

Strategies of coping with effective teaching and learning in large classes in Secondary Schools in Kampala District

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Abstract

This study examines strategies of coping with teaching and learning in large classes in secondary schools in Kampala district. With the rapid technological, economic and social growth being realized in Uganda, demand for education is increasing every other day. Education is an investment needed for rapid social change. The need for education, as a vehicle for economic growth, has consequently led to increased student enrolment in both government and private secondary schools countrywide. However to the educationist, the increasing numbers of students has led to large classes, which are not easy to teach effectively. Teaching and learning becomes a problem where instructional materials are few and classroom space is limited and the teacher can hardly follow up on the performance of each and every student. In order to provide the strategies for coping with large classes, the researcher examined teachers' understanding of the problems of teaching and learning in large classes, and establishing the teaching strategies teachers handling large classes have adopted to promote effective teaching and learning.

A cross-sectional survey research study was conducted on teachers, students and head teachers in 20 selected government and private secondary schools in Kampala district. The focus was senior one and two students because these are some of the classes where the UPE bulge is concentrated and they can easily be accessed since they still have time before being examined by UNEB. The content scope of this study was concerned with teachers' understanding of the problems of teaching large classes and coping mechanisms adopted.

Then, findings indicated that teachers understand the problems of effective teaching and learning in large classes. In order to cope with teaching and learning in large classes, there is need to provide more instructional materials like text books in subjects like math and English. During the teaching of these subjects, the numbers overwhelm the capacity to provide each and every student with enough learning aids and there are just few materials used by teachers. However, sharing of instructional materials in large classes is associated with numerous problems. The teacher cannot wholly ensure that each and every body in the class has followed the working and explanations properly as given in the textbooks and students tend to fight for the few materials. Even if student numbers might be increasing, academic performance can be attained if schools have adequate supply of textbooks, teaching guides, and other teaching media, which can help students, learn effectively.

Academic performance is influenced by the availability of various instructional materials, implying that all students will get a chance to follow closely the lesson series without hard time. Schools should struggle to ensure the provision of these materials, which is often done through PTA and government contributions. On the strategies of coping with teaching in large classes, effective teaching requires use of student-centered methods like giving assignments, examinations and home work, sharing of instructional materials, constructing more classrooms, and encouraging student-centered methods. These remedies will help policy makers tackle the problems of USE and UPE schools.

Introduction

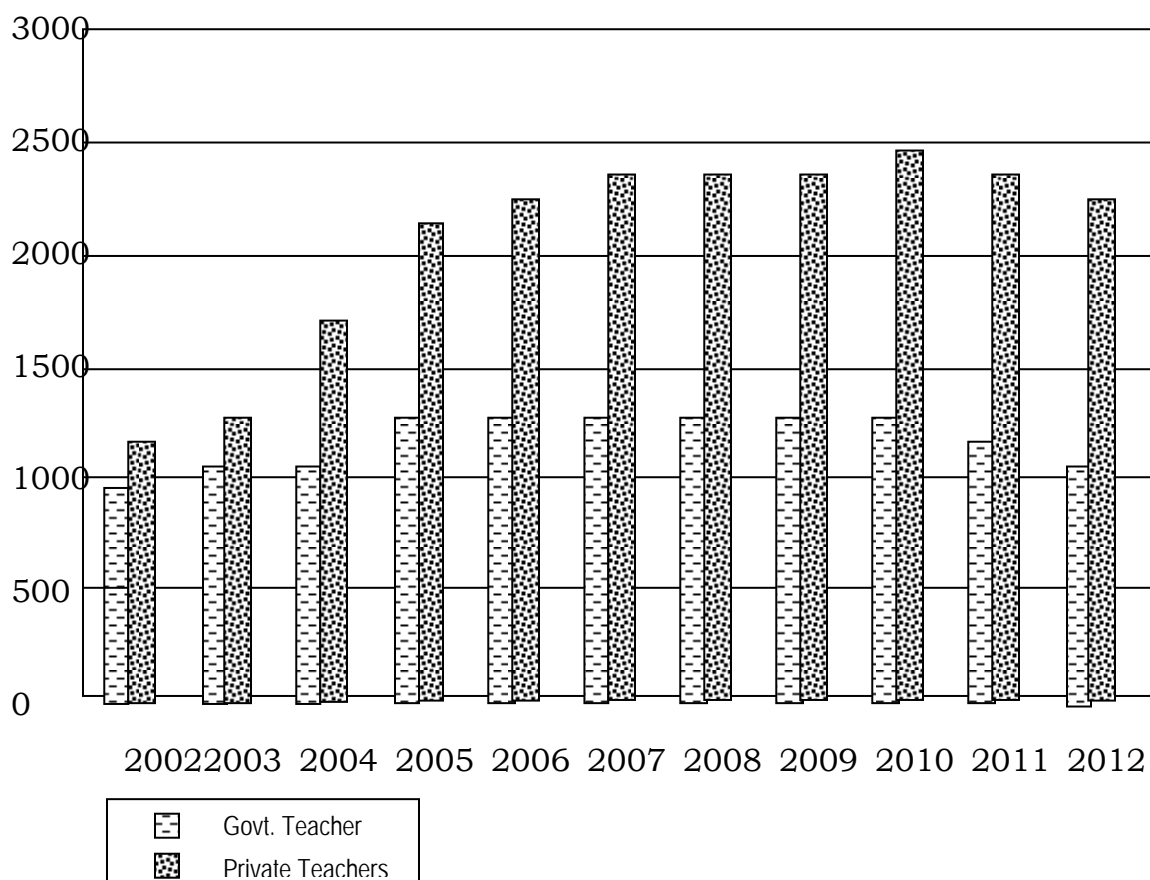
It is a worldwide perception that education is a key factor in the development of any society. It is taken to be a backbone for social and economic prosperity since it brings countless benefits to society such as good nutrition, good health, quality goods and services. On the contrary, it should be noted that education like any other sectors is faced with numerous hardships that require urgent attention. It is evident the world over that in most schools today, the students' population has more than doubled over the last decade of the 20th century. This might be attributed to a conviction that no country can prosper without education in this era. It can also be attributed to the United Nations' declaration of providing basic education for all by the year 2015.

