

Effects of a Large Class Size on Effective Curriculum Implementation

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ABSTRACT The study sought to examine the feelings and attitudes of heads and teachers towards how a large class size affects effective curriculum implementation in primary schools of Zimbabwe. The researchers used questionnaires as the data collection instrument. In the study, 20 teachers and 5 heads were requested to respond. Questionnaires for heads were different from the teachers' although both sought to tape the same information. The responses were presented in tables and graphs and then analyzed. An analysis of the results shows that the current teacher to pupil ratio of 1:40 was too large. Hence, both the head and teachers felt that it should be reduced to as low as 1:30. The respondents felt that a large class is not conducive to cater to individual differences. Marking and provision of adequate learning materials were signed as majority constraints in large class sizes. The results further revealed that supervision in general and discipline were a thorn in the flesh in most large class sizes.

INTRODUCTION

Effective curriculum implementation calls for a conducive working environment, which is possible if various variables that influence its success are satisfied. Such variables include good classroom management, discipline, effective lesson delivery, supervision and class size. After independence, the Black government took a bold decision to educate all the Zimbabweans who had been deprived of education by successive colonial regimes and war. Because of the imbalance between the Whites and Blacks educationally, the Africans had a high demand for education. To that end, Wadesango (2011) acknowledged the government's deliberate move to educate many Zimbabweans by ensuring that large numbers of learners receive primary, secondary and tertiary education.

From 1980 onwards the enrolment increased significantly. However, the increase in enrolment was not matched with the provision of adequate resources in terms of finance, human and materials. As such, many initiatives were taken in an attempt to educate every child in Zimbabwe. The Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) (2007) made the following observation.

Since 1980 various changes have been initiated in the education system, inter alia, expansion of the education system to cater for every-

one in Zimbabwe. More schools were built to enable to education system to accommodate many Black children who had been denied education during the colonial era, the class size burgeoned, the teacher to pupil ratio increased from 1:30 to 1:45 in secondary schools and 1:35 to 1:60 in some schools, and the multi-shift system commonly called hot-sitting in Zimbabwe became the modus operandi in most high sub-urban schools.

It should be appreciated that where there is a cause there is an effect. In 1981 the government passed a bill, which aimed at ensuring that there be education for all by the year 2000. The policy had to be implemented without delay and the provision of resources had to be carried out although they were scarce. Since few resources were available, the only viable and reasonable solution to ease human resources was to advocate for a high teacher-pupil ratio. A large teacher-pupil ratio contributed to the high failure rate at grade seven, junior certificate and Ordinary ("O") levels. Their underperformance may be attributed to a weak and faulty educational foundation. The Nziramasanga Commission (1999: 32) makes the following recommendation, "Teaching must be individualized as children are not equally gifted". Such a recommendation is not attainable and practical given the large class sizes prevailing in Zimbabwe. ZOU (2007) states that, "Option C proposes an operational teacher to pupil ratio in the classroom and inevitably affect the efficiency of the system."

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In the same vein, Nkomo (1995: 46) comments, “*From general observation, Zimbabwean teachers generally cannot effectively implement curriculum especially with the abnormally huge class sizes caused by the expansion in education without adequate facilities and resources.*” From the cited authorities it is clear that large class sizes impinge effective curriculum implementation. Significant reforms as already alluded to in order to improve the quality of education have been undertaken in Zimbabwe. Surprisingly the teacher to pupil ratio has remained high. From 1980 up to early 1990s emphasis was on mass education that is, sending everyone who needed education to school paying little or no attention to quality. It should be noted from the inception of the Economic Structural Adjustment (ESAP) that there was a paradigm shift from quantitative to qualitative aspirations. Quality is difficult to achieve where class sizes are large. Zvobgo (1997: 36) has the following revelations.

Between 1979 and 1990, enrolment in government and non-government primary schools grew from 819,500 to 2,281,595 in 1990, a one hundred and seventy eight percent rise. Much of the increase in the 1980s was a result of many youths, who prior to independence had been denied advantage of the new dispensation to enter school.

