

INFLUENCE OF CLASS SIZE ON THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN FRENCH IN ONITHSA EDUCATION ZONE

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Abstract

This study examined the effect of class size on the academic performance of Junior Secondary School Students in French. Three research questions guided the study. It was an ex-post-facto research. The sample comprised ten (10) French teachers and five hundred (500) students in Onitsha Education Zone of Anambra State. The instrument used for data collection was students' academic performance record from the Teacher's Grade Book and two researcher constructed questionnaires for teachers and students. Mean was used to answer the three research questions and t-test was used to test the two null hypotheses. The findings revealed that large class size negatively affects academic performance of students in French while small class size enhances or positively affects the academic performance of Junior Secondary School Students in French. Based on the findings, recommendations were made and suggestions for further research were stated.

Introduction

French is a romance language spoken originally in France, Belgium, Luxembourg and Switzerland (<http://library.thinkquest.or+g/o6aug/02037/hisfrench.html>). Many countries use French language as their mother tongue or fluent second language. According to Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, "it is an official language of all United Nations agencies and a large number of international organizations". Nigeria as a country needs French in order to relate with her Franco-phone neighbours, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union. Apart from this political importance of French language to Nigeria, it also has commercial importance. Emphasizing further, the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004:10) stated that

"For smooth interaction with our neighbours, it is desirable for every Nigerian to speak French. Accordingly, French shall be the second official language in Nigeria and it shall be compulsory in Primary and Junior Secondary Schools..."

This reinforces the philosophical basis for the introduction of French language into Nigerian Secondary Curriculum. So, every Nigerian student shall study French, as the second foreign language, the first being English Language. Under this arrangement, a typical Nigerian Junior Secondary School student shall be expected to study three (3) languages namely, his mother tongue, English language and French language. (Ezenwa, 2006).

However, the study of French language has become a very challenging business for both students and their teachers. This is as a result of increase in class size in both public and private schools especially the public schools in Nigeria because, most private schools are not affordable by all and the public schools are taken care of by the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Scheme. This issue of class size has become extremely alarming in this 21st Century because of the increased social value of education and the introduction of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) which, according to Ezenwa (2006) "*is basic and free from the primary to the junior secondary school*". The objective of this scheme is to ensure that every Nigerian, irrespective of background, gets formal education. Due to this, education has been much more accessible because of government funding and has grown significantly because of the growth in population.

French is a very lively language that requires an enabling environment and a class size for proper assimilation of lessons by the students. For a student to be competent and fluent in the use of French language, the student needs to master all the aspects of the language, namely, grammar, lexis and structure, phonetics, essay-writing, oral expression and French literature. These could be achieved through individual attention, written assignments, creative activities, problem-solving activities, projects, essay tests and field trips. The Federal Republic of Nigeria stipulated that “*a classroom should be enrolled 20-30 pupils per teacher*”. As a result, the researcher wants to investigate the issue of class size and its impact on the academic performance of Junior Secondary School Students in French Language.

Statement of Problem

Class size has to do with the number of Students regularly in a teacher’s room www.reduceclasssizenow.org/sa_articles/SA8.Pdf. Our schools have grown enormously because of our country’s exponential population growth and the government is unable to make provisions in order to absorb the fast growing population. As a result, there is a great increase in number of students regularly in a teacher’s room.

French language as a subject requires a very manageable class size to enable the teacher to develop a relationship with each of the students and to pay individual attention to the students. It is against this background that the researcher wanted to determine the effects of class size on the academic performance of junior Secondary School Students in French.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to find out the effects of class size on the academic performance of junior secondary school students in French. Most precisely, this study seeks to achieve the following:

1. to investigate the effects of large class size on the academic performance of junior secondary school students in French.
2. to identify the effects of small class size on the academic performance of Junior Secondary School Students in French.
3. to find out the effects of class size on teaching-learning interaction of teachers and students.

Significance of the Study

A lot of people express the opinion that the information provided by the class size will help the policy makers and government with valid and reliable information in determining the most suitable class size in our schools. It will help the teacher to determine the effects of the large class size on the academic performance of students.

Therefore, the findings of the study will provide information to the teachers, government officials, parents and the general public on the effects of class size on teaching-learning interaction of teachers and students.

Scope of the Study

The study was delimited to the effect of class size on the academic performance of Junior Secondary School Students in Onitsha Education Zone covering the effects of large class size and small class size on the academic performance of Junior Secondary School Students in French and the effects of class size on teaching-learning interaction of teachers and students.

Research Questions

The following research question guided the study:

1. To what extent does large class size affect the academic performance of Junior Secondary School Students in French.
2. How does small class size affect the academic performance of Junior Secondary School students in French?
3. To what extent does class size affect the teaching-learning interaction of teachers and students?

Research Methodology

The study was an ex-post-facto research which aimed at determining the effect of class size on the academic performance of junior secondary students in French: Case study of Onitsha Education Zone which is made up of three Local Government Areas: Onitsha North, Onitsha South and Ogbaru.

