

Influence of Class Size On Students' Academic Achievement in Public Secondary Schools in Niger North Senatorial District, Niger State, Nigeria

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Abstract: *This study investigated the influence of class size on students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Niger North Senatorial District, Niger State, Nigeria. The study examined how large, normal, and small class sizes affect students' academic achievement. A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The population comprised 4,025 respondents, consisting of 68 principals and 3,957 teachers from 68 public secondary schools in the district. Using a simple random sampling technique, a sample of 405 respondents (9 principals and 396 teachers) representing 10% of the population was selected. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled Questionnaire on the Influence of Class Size on Students' Academic Achievement, and a pro forma for students' academic records. The instrument was validated by experts and its reliability established through a pilot study. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were used to answer the research questions, while Chi-square statistics were employed to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that large, normal, and small class sizes have significant influence on students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in the study area. The study concluded that class size is a critical factor in effective teaching and learning. It was recommended that government and educational authorities should strictly adhere to the National Policy on Education teacher student ratio of 1:30 through the recruitment of qualified teachers and provision of adequate classroom facilities among others.*

Keywords: class size, academic achievement, public secondary schools, teaching and learning

INTRODUCTION

As school population increases, class sizes also increase, the academic achievement of students becomes an issue. Therefore, all hands must be on deck worldwide to formulate policies that will

enhance qualitative education right from elementary school to tertiary institutions, and continuous. Also, effective monitoring must be well established to check all factors that may frustrate this global pursuit. In an attempt to put sound education on ground worldwide, many factors have been incriminated as being responsible for the falling standard of education where it is perceived and established. Among such factor is the "Class Size". Adeyemi (2022) defines class size as an educational tool that can be described as an average number of students per class in a school, while Hoffinman (2021) sees it as the number of students per teacher in a class. Kedney (2019) thinks it to be a tool that can be used to measure performance of the educational system.

Adeniji (2018) defines class size as the total number of persons who receives instruction in an organized classroom from teachers at a particular time. This class size can be small class size, normal class size and large class size. The above definition shows that class size deals with total number of persons in a classroom. This is in agreement with the national policy on Education which states that the ideal total number of persons in the class should be 30 persons (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2019). Judging from the above statement, an ideal class size in Nigeria in secondary education should be ratio 1:30 (One teacher to 30 students in a class). The consideration of Class size has significant relations to teachers' job performance in secondary education. This paper is limited to public secondary education in Niger North Senatorial District, Nigeria.

Secondary education occupies an important place in the Nigeria education system and also serves as a link between the primary and tertiary levels. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2019) defined secondary education as the education the learner receives after primary education and before the tertiary stage. Senior secondary education in Nigerian schools is for a period of 3 years and it is for students who have successfully completed the Basic 9 education programme. The secondary school system is however a very crucial level of educational system. It is a gateway to the tertiary education and a ripe age for developing students' potentials. Its benefits should be commensurate with the cost, for this reason, the performance at this level is of significant importance to educational planners and managers.

Rusillo and Arias (2020) opined that: the teacher is basically saddled with the responsibility of transferring knowledge, skills, attitudes and techniques to his pupils. The teacher makes an attempt to help people to acquire some skills, attitudes, knowledge, ideas and applications. Thus, the teacher's task is to influence or create desirable changes in behaviour in his or her own pupils. The teacher often guides the pupils through a series of planned activities so that his pupils may acquire the highest learning possible from their experiences. According to Farland (2017), the planned activities of the teacher involves classroom instructions, preparation of lesson notes and lesson plan, evaluation of students performance, discipline of the children were necessary, helping in the formulation of the moral values and character of the students, etc, while the students respond positively and contribute meaningfully to the instructions receive through classroom participation of answering questions and asking questions. However, the performance of teachers is highly dependent on class size which can influence teachers' job performance or inhibits teachers' job performance.

Class size could be small, normal or large. A lot of arguments have gone on the impact of class size on performance and achievement, some fingered over-bloated class size as the main factor responsible for the falling standard of education, most especially in the secondary level of education in Nigeria. However, others see this as mere coincidence seeing other factors as being responsible. As a matter of fact, virtually everyone, students and teachers believed that smaller classes would lead to improved

students' achievement and that students learned more in small classes. They found out that the major benefit of a small class size occurred where the number of students in the class are fewer than 25. While normal class size is refers to the expected number of persons that are within the normal class size of 1:30 (1 teacher, 30 students) who receives instruction in an organized class room from teachers at a particular time, which is the ideal class size.