The 1991 Education Amendment Act reintroduced school fees in urban areas whilst exempting the rural schools thereby creating a strain on such institutions. Most parents transferred their children from urban to rural schools resulting in large class sizes in such organizations. The Secretary’s Circular Minutes Number 5 of 2009 reinforced the same stance, as only urban schools are to charge tuition fees. However, it should be noted that even though school fees is not paid in rural schools, the parents pay levies in addition to their free labor. The Nziramasanga Commission (1999: 10) shares the same sentiments as it comments thus:

...In rural areas parents pay building funds and are often required to provide labor and bricks for new classrooms, and that in any case their contribution to education has not been taken into account by government.

It has been noted with interest that the enrolment of students in the majority of Zimbabwean schools is not based on ability but mixed ability. In addition to that there are no special

teachers and enough resources in most Zimbabwean schools. As such, special needs children are mixed with those who are gifted. Faced with a large class size, teachers tend to neglect or give little help to those who need special attention. Due to such neglect, the Nziramasanga Commission (1999: 10) makes the following observation,

There is a high dropout rate in the education system, which has been compounded by a high failure rate. Both parents and children no longer see any tangible gain from education.

From the given citations, it can be deduced that a large class size has negative effects as far as effective curriculum implementation is concerned. As such quality is likely to be compromised by a large teacher to pupil ratio. Zvobgo (1997: 97) further states, “Teacher-student ratios remain so high that they cannot be effectively coped with, with the resultant deterioration in the quality of education evident today.”

It is against this background that a study to investigate the effect of class size on effective curriculum implementation was carried out in five Shurugwi primary schools urban cluster of the Midlands province.

The Concept of Curriculum Implementation

Nkomo (1995) views curriculum implementation as the process the learner should acquire the planned, or intended, incidental or unintended experiences, knowledge, skills, ideas and attitudes that are aimed at enabling him to survive in his particular society.

According to Grace and Edward (2015) in Oghuvbu (2011), curriculum is the summation of a systematically planned process of teaching and learning based on the aims and objectives of the educational policy of any country. It is made up of academic or subject based curriculum and non-academic or extra curriculum programs. The primary schools’ curriculum module is an academic curriculum based on all subjects designed for the primary school level.

According to Grace and Edward (2015) in Urevbu (1990), curriculum is a human educational enterprise in which people attempt to do something in a purposeful thoughtful and careful way. Acting purposefully with some procedure in mind in one sense at least, holding that end or procedure as valuable, good and desirable.

Curriculum implementation may therefore be defined as the process of putting into use or application of the educational proposals. Putting into practice the educational proposals effectively is determined by a variety of variables. Hence, some of the factors, which affect effective curriculum implementation, are discussed below.

Factors Affecting Curriculum Implementation

In line with the above, Grace and Edward (2015) (in Nwaogu 1990) assert that for teaching and learning to go on smoothly, factors other than teachers and the pupil play a significant role. The ecology of the classroom cannot therefore be overemphasized. Ecology of the classroom according to Nwaogu refers to the environment of people, that is, the curriculum, actual teaching, classroom management, classroom climate (noisy or quite) and the physical condition of the classroom (dark or ventilated, hard floor, arrangement of seats)

It is worth noting that several factors affect effective curriculum implementation. Below are some major ones observed by Nkomo (1995), including incompetence of classroom teachers, attitude to school, inadequate learning facilities, lack of interest from support groups, a hostile school environment and other issues.

Incompetence of Classroom Teachers

It is worth observing that the mentioned factors occur simultaneously and continually such that it may be difficult to attribute a given scenario to just one or two attributes. Having acknowledged that failure to implement curriculum effectively may be due to incompetent teachers, the situation may be worse in Zimbabwe considering that a teacher is expected to have a class size with a rate of 1:40 or more. Such a teacher may even be demotivated by other factors such as low remuneration. A recent study of teachers in Prince Edward Island of America found significant differences in job satisfaction between teachers with student numbers ranging from 16 to 30 students as compared to teachers whose classes exceeded 30 students. Those with large classes were demotivated and unenthusiastic as compared to their counterparts (Bellirean et al. 2002).