Gimuguni (2000) contends that this increase in students' numbers has been attributed to high social demand for higher education and the fact that education leads to the acquisition of a lucrative job. This eventually puts pressure on secondary schools. More so, the Universal Primary Education program that commenced in 1997 in Uganda has ushered in many graduates that are craving for secondary education. Currently, the introduction of the Universal Secondary Education (USE) Program has also given much hope to the parents and communities that couldn't afford education. Children are studying freely in some secondary schools as it is in primary schools. These factors have called for the steady increase in student numbers in secondary schools around the country. It is not surprising that as students' numbers increase, schools face a problem of large classes giving way to numerous setbacks that are likely to affect the teaching and learning process if not properly handled.

A number of proposals with varying degrees have fallen short of targets. According to the Education strategic Investment Plan (ESIP) (1998), the Government of Uganda had committed itself to providing at least one seed secondary school in each sub-county where there was none or where the need was great. However, according to the MoES' report on PPET (2002) out of 936 sub-counties, over 450 did not have secondary schools of any kind. Bitamazire (in the press) noted that 41 seed secondary schools were being constructed in sub-countries without any form of secondary school. This is all geared towards decongesting some schools but still the problem persists. Benrel (2002) pointed out that the MoES' norm for class size is 45 for S.1 to S.4. The PPET report on increased access, equity and efficiency had it that the proposed staffing

levels (STR) were 30:1 yet on the ground the number of students is big compared to teachers available. The table1 below shows the demand for newly trained secondary school teachers:

Table 1: Total New teachers needed in USE schools



Source: Draft policy framework for MOES pg 24 (2005)

It is evident that about 2300 new teachers are required in government-aided schools per annum as a result of expansion, attrition and an increasing student-teacher ratio. However, World Bank (2001) revealed that textbooks and other teaching materials in Secondary schools have not kept pace with the increase in the number of students. Annyu (2000) further asserted that the chronic shortage of textbooks is a major factor contributing to the poor quality education in many secondary schools where the student- book ratio was 16:1. The situation in most private schools was said to be far worse. Lambart and McCombs (1985) and Bennell and Sayed (2002) enumerated some of the shortcomings of large classes; Students become faces instead of people, it is harder to give individual advice and guidance to students, monitoring of attendance can be difficult, thus encouraging students to cut lessons, coping with large numbers

of assignments and examination scripts is a source of difficulty, and the quality of feedback to students can be much reduced in large classes. So there was need to investigate the strategies that teachers in different contexts have developed to mediate teaching in their large classes by finding out i) What is the teachers' conception of effective teaching and learning in large classes? ii) What teaching strategies have teachers handling large classes adopted to promote effective teaching and learning? iii) How do learners in large classes perceive the teaching strategies utilized by their teachers?