Large classes present more challenges for classroom management, students' control, marking, planning and assessment. Teachers are put under more strain when faced with large classes. In smaller classes, it can be easier for teachers to spot problems and give feedbacks, identify specific needs and gear teaching to meet them, and set individual targets for students. Teachers also experience better relationships with, and have more knowledge of individual students. Stephens, Hamedani and Destin (2018) asserted that large class size significantly affects the level of students' cognitive skills in the classroom. Sizeable or moderate classes improved both the students' performance and learning behaviour as well as it yields fewer classroom disruptions and discipline problem. The relationship between class size, teachers' job performance and students' academic achievement has been a perplexing one for educators.

Researchers, Scholars, writers and educational experts have proven that class size has a strong influence to teachers' job performance which can also enhance or affects students' academic achievement especially in public secondary schools. Adeyemi (2019) explains that students' academic achievements refer to the grades of students in all subjects in Senior Secondary Certificate Examination which can be conducted by examination bodies such as West African Examination Council (WAEC). Adebayo (2017) stated that academic achievement of students in schools nowadays especially government schools is poor compared to the olden days because of the teacher incapability to teach efficiently and effectively which is also attributed to large class size. Overcrowded classrooms have increased the possibilities for mass failure and make students to lose interest in school. This is because large class size does not allow individual student to get attention from teachers which invariably lead to low reading scores, frustration and poor academic achievements of students in Niger North Senatorial District, Niger state Nigeria. Below is an example of poor academic achievement of students in government senior secondary schools in Niger North Senatorial District, Niger state, Nigeria.

Table1.1: Academic achievement of students in public secondary Schools in Niger North Senatorial District, Niger state, in the May/June WAEC Senior Secondary Certification Examination, 2019– 2023

SCHOOLS	YEAR	NUMBER OF CANDIDATES	CANDIDATES WITHCREDIT PASSESINCLUDING ENGLISHANDMATHS	PERCENTAGEP ASS %
Government Secondary School, Agwara	2019	271	147	54.2
	2020	209	96	45.9
	2021	170	94	55.3
	2022	214	67	31.3
	2023	233	169	72.5
Government Secondary School, Borgu	2019	205	100	48.8
	2020	227	113	49.8
	2021	234	102	43.6
	2022	201	105	52.2
	2023	208	95	45.7
Government Secondary School, Kontagora	2019	211	95	45.0
	2020	206	100	48.5
	2021	225	125	55.6
	2022	211	92	43.6
	2023	179	112	62.6
Government Secondary School, Magama	2019	182	91	50
	2020	222	100	45.0
	2021	258	84	32.6
	2022	269	95	35.3
	2023	201	96	47.8
Government Secondary School, Mariga	2019	155	64	41.3
	2020	183	73	39.9
	2021	211	99	46.9
	2022	200	101	50.5
	2023	204	119	58.3
Government Secondary School, Mashegu	2019	167	86	32.8
	2020	184	74	34.7
	2021	153	69	41.6
	2022	191	72	45.2
	2023	167	89	51.8
Government Secondary School, Rijua	2019	155	74	47.7
	2020	165	73	44.2
	2021	146	65	44.5
	2022	172	71	41.3
	2023	174	68	39.1
Government Secondary School, Wushishi	2019	169	73	43.2
	2020	201	91	45.3
	2021	195	89	45.6
	2022	178	80	45.0
	2023	182	84	46.2

Source: West African Examination Council Mina Niger state (2023)

Purpose of the study

The main aim of this paper is to show the perceived influence of class size on students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Niger North Senatorial District, Niger state, Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Determine how large class size influence students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Niger North Senatorial District, Niger state, Nigeria
2. Examine how normal class size influence students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Niger North Senatorial District, Niger state, Nigeria
3. Ascertain how small class size influence students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Niger North Senatorial District, Niger state, Nigeria

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

- i. What is the perceived influence of large class size on students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Niger North Senatorial District, Niger state, Nigeria?
- ii. What is the perceived influence of normal class size on students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Niger North Senatorial District, Niger state, Nigeria?
- iii. What is the perceived influence of small class size on students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Niger North Senatorial District, Niger state, Nigeria?

Hypothesis

Based on the objectives of the study and the stated research questions, three hypotheses were constructed to help address the research problem:

HO1: There is no significant influence in large class size on students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Niger North Senatorial District, Niger state, Nigeria.

HO2: There is no significant influence in normal class size on students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Niger North Senatorial District, Niger state, Nigeria.