Learners' Negative Attitudes Towards School

Curriculum implementation can only be effective if the students have positive attitudes towards learning (Wadesango 2011). If their attitude is negative, there may be need to persuade them to change their behavior. Given the class size in Zimbabwe, which ranges from 40 or more students, it may be difficult to cultivate a positive attitude on every student. The end result may be a failure to perform according to expected standards. To that end, Tsvangirai (2009) wrote, "Our teacher to pupil ratios are very poor"

Lack of Interest from Support Groups

In a situation where a country lacks cordial relations with others, as is the current scenario in Zimbabwe, support groups like the churches and donor organizations may shun educational support. Such a situation may result in serious problems such as shortages of teaching and learning materials. The end product may be an ineffective curriculum implementation. In some cases the school experiences a hostile environment. As such parents may not provide adequate resources while the school authorities including the parents expect high quality work. Such a situation coupled with heavy workload may negatively impact effective curriculum implementation. Leithwood and Beatty (2008: 108) comment thus, "At the classroom level, evidence suggests that both volume and complexity of teachers' workloads have important negative consequences."

Demands from External Boards

It can be argued that when examinations are set, they disregard environments from which teachers and pupils work. School examination boards grade students uniformly according to their own expectations disregarding the fact that some students may be working in the poorest of environments, which hinder comprehensive and quality learning. Given such a situation, the teacher may concentrate on those with specified abilities at the expense of those who need attention. In some cases, if given a difficult environment to work, the teacher may despair. According to Leithwood and Beatty (2008: 109),

Teachers' commitment and stress are negatively influenced by class sizes that are per-

ceived to make unreasonable demands on the time required for preparation and marking and to erode the opportunities for providing differentiated instruction for students.

The Concept of Class Size

Class size refers to the number of pupils or students at a specific level taught together in the same environment by a single teacher. The concept of class size in the Zimbabwean situation cannot be fully understood without reference to the historical background before and after independence. Before independence in 1980, Zimbabwe had a dual education system comprising the Whites and Blacks. The education for the Whites was compulsory for every child as well as heavily funded by the state as from 1929. On the contrary, the Blacks experienced a bottleneck system of education where only a few gifted pupils were allowed to get education with little assistance from the state. Zvobgo (1997: 39) makes the following comment, “*The education system in colonial Zimbabwe was discriminatory. Enormous amounts of money were spent on education but most of the money went to the minority ethnic groups like Whites, Asian descendants and Coloreds.*”

As a result of the cited scenario, the majority of the Black people were deliberately deprived of an educational opportunity. Hence, the class sizes for the Whites were well monitored and left at manageable levels. When the Blacks gained independence in 1980, they had no option except to quickly reverse the situation. Hence, an education for all policy was adopted and had to be achieved through a deliberate move to provide adequate and political support. Such support was made possible by the 1981 Education Amendment Act Number 17 aimed at reversing the 1979 Education Act (Mumbengegwi 1995). In the same vein, Chiwaro and Manzini (1995: 13) assert that,

With Zimbabwe’s independence, the new government sought to correct the imbalance by investing in rural primary and secondary education. This policy led to one of the fastest educational expansion programs in Africa.

It is worth noting that both human and material were inadequate since the country was just coming out of a devastating war coupled with neglect of the majority African education by the successive colonial regimes. Hence, the educa-

tion for all policy pushed the legislatures to draft a teacher-pupil ratio that was too big for comfort to teachers, pupils and the system. Since the successive colonial powers had a bias in terms of training personnel and providing education, there was a serious shortage of teachers. In the primary sector, the teachers who had been trained were transferred to the secondary sector where the problem of human resource shortage was more acute. To that end, Mumbengegwi (1995: 55) says,

There was an acute shortage of textbooks for use by pupils. The shortage of teachers was exacerbated by the transfer of some primary teachers to secondary schools, where even more serious shortages were being experienced.

It is worth observing that the scenario in terms of teacher-pupil ratio has not yet changed till date despite an improved teacher-training program. According to the Director’s Circular Number 6 of 2008, the teacher pupil ratio for primary education is as follows,

Primary grades 1 to 7: 1:40

Technical and vocational subjects 1:100

The circular further states thus, “In cases where a primary school offers a vocational subject, the 1:100 ratio will also apply.”

Special Allocation is as Follows:

Special class	1:19
Deaf and hearing	1:7
Severely mentally handicapped	1:7
Physically	1:10
Blind and visually handicapped	1:10

The newsletter from the office of the Prime Minister (Tsvangirai 2009: 04) quotes the Minister of Education, Sport and Culture saying, “*The recommended teachers-pupil ratio in schools is one as to forty.*” From the cited documents, it is clear that large classes are currently experienced despite the fact they maybe compromising quality. Too large a class size may overburden the teachers to the extent they may give less work as well as fail to give adequate guidance, counseling and immediate feedback individually.