Literature Review

The question is "Can teachers plan for achieving proper teaching in large classes?" Lambert et al (1998) and Nacino-Brown (1990) define teaching and learning as an attempt to help someone acquire, or change some skill, attitude, knowledge, idea or appreciation. It is a natural process guided by individual learner's goals, arising from the activity itself and interactions with others to make sense of their experience of constructing knowledge, meaning and understanding. So effective teaching is the teachers' ability to tactfully pass on knowledge to students and providing relevant tasks that ensure successful realization of the lesson objectives. Ogunniyi (1986) noted that, the teacher as the main executor of the educational programmes, should be well trained, possess relevant professional qualifications, be enthusiastic and well acquainted with the educational programmes. Kebirumbi (2000) on her part reasoned that, in order for a teacher to be effective in bringing about intended learning outcomes, should have command of the theoretical knowledge about learning and human behavior, display attitudes that foster learning and human relationships, have command of knowledge of the subject matter to be taught and be in control of technical teaching skills that facilitate students' effective learning. However, the issue is how can teachers ensure that children grasp the relevancies and quality that knowledge provides in very large classes. This requires that the teacher concentrate on the learning from each and every student, by checking their abilities and correcting them patiently. Now, if it is a large class this task becomes quite hard to accomplish because the teacher is incapacitated to do so. The teacher would be worn out especially when the kind of pay and motivation he or she get is insufficient to keep him or her trying to accomplish the task ahead.

The National Commission on Education (1995) further observed that a teacher should be an expert equipped with knowledge, various classroom methods and techniques that can be skillfully utilized to handle teaching in large classes and above all have an understanding of appropriate organizational and management styles. Perrot (1982) sums it up when he highlights indicators of effective classroom teaching as characterized by Warmth and understanding; being organized, stimulating and imaginative, asking students' feelings, rewarding, welcoming, clarifying when presenting instructional content by way of applying different instructional materials and procedures, not sidelining availing opportunity to all students to learn instructional content. However all these tasks require commitment, rationality and a sense of belonging. In many secondary schools in the developing world where pay is meager it becomes hard for head teachers to convince teachers to provide the best to students through the above activities when these teachers are not properly induced financially or otherwise. Doing all this requires that the teacher put a bigger part of time, effort and life into student life, which requires good remuneration to stir up his devotion.

Large classes are associated with a number of learning problems as conceived by a number of studies conducted worldwide. Buni (1993) in his own way conceives ineffective teaching and learning in large classes when he argues that a large class size may lead to a reduction in the teacher-student contact which makes the supervision of class activities and management of students' discipline difficult. Buni was backed by Sesan (1992) when he noted that where as it is easy to have the whole class silently reading or writing an exercise, it is next to impossible to have the whole class speaking. Even when they are listening, assessing their individual listening ability can be very difficult. Confronted with such, teachers will make sure that they do away with situations that will make them unable to manage the class. They will greatly avoid scenarios that give chance to learners to practice knowledge and skills they have got. Abua (1995) emphasized that pressure of student numbers constrains the ability of the teacher to effectively execute his/her duties. When the number is too high, the teacher is forced to delegate some of his/her duties either to students or colleagues. At times he/she can even abandon them completely.

Classes with large numbers of students at times prove to be difficult to control and discipline as they create a hostile environment if not ably handled and even Oliveira (1993) holds that increased student enrolment demands adequate instructional materials and that lack of the same render teaching and learning ineffective. Nkuuhe (1995) echoed the same idea when she observed that students learn skills, concepts and ideas better when they try them out in practice. Instructional materials increase the quality of learning, decrease the time taken for learners to attain desired goals and promote good reading habit and the learner is capable of studying at his/her own pace. In line with the same, Kajubi (1989) maintained that the provision of instructional materials particularly textbooks is the most effective way of improving quality and scholastic achievement. On the contrary, Annyu (2000) seems to ignore use of textbooks. He noted that when teachers use textbooks, they are usually not creative in their teaching, they teach everything according to the set textbooks either verbatim, which fail to take the students' level of understanding into account and do not constitute any meaningful communication. To sum it, large classes demonstrate a situation of a very active teacher and very passive learners. Good learning can hardly occur in a situation where there is no student-centered learning however much the teacher is so good.

Oliveira and Farrel (1993) contend further that it is a common occurrence in most secondary schools in developing countries to find physically congested classrooms with an active teacher and passive learners. A teacher only keeps an eye to students within his/her surveillance zone leaving the back of the class outside his/her attention zone. Rathmell (1994) further submitted that students should be given a chance to dig up their own material and make their own notes. By this they develop better arguments and perceptions. Considering the move towards a student-centered approach, the teacher should guide students to discover their strength and weaknesses in order to lead them from being passive and teacher dependent. Ajuoga (2002) also held similarly that students' learning needs are diverse, implying that attending to students effectively involves a teacher satisfying each and every one of them as they present their needs to him/her. In teaching, he/she must assist students to learn how to think.