HO3: There is no significant influence in small class size on students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Niger North Senatorial District, Niger state, Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprised all principals and teachers in public secondary schools in Niger North Senatorial District of Niger State, Nigeria. Specifically, the population consisted of 68 principals and 3,957 teachers drawn from 68 public secondary schools across the district, giving a total population of 4,025 respondents. A simple random sampling technique involving 10% of the total population was employed to select the sample

for the study. Consequently, a sample size of 405 respondents was obtained, consisting of 9 principals and 396 teachers, representing 10% of the total population. The sampled schools were drawn from the eight Local Government Areas that make up the Niger North Senatorial District. Data for the study were collected using a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher, alongside a pro forma designed to collect students' academic achievement scores. The questionnaire, titled "Questionnaire on the Influence of Class Size on Students' Academic Achievement (QICLSAA)", was constructed using a modified four-point Likert-type scale with response options of *Strongly Agree (SA)*, *Agree (A)*, *Disagree (D)*, and *Strongly Disagree (SD)*.

To establish the validity of the instrument, the questionnaire was submitted to experts in Educational Management at Nasarawa State University, Keffi, whose comments and suggestions were incorporated into the final version of the instrument. The mean scores of the validation scale yielded a logical validity index of 0.85. The reliability of the instrument was determined through a pilot study conducted among principals and teachers who were not part of the study sample but belonged to the study population. Two public secondary schools Government Secondary School, Agwara, and Government Secondary School, Borgu, both in Niger State were used for the pilot test. A total of 20 teachers, comprising 10 teachers from each school, participated in the pilot study. The questionnaires were administered personally by the researcher with the assistance of trained research assistants. Prior arrangements were made with the selected schools, and an official introductory letter was obtained from the Department of Educational Management, Nasarawa State University, Keffi. Ethical considerations, including respondents' privacy and confidentiality of information, were strictly observed. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically mean scores and standard deviations, to answer the research questions. The hypotheses were tested using the Chi-square (χ^2) statistical technique, which measures the relationship between observed and expected frequencies. The Chi-square statistic was employed to determine the significance of relationships among the variables as stated in the hypotheses of the study.

RESULTS

The data collated from research question one was analyzed in the table below using descriptive statistics (Mean Ratings and Standard Deviation).

Table 4.1: Mean Ratings and Standard Deviation of Respondents on how large class size influence students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Niger North Senatorial District, Niger state, Nigeria.

Item No	Item Description	SA	A	D	SD	X	SD	Decision
1.	Teachers' who uses individualized methods when circumstances demands enhances student's academic achievements	204	114	41	21	3.35	0.68	Agree
2.	Teachers' who uses group methods when circumstances demands enhances student's academic achievements	194	114	50	22	3.44	0.57	Agree
3.	Teachers' who uses project task methods when circumstances demands enhances student's academic achievements	136	154	60	30	3.37	0.68	Agree
4.	Teachers' who uses field trips methods when circumstances demands enhances student's academic achievements	155	105	70	50	3.33	0.69	Agree
5.	Teachers' who applies the combination of two or three teaching methods when circumstances demands enhances student's academic achievements	145	125	80	30	3.23	0.79	Agree
Cluster Mean		3.34		Agree				

Source: Field Study 2024

Table 4.1 shows that items 1-5 had mean scores of 3.35, 3.44, 3.37, 3.33 and 3.23 with corresponding standard deviations of 0.68, 0.57, 0.68, 0.69 and 0.79 respectively. Based on the criteria for decision making, it means that all the items were rated above the cut-off point of 2.50. The cluster mean of 3.34 was also above the cut-off point of 2.50. The standard deviation scores of the respondents are small signifying homogeneity for the items raised. This implies that large class size influence students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Niger North Senatorial District, Niger state, Nigeria.

The data collated from research question two was analyzed in the table below using descriptive statistics (Mean Ratings and Standard Deviation).

Table 4.2: Mean Ratings and Standard Deviation of Respondents on how normal class size influence students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Niger North Senatorial District, Niger state, Nigeria

Item No	Item Description	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{X}	SD	Decision	
6.	The effective use of projectors stimulate interest in teaching and learning	165	135	30	50	3.55	0.62	Strongly Agree	
7.	The effective use of films by teachers helps learners expand experience of other cultures	145	154	51	30	3.40	0.66	Agree	
8.	The effective use of slides by a teacher in a normal class helps all to grasp the rudiments of the teaching and learning process	201	114	35	30	3.37	0.71	Agree	
9.	The effective use of marker-board while teaching makes learning permanent	143	135	50	52	3.43	0.64	Agree	
10.	The effective use of images by teachers helps students develop manipulative or creative skills in teaching and learning	186	114	60	20	3.64	0.57	Strongly Agree	
Cluster Mean		3.48							Agree