The Effects of Class Size on Curriculum at the Class Level

The number of pupils in a class militates against the teachers’ ability to mark timeously

and give quick as well accurate feedback. Marking can be done in order to diagnose the exact nature of a learner's difficulties. In this case, the teacher tries to find out where and how the child has gone wrong and how he/she can be assisted. Such a task is difficult if the teacher-pupil ratio is big as is the current situation in Zimbabwe. Loeb et al. (2005) in their research found that high levels of staff are a function of low salaries, large class sizes, problems with facilities and lack of textbooks.

If the children's work is not marked on time, their motivation may be seriously affected. A large class such as 1:40 can make it difficult for the teacher to write comments and evaluate children's efforts as sounded by McPhilling and Rae (1992: 68) who say, "*This is difficult in a large classroom setup.*" If the class is small, it may be easy or possible for teachers to cater for individual differences as well as attending to children's needs timeously. Immediate feedback reinforces the teaching and learning process. Marking also guides the process of teaching and learning to its logical conclusions. In curriculum implementation, marking grades pupils and promotes competition among pupils. As such, that can be possible if the work is marked on time.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative interpretive research methodology. The study concentrated on the qualitative form since this research aimed at elucidating what the participants had to say with regard to effects of large class sizes in their natural settings. In this regard, it was imperative that a methodological perspective be adopted to allow the findings to develop "from the data itself rather than from preconceived, rigidly structured, and highly quantified techniques that pigeonhole the empirical social world into the operational definitions that the researcher has constructed" (Creswell 2002). The problem identified in this study demanded that the participants themselves be allowed to freely express their feelings, views and opinions. To this end, Sherman and Webb (Ely 1991:4) provide the following definition "*...qualitative implies a direct concern with feelings, experiences and views as lived or felt or undergone...*" This study adopted a case study research design. A case

study is described as a form of descriptor research that gathers a large amount of information about one or a few participants and thus investigates a few cases in considerable depth (Thomas and Nelson 2001). Purposive convenience sampling of twenty schoolteachers and five school heads from the Shurugwi Education District was adopted in the selection of participants for this study. The researchers used questionnaires to get information from the respondents.

Ethical Considerations

According to Creswell (2002), a researcher has an obligation to respect the rights, needs, values and desires of the respondents. The research was therefore conducted with respect and concern for the dignity and welfare of the informants. The individual's right to decline to participate was respected in this study. The researchers ensured that the purpose and activities of the research were clearly explained to the participants. The researchers of this document ensured that promises and commitments were honored by safeguarding the participants' identities.

Study Objectives

The study sought to find the feelings and attitudes of heads and teachers to the extent to which a large class size affects effective curriculum implementation in primary schools of Zimbabwe.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows that the male teachers teach smaller classes, as three (15%) of them have

Table 1: The size of classes taught by teachers in schools

Class range	Heads (%)		Teachers (%)	
	M	F	M	F
Less than 25	0	0	3	0
26 – 30 children	0	2	0	3
31 – 35 children	0	0	1	1
36 – 40 children	0	0	2	1
41 – 45 children	2	0	0	1
46 – 50 children	0	0	3	5
51 and above	1	0	0	0
Total	3	2	9	11
Grand total	5		20	

classes with less than 25 children. Perhaps this is due to the fact that male teachers teach senior or upper classes grades (6-7), which may be screened to the extent of leaving classes with less gifted classes with smaller number of children (teacher pupil ratio). On the contrary, female teachers teach large classes, as five (25%) have classes in the range 46-50 while three (15%) males teach children in the same category. This is a deviation from the ministry regulation and policy, which stipulates that the teacher-pupil ratio should be 1:40. Perhaps the school with a small teacher-pupil ratio has the means of paying extra teachers employed in their institutions.

Perception of Heads and Teachers on the Extent to which a Large Class Size Affects Effective Curriculum Implementation

In this section, the respondents were asked to state views in the form of ‘agree’, ‘strongly agree’, ‘neutral’, ‘disagree’ and ‘strongly disagree’ on a Likert scale. Hence, ‘agree’ and ‘strongly agree’ shall be construed as an agreement (A), and ‘disagree’ and ‘strongly disagree’ shall mean disagreement (D), respectively.

