing large classes affects lecturer's health and also affects their job performance. According to Farrell (2019), big class sizes provide difficulties that may lead to a restriction or rejection of teaching strategies that are frequently employed in smaller class settings. The researcher listed several obstacles to effective teaching, including balancing the alignment of assessments with module content and learning outcomes, ensuring fair engagement in groups that the teacher determines, handling student inquiries, time management, managing elements of choice, upgrading technology skills to enhance teaching,

learning, and assessment, and managing elements of choice. Also, Parks-Stamm et al. (2017) discovered that instructor participation levels and class size had a substantial impact on learning and suggested keeping scientific classes between 15 and 30 students. Susilowati (2013) identified an unfavourable classroom environment as a major problem in teaching large classes, which makes interactions between the teacher and students inefficient. This according to Ayeni, Sani and Uzoigwe (2019) will lead to a situation where it is not every communication that often achieves its set objective. McDonald (2013) concluded that student-staff ratios in higher education have a substantial impact on teaching and learning; Cheng (2011) demonstrated that rising enrollment has detrimental and significant consequences on student satisfaction in school.

Implementation of the Research Programme

Larger class sizes also affect the implementation of research programmes in tertiary institutions across the country. The research programme is the second most ranked programme of tertiary institutions. Research is generally understood as creative work undertaken on a systematic basis to increase the body of knowledge. The academic staff as the name implies are professionals who handle the teaching and research programmes of higher institutions and also perform other academic services (Ogunode & Ayeni, 2023). The knowledge in turn is used to devise new applications and improve the standard of living (Currie-Alder, 2015). Ogunode, Ukozor and Kware, (2023) noted that research in tertiary institutions is been conducted by both students and lecturers. All levels of studentship in tertiary institutions are mandated to carry out some specific research in their fields of study and submit it to the departments as one of the criteria for graduation. Ogunode and Ade (2023); and Obateru (2022) submitted that conducting research and reporting the findings is one of the criteria for university graduation and certification in most Nigerian universities. The undergraduate students in the course of study and learning experiences are designed specifically to develop inquiry-based learning skills (skills that allow learners the opportunity to ask questions, develop a hypothesis and identify methods that would allow them to investigate their questions). Lecturers are responsible for the supervision of students. Different institutions have several students that a lecturer must supervise per academic session. Due to the high population of students, some lecturers are given students more than the normal number and this may affect the quality of research. The large number of supervisees to a supervisor implies the quality of the research work.

The shortage of academic staff in some public universities in Nigeria is responsible for the delay in the dissertation writing of postgraduate students. Many public universities are faced with the problem of shortages of academic staff which leads to a high workload for the few staff. Ogunode and Ayeni (2023) corroborate the above development when they noted that another problem hindering job performance in Nigeria public universities is the inadequate academic staff. The academic staff are overstretched. From lecturing, and supervising students in industrial training, final year project and postgraduate students' supervision, to marking scripts and grading scripts. Other functions include the development and promotion of innovative teaching methods, consultation with students and production of teaching materials for students. The academic research role involves carrying out investigations on an identified problem(s), presentation of the findings of such investigations in conferences/seminars and publishing the findings in journals and/or textbooks.

The third role involves rendering services both to the school and the community at large (Ogunode, Jegede & Musa, 2021). Femi (2018) maintained that one of the factors responsible for the