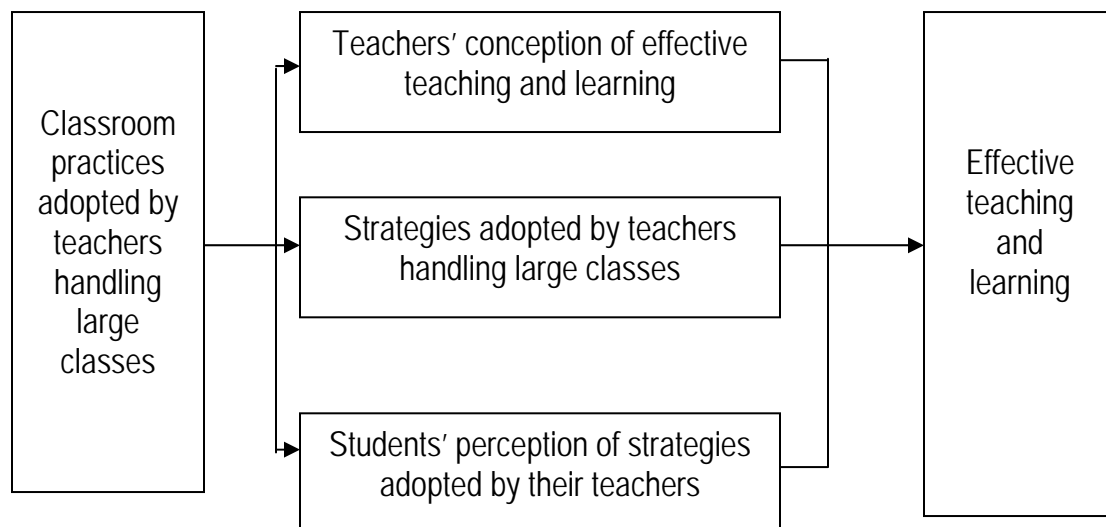
The tremendous increase in students' numbers in most secondary requires variations in teaching methodology. Adrian (1993) argues that it is not the class size that has the greatest influence on teaching and learning but assuming variations in teaching strategies. Sebbunga (2003) opted for group work discussion, which helps learners to gain both communicative competences and confidence in answering questions and discovering and developing student creativity potentials. Kasambira (1993) noted that the personality of the teacher also contributes greatly to the creation of a suitable learning atmosphere regardless of the class size where the teacher should work hard to win students' respect and appear approachable. Billington (1997) and Ajuoga (2000) conclude that large classes imply increase in workloads and high levels of class assessment. Mick Selly (1999) also attaches vitality to assignments through homework as a useful device for monitoring progress. Abua (1995) argued that regular evaluation provides useful information that could be used to seal loopholes to effective teaching by providing links between lessons and purposeful assessment.

Theoretical framework

The researcher intends to use Vygotsky's (1973) theory of learning, which is held in high esteem in the social constructive thinking. It majorly tackles what makes knowledge by highlighting aspects that have a major impact on the way we teach and on ways students learn. It holds that every learner constructs his/her ideas as opposed to receiving them, complete and correct from a teacher or authority source. It emphasizes the improvement of the existing classroom methods so as to facilitate learning through interaction with others, internalizing knowledge, and acquisition of first hand personal experience as students build a satisfactory and coherent picture of the world. Effective teaching is only possible if the teacher can ably pass on knowledge to all learners and in turn all learners can ably transform what is taught into practical relevancies to their lives. With such an approach, the teacher is supposed to provoke students to think deeper and reason out things rightly. So the emphasis is how students build their own understanding especially when it comes to strategies employed by their teachers as they labour to grasp new concepts.

Conceptual framework

In order to investigate large class teaching strategies in selected Secondary schools of Kampala and Wakiso district, the researcher relates the right to education regardless of the size of the class, to the classroom practices adopted by teachers of large classes, the teachers' conception of effective teaching and learning, strategies adopted by teachers handling large classes and students' perception of strategies adopted by their teachers in teaching large classes. The conceptual framework has been developed by the researcher and lays out the relationship the study is trying to address.



Arising from above, the way teachers conceptualize effective teaching may influence the teaching strategies they adopt as they cope up with large classes. In the same way, the teachers' strategies of teaching large classes are perceived differently by students and may affect the way they learn.