Table 2: Management and supervision of small classes

Heads	A	N	D	Total
Number	4	1	0	5
%	80	20	0	100
Teachers				
Number	12	1	7	20
%	60	5	35	100

Table 2 shows that four (80%) of the heads of schools agreed that teachers with small class sizes supervise and manage their classes easily. One head remained neutral. It can therefore be concluded that large classes are not easy to manage and supervise as alluded by Wadesango and Shumba (2009). Of the 20 teacher respondents, 12 (60%) agreed that they were able to manage and supervise the classes they were currently teaching. Seven (35%) disagreed and one (5%) remained neutral. Incidentally those who disagreed had large classes. The reason why some teachers with large classes agreed with the notion may be because they are now used to and addicted to teaching those large classes. Nonetheless, to a greater extent both

the teachers and the heads concurred that small classes are easy to supervise and manage.

According to Table 3, four (80%) of the heads of schools agreed with the assumption that teachers with manageable classes give adequate work to all pupils. One (20%) remained neutral while none of the heads disagreed. Fourteen (70%) of the teachers agreed that they gave adequate work to all their pupils. Two (10%) of the teachers remained neutral. Four (20%) disagreed. Both the teachers with small and large classes agreed that they gave adequate work to all their pupils. Perhaps those with large classes have become used to them and have developed some effective means of dealing with such classes. Those who disagreed had large classes, which show that to a lesser extent according to the teachers, class size affects the amount of work that is given by the teachers.

Table 3: Perception on management and supervision of small classes

Heads	A	N	D	Total
Number	4	1	0	5
%	80	20	0	100
Teachers				
Number	14	2	4	20
%	70	10	20	100

Table 4 indicates that four (80%) of the heads of schools agreed that teachers with large classes are overloaded and overburdened. One (20%) head of school remained neutral and none of the heads of schools disagreed. The Table further indicates that ten (50%) of the teachers agreed with the assumption that large classes overload and overburden teachers. On the other hand, ten (50%) disagreed with the notion that large classes overburden and overload teachers. Hence, the head thinks that large classes to a greater extent overburden and overload teachers. Such sentiments are shared by Wadesango (2012) in his study on factors that affect staff

Table 4: Heads and teachers’ opinions on the assumption that teachers with large classes are overloaded

Heads	A	N	D	Total
Number	4	1	0	5
%	80	20	0	100
Teachers				
Number	10	0	10	20
%	50	0	50	100

morale, wherein the issue of large classes was prominent and most of the respondents indicated that they did not have time for research because of large class sizes.

Table 5 shows that three (60%) of the heads confirmed that marking and the standard of work are compromised in large classes. One head of school (20%) remained neutral while another head of school (20%) disagreed that marking and standard of work is compromised in large class sizes. According to the heads' responses marking and the standard of work is compromised to a greater extent compromised in large classes. Table 5 further indicates that 11 (55%) of the teachers agreed that marking and the standard of work are compromised in large class sizes. One teacher (5%) remained neutral according to the teachers, marking and the standard of work is compromised in large classes. Perhaps the teachers have become used to large classes to the extent that they have developed some effective strategies that enable them to perform according to expected standards.

Table 5: Effects of large classes on marking and standard of work

<i>Heads</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>Total</i>
Number	3	1	1	5
%	60	20	20	100
Teachers				
Number	11	1	4	20
%	55	5	40	100

Table 6 indicates that four (80%) of the heads agreed that neither bright nor slow learners are neglected in large classes. One (20%) of the heads remained neutral. It can be concluded that to a large extent either slow or bright learners are neglected in large classes. The Table further shows that four (20%) of the teachers agreed that either too bright or slow learners are neglected in large classes. Four (20%) of the teachers remained neutral. Twelve (60%) of the teachers disagree. Thus, to a large extent according to the teachers, either too bright or slow learners are not neglected in large classes. Perhaps the contradiction between the heads and the teachers is due to the fact that the heads focus on the whole school (all classes) while the teachers are confined to their allocated or assigned classes. Another fact is that even if neglect is evident, teachers may feel threatened to reveal it because the education policy spells out clear-

ly that both slow and fast learners must be catered to during teaching and learning sessions. During these days when the teachers' status has been weakened and eroded by the economic hardships, he/she is found to be demotivated. Such sentiments are observed by Loeb et al.'s (2005) research, which found that it is difficult to cater to individual learners' if class sizes are large.