The population of the study was made up of twenty-five (25) French teachers and Nineteen thousand, seven hundred and seven (19707) Junior Secondary School Students in Onitsha Education Zone; making it a total of Nineteen Thousand, Seven Hundred and Thirty-two (19, 732).

Proportionate stratified random sampling was used in the selection of 6 schools from the 14 schools that offer French language. Simple random sampling was used to select 504 French students and 10 French teachers from the 6 schools.

The research instrument used for this study was student's academic performance records and two questionnaires developed by the researcher for teachers and students titled "Class Size and Teaching-Learning Interaction of Teachers and Students Questionnaire". The questionnaires were made up of two parts. The first part was on bio-data of the respondents while the second part comprised items on class size and teaching-learning interaction of teachers and students. It had (1) one section with a total of 14 items for teachers and 10 for students. The items were structured on a four-point scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD).

The questionnaires were face validated by two experts in the Department of Educational Foundations from the Federal College of Education (Technical) Umunze, and an expert in measurement and evaluation in Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka. They made useful suggestions that were effected before the final copy was made.

The researcher collected the academic performance records of the Junior Secondary School Students in French language from the Teacher's Grade Book of the 6 schools. The researchers used a direct delivery technique in the administration of the instrument to the respondents. The copies of the questionnaires were administered personally to the respondents in their respective schools. In each school, the researcher had to wait on the spot for the respondents to fill in the responses, after which they were retrieved. At the end of the exercise, 510 questionnaire copies were recovered out of 514 (500 for students and 10 for teachers). 4 copies of the students' questionnaire were lost.

The researchers used mean scores of the academic performance records of the students to answer research questions one and two. Mean was used to answer research question three. The responses were rated based on a 4-point scale with the mean point of 2.50.

Results

The data generated was analyzed below in tables based on the research questions

Research Question One

To what extent does large class size affect the academic performance of Junior Secondary School Students in French?

The data for answering the above research question are presented in table 1 below.

Table 1: Mean scores of the Academic Performance records of Junior Secondary School Students in French language indicating the extent to which large class size affect academic performances of the students

Range of Scores	Frequency	Percentage	Remark
0-39	169	61.45	Fail (Poor Performance)
40-54	70	25.45	Pass (Fair Performance)
55-69	29	10.55	Credit (Good performance)
70-100	7	2.55	Alpha (Excellent Performance)
Total	275	100	
Mean Scores			
Class Size	N	X	Remark
Large Sized Classes	275	34.75	Poor Performance

Table 1 above shows the academic performance records of three (3) schools with large sized classes. A look at the table shows that out of 275 students, only 7(2.55%) scored A, 29(10.55%) scored C, 70(25.45%) scored P while 169(61.45%) scored F in French language. This indicated that only 106 students passed and 169 failed the subject. The mean score of the students in large class size was 34.75 which is very low. From the above table 1, therefore, there is a clear evidence of poor performance in large class.

Research Question 2: How does small class size affects academic performance of Junior Secondary School Students in French?

The data providing answers to the above research question are shown below.

Table 2: Mean scores of the Academic Performance records of Junior Secondary School Students indicating how small class size affects academic performance of the students in French language

Range of Scores	Frequency	Percentage	Remark
0-39	5	5.95	Fail (Poor Performance)
40-54	14	16.67	Pass (Fair Performance)
55-69	35	41.67	Credit (Good performance)
70-100	30	35.71	Alpha (Excellent Performance)
Total	84	100	
Mean Scores			
Class Size	N	X	Remark
Small Sized Classes	84	64.92	Good Performance

Table 2 showed the academic performance records of three (3) schools with small class sizes. Out of 84 students, 30(35.71%) scored Alpha (A), 35(41.67%) scored Credit (C), 14(16.67%) scored Pass (P), while 5(5.95%) scored (F) Fail. This indicated that out of 84 students 79 passed and only 5 failed the

subject. The mean score of the students in small class size was 64.92, which is an indication that there was high performance in small sized classes.

Research Question 3:

To what extent does class size affect the teaching-learning interaction of students and teachers?

The data answering the above research questions are presented in table 3 and 4.

Table 3: Mean ratings of teachers' response on the extent to which class size affect the teaching-learning interaction of teachers and students

S / N	Items	Teachers X	Comment
1	I address all the questions posed by the students.	3.30	Accepted
2	I attend to all individual problems of the students.	3.50	Accepted
3	There is more interaction between teachers and individual students in a small class size	2.20	Rejected
4	I make use of language laboratory during lessons	2.70	Accepted
5	I correct the students' assignment	2.80	Accepted
6	I always make instructional materials available to all the students.	2.50	Rejected
7	Small class size allows all the students to contribute in a particular topic of discussion.	2.50	Rejected
8	I have good relationship with my students.	3.80	Accepted
9	Small class size facilitates flow of communication between teachers and students.	3.80	Accepted
10	Small class size helps teachers in monitoring behavioural changes in students.	3.40	Accepted
11	Large class size facilitates development of social skills in students.	2.00	Rejected
12	Large class size facilitates cognitive learning.	3.50	Accepted
13	Class size of less than 30 facilitates easy teaching and learning.	3.80	Accepted
14	Small class provides teachers the ability to really understand their students' strengths and weakness.	3.07	Accepted
Cluster		3.11	Accepted

In the above table 3, items 1, 2, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13 and 14 had mean ratings of 2.50 and above. These indicated Acceptance. Items 3, 6, 7 and 11 portrayed Rejection. The table also had a cluster mean of 3.11 which indicated that the French language teachers in Onitsha Education Zone accepted that small class size positively affects teaching-learning interaction of teachers and students.