Methodology

The researcher used a crosssectional survey research design. The design was selected because it gives intensive, descriptive and holistic analysis based on views from many groups of respondents. The study focused on 10 government aided and 10 private secondary schools in Kampala district, where 400 students in senior one and two, 142 teachers and 20 head teachers were picked. Purposive sampling was used to select the schools and categories of respondents to be included in the sample. It was preferred for the study because it selected typical and useful cases of respondents that enabled the researcher get information relating to how teachers in different contexts mediate effective teaching and learning in large classes thus saving money and time. The study population was of head teachers, teachers and students from the selected schools. Head teachers were purposively selected basing on their role and experience in school management and the fact that these head teachers take the overall supervision of all the teaching/ learning process in these schools. Teachers as key informants provided first hand information on how they mediate learning in large classes. Students were also used to generate views pertaining the way they perceive strategies adopted by their teachers. The researcher focused on the teaching of English language and Mathematics because these subjects embrace the main purpose of basic education, which is numeracy and literacy. They also appear daily on the timetable and are compulsory hence being taught in all schools.

Study findings

This study tried to find out how teachers and head teachers cope with teaching and learning in large classes in Kampala district. The analysis involved identifying whether the teachers' understand the problems of teaching large classes and the strategies adopted to promote effective teaching and learning. The findings give a strong testimony that teachers understand the problems of effective teaching and learning in

large classes and these include the inadequate classroom space, recorded by half (50%) of the students and (76%) teachers. An interview with head teachers in three secondary schools indicated that the major problem facing schools is the inadequate teaching space.

Table 1: Teachers' and students' responses regarding classroom space and student numbers

	Students		Teachers	
Responses	Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent
Inadequate	200	50.0	108	76.0
Fairly adequate	40	10.0	20	14.08
Adequate	160	40.0	14	9.92
Total	400	100.0	100.0	

Majority of the students (85%) and (90%) teachers argue that in order to cope with teaching and learning in large classes, there is need to provide more instructional materials like text books in subjects like math and English. During the teaching of these subjects, the numbers overwhelm the capacity to provide each and every student with learning aids like reference books, mathematical instruments and mathematical tables so as to improve the teaching. Sometimes, sharing of the few available instructional materials are widely accepted by at least (48%) students and majority (87.32%) of teachers. However, sharing of instructional materials in large classes is associated with numerous problems. The teacher cannot wholly ensure that each and every body in the class has followed the working and explanations properly as given in the textbooks (56%) students and (70%) teachers, and students tend to fight for the few materials (60%) students and 89%) teachers. Even if student numbers might be

increasing, academic performance can be attained if schools have adequate supply of textbooks, teaching guides, and other teaching media, which can help students, learn effectively.

Table 2: Model Summary for the correlation between instructional materials and students' academic performance

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.642(a)	.412	.281	.82108

The table 2 indicates that academic performance is influenced by the availability of various instructional materials as noted by a correlation of 0.64. Availability of adequate instructional materials implies that all students will get a chance of following the lesson series without hard time and this makes the teaching-learning process effective. More than half of the students (53.52%) argued that schools acquire instructional materials through PTA contributions from parents, the government little (23%) as recorded by the students and (20%) teachers. More still, slightly more than half (52%) of the students say effective teaching requires use of student-centered learning, which promotes self-discovery, personal study and giving of student assignments as reflected by more than half (55.75%) of the students and (50.2%) teachers. Again, in an interview with some head teachers, they also argued “one of the ways in which we encourage students to study effectively is to engage students in independent study. Through self-study, students learn more than being spoon-fed. They do critical research, which enables them to better understand what the teacher teaches”.

Conclusions

With the rapid technological, economic and social growth being realized in Uganda, demand for education is increasing every other day since it is a big contributor to the rapid economic growth. The need for education, as a vehicle for economic growth, has consequently led to increased student enrolment in both government and private secondary schools countrywide. However, the increasing numbers of students has led to large classes, which are not easy to teach effectively. The ability to teach effectively and enhance learning is part and parcel of quality education that Ugandans need apart

from increased school going numbers. The intractable dilemma has been that where education increase has led to large classes, the same large classes are affecting the quality of education. Teaching and learning becomes a problem where instructional materials are few and classroom space is limited and the teacher can hardly follow up on the performance of each and every student. In an attempt to find out strategies for coping with teaching and learning in large classes, teachers seem to understand the problems of teaching in large classes and the remedies put in place to address these problems include the provision and sharing of instructional materials, constructing more classrooms and encouraging student-centered methods like giving assignments, examinations and home work. These remedies will help policy makers tackle the problems of USE and UPE schools.

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