Table 6: Effects of large class size on gifted and slow learners

<i>Heads</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>Total</i>
Number	4	1	0	5
%	80	20	0	100
Teachers				
Number	4	4	12	20
%	20	20	60	100

Table 7 shows that two (40%) of the heads agreed that monitoring, supervision and discipline in large classes is compromised. Two (40%) of the heads remained neutral while one (20%) of the heads disagreed. According to the heads' responses, monitoring, supervision and discipline are compromised to a lesser extent in large classes. Table 7 also indicates that 11 (55%) of the teachers confirmed that monitoring, supervision and discipline are compromised in large classes. Their views are echoed by Wadesango (2012) whose study established that in large classes, teachers cannot know their students' profiles, as a result it will be difficult to control the class in terms of discipline and other related issues. One teacher (5%) remained neutral while eight (40%) disagreed. It can be deduced that according to the teachers' responses, monitoring, supervision and discipline are compromised to a larger extent in large classes. Perhaps the variation in responses between the teachers and the heads is due to the fact that teachers are the classroom managers and they deal directly with the pupils most of the time whereas heads have less contact with pupils on a face-to-face basis daily.

Table 7: Effects of class size on monitoring, supervision and discipline

<i>Heads</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>Total</i>
Number	2	2	1	5
%	40	40	20	100
Teachers				
Number	11	1	8	20
%	55	5	40	100

The statistics in Table 8 indicate that three (60%) of the heads agreed that learning materials are difficult to provide in large classes. One (20%) of the heads remained neutral while another one (20%) disagreed. The Table further showed that 18 (90%) of the teachers confirmed that provision of learning materials is difficult to fulfill in large classes. One (5%) of the teachers remained neutral while another one (5%) disagreed. It can therefore be concluded that provision of learning materials in large classes are problematic as observed by Nkomo (1995) in his study, which found that it is difficult for practitioners to source enough material for a large class and the quality of material is also compromised.

Table 8: Effects of large classes on provision of learning materials

<i>Heads</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>Total</i>
Number	3	1	1	5
%	60	20	20	100
Teachers				
Number	18	1	1	20
%	90	5	5	100

Table 9 shows that two (40%) of the heads concurred that they lose enthusiasm when teaching large classes. One (20%) of the heads remained neutral while two (40%) of the heads disagreed. It can therefore be concluded that large classes render the teachers enthusiasm to a lesser extent. The Table further indicates that 16 (80%) of the teachers agree that they sometimes lose enthusiasm when teaching large classes. Two (10%) of the teachers remained neutral while the other two (10%) disagreed. It can be wrapped up that to a greater extent teachers lose enthusiasm when teaching large classes. Such sentiments are supported by Belliveau et al. (2002) and Wadesango (2012) whose studies established that teachers who were teaching large classes were demotivated and their morale was

Table 9: Effects of large classes on motivation of teachers

<i>Heads</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>Total</i>
Number	2	1	2	5
%	40	20	40	100
Teachers				
Number	16	2	2	20
%	80	10	10	100

dwindling. They were no longer committed to their work.

The results show that 10 (50%) of the teachers (Table 10) are demotivated by the size of their classes. Three (15%) of them remained neutral while 7 (35%) are comfortable with their class sizes. Those who were demotivated have large classes. Hence, it can be concluded that to a greater extent teachers with large classes are demotivated. Such views are observed by Leithwood and Beatty (2005), who postulate that large classes demoralize teachers because they have high volumes of work to mark, as a result they do not have time to do their own things. This ends up compromising quality of products produced by the education system.