delay in graduation of post-graduate students in Nigeria tertiary institutions is the high number of supervisee to lecturer problems. Ojo (2020) reported how some supervisors in Nigerian tertiary institutions are given more supervisees ranging from about 15 undergraduate, 5 master students and 5 PhD students supervised by one supervisor. Ogunode (2021) observed that many supervisors in Nigerian public universities are overworked and too busy to attend to their dissertation/thesis students. Nnebedum and Obuegbe observed that supervisors have numerous work such as teaching, conducting exams and marking the scripts of both postgraduate and undergraduate students. Due to these numerous tasks, they have insufficient time to guide and provide prompt feedback on students' work. It also makes it difficult for supervisors to have face-to-face meetings with supervisees to discuss the way forward in their research work. Spear (2000) found in his research that common complaints from students concerned irregular contact with supervisors who most of the time are preoccupied with teaching or administrative duties, have too many supervisees or have to be away from the University frequently for external examinations or conferences. Kearsley in Ogunode, et al (2023) noted that students were not getting enough time with their supervisors because the supervisors were overworked and there was an acute shortage of qualified supervisors. Lubbe, Worrall and Klopper (2005) thought that senior faculty members were under increasing pressure to teach, publish and attract income to their universities Both Supervisor and supervisor motivation and research attitudes are negatively impacted by larger class sizes (Peter, 2019). Yemi (2008) found that the effect of a large number of supervisees on a supervisor is negative over a wide range of time of meetings, correction effects, and affects the quality of supervision and quality of research.

Students' Academic Performance

Tertiary institutions are established to solve human problems and that is why they have the power to develop academic programmes (Ogunode & Ayeni, 2024). Students' academic performance can be defined as the totality of student's achievement in the academic work in the school. Students' academic performance is the academic achievement of students in a given school. Students' academic performance is the total sum of student's cognitive, affective and psychomotor achievement in the school. Many factors determine students' academic performance in school. According to O'Hanlon et al. (2019), larger lecture classes are linked to lower levels of student engagement with the material, fewer course commitments, poorer levels of student engagement with the material, and lower levels of student motivation and participation in class. In conclusion, it suggests that big class sizes seriously affect students' academic performance and should be handled if they cannot be eliminated. A study by [Ayanwoye](#), (2021) disclosed that larger lecture classes have been linked to a host of detrimental effects, including a decrease in the quantity and quality of student-teacher interaction, lower levels of student engagement with the subject matter, fewer students who committed to their courses, and lower levels of student motivation and class participation, all of which ultimately result in a poorer quality of education for both Nigerian teachers and students. To prevent the complete collapse of Nigerian education, this menace must be swiftly countered.

Brain-drain

Larger class sizes in most tertiary institutions discourage lecturers and affect their morale. The problem of large class size has a relationship with the brain drain problem in the various tertiary institutions across the country. Brain drain is the mass movement of professionals from developing countries to developed countries for greener pastures. Members of the academic staff are among the

most moved professionals. Among the factors responsible for this brain is the poor work condition that includes; the teaching of large classes, poor salaries, lack of infrastructure facilities, poor access to research rant and poor implementation of welfare. Ogunode (2020) concluded that factors responsible for the Brain drain in Nigerian public universities include; poor motivation, an uncondusive working environment, insecurity, underfunding and political interferences. The implication of brain-drain in the Nigerian public universities include; a shortage of lecturers, poor quality of education and high student-teacher ratio (Ogunode & Adamu, 2021). Odim, Annastashia and Solomon (2018) lamented the work condition of the academic staff of tertiary institutions as responsible for the brain drain in the system. The need to improve the poor condition of lecturers is captured by Ayeni and Nwaorgu (2018), who noted that development is the improvement in people's welfare.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This paper discussed the impact of large class sizes on tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The paper concluded that large class sizes in tertiary institutions have negatively affected the implementation of teaching programmes, research programmes, and student's academic performance and have led to brain-drain in the various institutions across the country.

Based on the findings of this research work, the study recommended as follows:

The federal and state governments should review lecturers' salaries to ensure that they are the highest-paid profession in the country. The suggested solution will prevent brain drain

Secondly, the federal and state governments of Nigeria should ensure that the lecturer-student ratio policy of the government is strictly adhered to. The suggested solution will increase student academic performance and the quality of students the tertiary institutions are graduating.

Lastly, the federal and state governments of Nigeria should ensure that research allowance is provided for and added to the salaries of lecturers in tertiary institutions. The suggested solution will increase the quality of research.

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