Source: Field Study 2024

Table 4.2 shows that items 6-10 had mean scores of 3.55, 3.40, 3.37, 3.43 and 3.64 with corresponding standard deviations of 0.62, 0.66, 0.71, 0.64 and 0.57 respectively. Based on the criteria for decision making, it means that all the items were rated above the cut-off point of 2.50. The cluster mean of 3.48 was also above the cut-off point of 2.50. The standard deviation scores of the respondents are small signifying homogeneity for the items raised. This implies that normal class size influence students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Niger North Senatorial District, Niger state, Nigeria

The data collated from research question three was analyzed in the table below using descriptive statistics (Mean Ratings and Standard Deviation).

Table 4.3: Mean Ratings and Standard Deviation of respondents on how small class size influence students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Niger North Senatorial District, Niger state, Nigeria

Item No	Item Description	SA	A	D	SD	X	SD	Decision	
11.	Teachers' effective consciousness on seating arrangement in a small class ensures group learning	186	114	60	20	3.36	0.70	Agree	
12.	Teachers' effective consciousness on seating arrangement in a class ensures individualized learning	173	116	70	21	3.43	0.67	Agree	
13.	Teachers' effective consciousness on seating arrangement in a class ensures the development of slow learners	163	115	80	22	3.41	0.64	Agree	
14.	Teachers' effective consciousness on seating arrangement in a class enhances the learning of under – achievers	186	141	30	23	3.31	0.73	Agree	
Cluster Mean		3.41							Agree

Source: Field Study 2024

Table 4.3 shows that items 11-14 had mean scores of 3.36, 3.43, 3.41 and 3.31 with corresponding standard deviations of 0.70, 0.67, 0.64 and 0.73 respectively. Based on the criteria for decision making, it means that all the items were rated above the cut-off point of 2.50. The cluster mean of 3.41 was also above the cut-off point of 2.50. The standard deviation scores of the respondents are small signifying homogeneity for the items raised. This implies that small class size influence students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Niger North Senatorial District, Niger state, Nigeria.

Testing Research Hypotheses

In order to test the three hypotheses of this study, the chi-square (χ^2) test of goodness of fit was used to test the options of respondents at 0.05 level of significance and the results are presented on Tables 4 to 6 and the detailed analysis shown in (Appendix, C).

Hypothesis 1:

There is no significant influence in large class size on students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Niger North Senatorial District, Niger state, Nigeria.

Table 4:

Chi-square test on influence of large class size on students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Niger North Senatorial District, Niger state, Nigeria

Opinions	Observed N	Expected N	Residual	Level of Sig.	Df	χ^2 -cal	P-value	Decision
SD	21	226.5	-221.5	0.05	3	650.26	0.00	Sig.
D	41	226.5	-159.5					
A	114	226.5	200.5					
SA	204	226.5	180.5					

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 226.5

Table 4 revealed that χ^2 -cal = 650.26, at df = 3 and p = 0.00. Since p-value of 0.00 < 0.05 at 3 degree of freedom, the null hypothesis which states that There is no significant influence in large class size on students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Niger North Senatorial District, Niger state, Nigeria was therefore, rejected. This implies that there is significant influence in large class size on students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Niger North Senatorial District, Niger state, Nigeria.

Hypothesis 2:

There is no significant influence in normal class size on students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Niger North Senatorial District, Niger state, Nigeria

Table 5:

Chi-square test on influence of normal class size on students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Niger North Senatorial District

Opinions	Observed N	Expected N	Residual	Level of Sig.	Df	χ^2 -cal	P-value	Decision
SD	30	226.5	-209.5	0.05	3	728.50	0.00	Sig.
D	35	226.5	-195.5					
A	114	226.5	181.5					
SA	201	226.5	223.5					

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 226.5.

Table 5 revealed that χ^2 -cal = 728.50, df = 3 and p = 0.00. Since p-value of 0.00 < 0.05 at 3 degree of freedom, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant influence of teacher effective use of instructional materials in normal class size on students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Niger North Senatorial District, Niger state, Nigeria was therefore, rejected. This means that there is significant influence in normal class size on students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Niger North Senatorial District, Niger state, Nigeria.

Hypothesis 3:

There is no significant influence in small class size on students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Niger North Senatorial District, Niger state, Nigeria

Table 6: Chi-square test on influence small class size on students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Niger North Senatorial District, Niger state, Nigeria

Opinions	Observed N	Expected N	Residual	Level of Sig.	Df	χ^2 -cal	P-value	Decision
SD	23	226.5	-212.5	0.05	3	688.87	0.00	Sig.
D	30	226.5	-181.5					
A	141	226.5	184.5					
SA	186	226.5	209.5					

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 226.5.