Table 10: The effects of a large class on specific teachers

<i>Teachers</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>Total</i>
Number	10	3	7	20
%	50	15	35	100

Perception of Heads and Teachers on the Current Teacher to Pupil Ratio

In this section, the perceptions of heads and teachers were sought using open-ended questions. Most of the responses shall be presented in the form description since the data falls in qualitative category. Three (60%) of the heads felt that the teacher-pupil ratio is manageable while two (40%) thought it was too large. The reasons for those who thought that the current teacher-pupil ratio is okay were that if the teachers knew what they are expected of, large classes are manageable. The heads that felt that the 1:40 teacher pupil ratio was not manageable said that large classes would make it difficult for class teachers to give individual attention and pupils would not benefit. Such views are supported by Leithwood and Beatty (2005), who assert that a large class is a challenge to the teacher since he/she has to source and plan work according to ability, and as a result large classes are not manageable.

Eighteen (80%) of the teachers felt that the current teacher-pupil ratio of 1:40 is too large. Some of their arguments were as follows, it is too big since teachers will not be able to cater for individual differences, individual attention, provision of adequate work and effective learn-

ing would not be fulfilled. One teacher had the following comment, “*It can work well if the children are screened and are highly intelligent.*” Another one said, “*The teacher-pupil ratio should be 1:30 for fast learners and 1:25 for those with mixed abilities.*” Both the teachers and heads felt that the current teacher-pupil ratio must be reduced because the span of supervising, controlling and monitoring of progress negatively affects the pass rate of the classes. They both felt that measurement and evaluation of work is either ignored or delayed. Another view is that only selected pupils would benefit from the teacher’s efforts in the classes with the current teacher-pupil ratio of 1:40. Hence, neglect abuse is possible to slow learners under the current teacher-pupil ratio.

The statistics for teachers in Table 11 when ranked in ascending order and appear as follows: 15, 20; 20; 25; 25; 25; 30; 30; 30; 30; 30; 30; 30; 30; 35; 35.

All the teachers suggested a teachers-pupil ratio that was below 1:40. Even those who had initially indicated that the teacher-pupil ratio of 1:40 was manageable changed their views. The Table further indicates that the modal for the suggested teacher-pupil ratio 1:30. The mean for the ideal teacher-pupil ratio for the teachers is calculated as,

$$\begin{aligned}
 X &= \Sigma X \\
 \text{Where,} \\
 X &= \text{mean} \\
 \Sigma &= \text{summation sign} \\
 n &= \text{number of scores} \\
 \text{Therefore,} \\
 \frac{25+30+25+15+30+25+20+30+30+30+25+30+30+20+30+30+35+20}{20} \\
 &= \frac{545}{20} = 27.25
 \end{aligned}$$

The mean or average for suggestions by the teachers on an ideal teacher-pupil ratio is less than the modal and the established 1:40. It can be noted that on average, the teachers are suggesting a teacher-pupil ratio, which is below 1:30. Hence, the current teacher-pupil ratio of 1:40 could be viewed as too large.

Table 11: The ideal teacher-pupil ratio

<i>Suggested class sizes</i>																	
Teachers	25	30	25	15	30	25	20	30	30	30	35	30	25	30	30	20	30
Heads	20	30	30	52	25												
<i>Suggested class sizes</i>																	
Teachers	30	35	20														

Table 11 shows that the heads’ responses can be ranked in ascending order as follows: 20, 25, 30, 30, 52.

The modal for the heads’ responses is 1:30. The average for the heads’ suggested ideal teacher-pupil ratio is calculated as follows,

$$\begin{aligned}
 &\frac{20+25+30+30+52}{5} \\
 &= \frac{147}{5} = 29.4
 \end{aligned}$$

The average on the suggestion for an ideal teacher-pupil ratio suggested by the heads is below 1:30 and below the current teacher-pupil ratio of 1:40. It can be deduced that the current teacher-pupil ratio is perceived as too high by the heads. Only one head suggested a teacher-pupil ratio that was above 1:40.

It can be noted that both the teachers and the heads suggested an ideal teachers-pupil ratio, which is below 1:30 on average. The modal teacher-pupil ratio for both teachers and heads was 1:30 respectively.

Table 12: Aspects of teaching affected by a large class size.

<i>Aspect</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
Marking consumes time	1	14
Scarce resources	2	13
Supervision	3	8
Discipline and control	4.5	6
Remedial and extension work	4.5	6
Quality of work	6.5	5
Quality of work	6.5	5
Group work	8	4
Children’s participation in oral exercises	9	2
Recording	10.3	1
Tests	10.3	1
Sitting arrangements	10.3	1

Table 12 shows that twelve aspects were identified as aspects that are affected by teaching a large class size. Of the twelve identified aspects, the most affected were eight and include marking, availability of resources, supervision, discipline, provision of remedial and ex-

tension work, quality of work, quality of work and group participation. It is interesting to note that even those who had earlier indicated that they were comfortable with large classes had problems on marking, providing resources and supervision, which are key aspects in as far as implementing curriculum effectively is concerned.

How Large Class Sizes Affect Teaching

Perceptions of both teachers and heads were as follows regarding how large class sizes affect teaching, that is, some pupils will not listen because they will be under the cover of too large numbers. Such views are echoed by Geoffrey and Woods (1996) whose study established that that it was not easy for teachers to manage large classes as most of the learners will be busy doing their own work not related to what the teacher will be teaching. The net effect of this is that weaknesses and differences in children are difficult to note, address and redress. Sometimes pupils are given inadequate work because the teacher will be avoiding a heavy marking load. Furthermore, thoroughness is compromised. Eventually concentration is more on fast learners at the expense of slow learners. On the other hand, distribution of learning materials is difficult if not impossible to fulfill due to wear and tear. As alluded to earlier on, marking is strenuous and tiresome.

Currently the shortage of textbooks, manila, markers, furniture and other essential material due to inflation hampers efficiency and effectiveness of the teaching and learning process. Class management becomes more challenging and feedback takes quite a long time to reach individuals, hence will not be effective. Such views are supported by the Zimbabwe Minister of Education, Sport, Art and Culture quoted in the newsletters from the Prime Minister's office of 2 September 2009. The article was urging the government to reduce the teacher-pupil ratio as it is assumed to affect the quality of teaching that the learners receive. Contrary to the views cited, one teacher said a large class was enjoyable and challenging.

How do Teachers Solve the Problems of Pupils with Disabilities and Slow Learners

The teachers' views were as follows, that is, disability does not mean inability, and hence

pupils with disabilities should be given work suitable for them and in line with their operational level. Some thought that extreme pupils have to be referred to special classes. Others thought special lessons should be provided in the afternoon while the able ones are working in groups. Once more, the aspect of neglect creeps in as those considered bright will be working without the teacher's maximum concentration.

Perception of Heads and Teachers on the Sharing of Resources in Large Classes

The respondents felt that wear and tear is rampant in large classes since the children struggle and fight for control over resources. Some felt that durability of such resources is at stake and financial resources would be stretched to the extent that the schools may end up bankrupt. Such a situation they claimed would render teaching and learning ineffective.

Teachers' Suggestion on What Should be Done to the Current Teacher to Pupil Ratio

Nineteen (95%) of the teachers thought that the ratio of 1:40 should be reduced. Their reasons for such a suggestion were that a ratio such as 1:30 can enable each and every child to be effectively attended to by the teacher. Maximum teaching and improvement of quality work would be achieved, as supervision of children's work would be possible. Some teachers felt that a ratio such as 1:25 would enable the teachers to manage their classes thereby promoting quality and good results. Only one teacher thought that the current teacher-pupil ratio should be maintained. Perhaps the teacher has become accustomed to the situation such that he/she developed some skills that assist in easing heavy loads associated with large classes.

CONCLUSION

The study found that to a greater extent effective curriculum implementation is hampered in large class sizes. Both the head and teacher respondents felt that the current teacher to pupil ratio of 1:40 was too large as it fails to enable the teacher to cater to individual differences. It was discovered that marking, provision of adequate resources and supervision of children's work were at stake in large classes. Hence, the

core business of teaching and learning hinges upon such variables. If they are not properly and adequately catered for, they may seriously affect the output and outcomes in the Zimbabwean education system. It emerged in this study that pupils jostle and scramble for scarce resources and that some teachers end up adopting unorthodox methods of administration such as letting children mark each other's books or delaying feedback despite its central role in the provision of quality education. The teachers are overworked to the extent of being demotivated.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ♦ The current teacher-pupil ratio should be reduced to 1:30.
- ♦ If the current teacher-pupil ratio is not slashed downwards, adequate teaching and learning resources should be provided and teachers should be handsomely rewarded.
- ♦ There should be a deliberate move to conduct research on the teacher-pupil ratio after every year or two years to give the planners an insight on what takes place on the ground.

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