Table 6 revealed that χ^2 -cal = 688.87, at df =3 and p = 0.00. Since p-value of 0.00 < 0.05 at 3 degree of freedom, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant influence of teachers' in small class size on students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Niger North Senatorial District, Niger state, Nigeria was therefore, rejected. The implication is that there is significant influence in small class size on students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Niger North Senatorial District, Niger state, Nigeria

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Based on the results of the analysis of the three research questions and testing of the three hypotheses postulated for the study, the following findings are organized and discussed.

The first finding of this study revealed that there is significant influence of large class size on students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Niger North Senatorial District, Niger state, Nigeria. This finding is in line with Fakunle (2008) who posited that, there are two main approaches to teaching: the teacher-centered and student-centered. The teacher-centered and student-centered have dominated interaction in classrooms and captures the various methods that students can learn. These can of course be measured either through formal and informal methods of assessment. The teacher-centered approach is when the teacher appears in the classroom and gives his lessons in such a way that students concentrates and admire his presence in his class but in reality, learning did not take place because the teacher did not deliver his lesson in such a way that students can learn and assimilate. However, the student-centered approach is when the teacher gives lessons in the classroom with all manners of considerations to the classroom with respect to size of the class, classroom environment, individual differences in learning, etc (Opolot-Okurut, 2008).

The second finding of the study indicated that there is significant influence in normal class size on students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Niger North Senatorial District, Niger state, Nigeria. This finding corroborates with Ijaduola (2013), who posited that, instructional materials assist teachers to make their lessons explicit to learners. They are also used to transmit information, ideas and notes to learners. Instructional materials include both visuals and audiovisuals such as pictures, flashcards, posters, charts, chalk board, textbooks, chalk board writing materials, projector, tape recorder, radio, video, television, computers among others. These materials serve as supplement to the normal processes of instruction. Instructional materials are essential and significant tools needed for teaching and learning of school subjects to promote teachers' efficiency and improve students'

achievement. They make learning more interesting, practical, realistic and appealing. They also enable both the teachers and students to participate actively and effectively in lesson sessions. They give room for acquisition of skills and knowledge and development of self- confidence and self- actualization. The third finding revealed that there is significant influence in small class size on students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Niger North Senatorial District, Niger state, Nigeria. This finding agrees with what Adebayo (2017) opine that, teachers also need to feel that they are in control of the material to be taught, how to teach it, and how to teach the students to be in control of the content. These strategies do not often appear in reading methods texts, or math books, rather it involves recognizing individual differences in the class during teaching and learning process; and using good entry behaviour to elicit students' performance in the class. Most teachers are not professionally trained or rather not from educational background; and may not recognize the importance of good entry behaviour in the class, such as story telling so as to bring the attention of students before proper teaching.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the influence of class size on students' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Niger North Senatorial District, Niger State, Nigeria. The findings clearly established that class size whether large, normal, or small has a significant influence on students' academic achievement. The results from the descriptive statistics and chi-square analyses revealed that all the null hypotheses were rejected, indicating that class size is a critical determinant of effective teaching and learning outcomes in public secondary schools.

Specifically, the study showed that large class sizes pose serious challenges to effective classroom management, individualized instruction, and continuous assessment, which in turn negatively affect students' academic achievement. Normal class sizes, particularly those that align with the recommended teacher student ratio, were found to enhance effective use of instructional materials and promote better student engagement and understanding. Small class sizes were also observed to provide teachers with greater opportunities to adopt learner-centred strategies, attend to individual differences, support slow learners, and improve overall academic performance.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Government and educational authorities should ensure strict adherence to the National Policy on Education recommendation of a teacher–student ratio of 1:30 in public secondary schools by recruiting more qualified teachers and constructing additional classrooms where necessary.
2. School administrators should implement effective class-size management strategies, such as streamlining students into manageable classes and ensuring equitable distribution of learners across available classrooms.
3. Provision of instructional facilities and materials should be prioritized, especially in schools with normal class sizes, to enable teachers to maximize the benefits of audiovisual and instructional resources in enhancing students' academic achievement.
4. Teachers should be encouraged and trained through regular workshops, seminars, and in-service programmes to adopt learner-centred and innovative teaching strategies that are suitable for different class sizes.

5. Monitoring and supervision units within the Ministry of Education should be strengthened to regularly assess class sizes and teaching conditions in public secondary schools, ensuring compliance with approved standards.

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