Table 4: Mean ratings of students' responses on the extent class size affects teaching-learning interaction of students and teachers

S / N	Items	Teachers X	Comment
1	I get bored during French lessons because of the teacher's method of teaching.	2.56	Accepted
2	The teacher addresses all my questions.	2.19	Rejected
3	I always get the teachers attention whenever I have problems.	1.98	Rejected
4	The teacher corrects our assignments individually.	1.71	Rejected
5	The teacher allows all of us to touch the teaching materials.	1.71	Rejected
6	The teacher permits everybody to contribute to the topic of discussion.	2.70	Accepted
7	There is good relationship between teachers and students in my class.	3.02	Accepted
8	Our teacher is very effective.	3.25	Accepted
9	Our language laboratory accommodates everybody during French lesson.	1.71	Rejected
10	Our teacher knows my strengths and weakness.	1.70	Rejected
Cluster		2.25	Rejected

The analysis from table 4 showed that items 1, 6, 7 and 8 rated 2.56, 2.70, 3.02 and 3.25 respectively were accepted, while items 2, 3, 4, 5, 9 and 10 which had mean ratings below 2.50 were rejected. The table equally had a cluster mean of 2.25. This is an indication that large class size negatively affects teaching interaction of teachers and students.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study are discussed in line with the three research questions that guided the study.

The major findings for research question one which was on the extent to which large class size affects academic performance of Junior Secondary School Students in French showed that students in large sized classes had the mean of 34.75. The result portrayed a very poor performance, which is an indication that large class size negatively affects academic performance of Junior Secondary School Students in French. The scores of the students showed that out of 275 students in the large sized classes, only 106 students passed while 169 students failed. This finding agrees with the earlier findings by

Keil & Partell (1997) that increasing class size has a negative effect on students' performance and that large class size lowers student achievement at a decreasing rate.

Furthermore, this study revealed that the greater percentage of our Junior French students are in large class sizes. Take for instance, schools like Queen of the Rosary College, Onitsha; Dennis Memorial Grammar School, Onitsha and Girls' Secondary School, Onitsha have 85-100 students in a class. The tendency that greater percentage of the students will always perform poorly especially in subjects like French language is obvious. The poor performance of students in large class size could be attributed to factors like poor assessment and feedback mechanism, difficulties in classroom management and control, distraction during lessons, and lots of discipline problems. These factors lead to examination misconduct. Again, most of the schools do not have language laboratory let alone the one that accommodates 85-100 students. As Ogah (2006) stated that "effective acquisition of French language involves the use of audio oral equipment and other modern techniques for modern language teaching". The schools in Onitsha education Zone need language laboratory, teachers and more structures to accommodate the increasing number of students in our Junior Secondary Schools. Therefore, much is required from the government.

The research question two which was on how small class size affects academic performance of Junior Secondary School Students in French indicated that the students in small class size had the mean of 64.92. The scores of the students showed that out of 84 students in small sized classes, 79 students passed and only 5 students failed. The result showed a very high performance on the part of the students which is clear evidence that small class size enhances or positively affects academic performance of Junior Secondary School Students in French.

It is evident that small class size positively affects students' academic performance because it gives room for less discipline problems, proper classroom management, proper assessment of student by their teachers. It also reduces examination misconduct, helps slow learners to improve since the teachers attend to them individually. All these are factors that enhance students' academic performance as exhibited in table 2. This is line with Weingarten (2003) who stated that "*Smaller classes are a key ingredient in student success*". Since the majority of Junior French Students are in large class sizes, only few students may benefit from the numerous advantages of small class size. In other words, many students will not benefit from the small class size unless the government as well as individuals who provide educational services will go an extra mile in provision of adequate structures and employment of more French teachers. If not, the few teachers will continue to suffer and end up producing poor quality students.

Research question 3 which was on the extent to which class size affects teaching-learning interactions of teachers and students, had the cluster mean scores of 2.91 and 2.25 from teachers and students respectively. The cluster mean for teachers' responses was high, indicating that it was the French teachers' opinion that small class size positively affects teaching-learning interaction of teachers and students. In spite of the fact that majority of the teachers handle large class size, they attested to the fact that small class size allows them to attend to all individual problems of the students, to correct the student's assignment individually, to have good relationship and flow of communication with their students, it helps teachers in monitoring behavioural changes in students, facilitate easy teaching and learning, and helps the teachers to really understand their students' strengths and weaknesses. The students' cluster mean of 2.25 indicated that large class size negatively affects teaching-learning interaction of teachers and students. The effect of teaching-learning interaction of teachers and students

include non-attendance of teachers to students' problems, inability of teachers to correct their assignments individually, inability of the teachers to address all the students' questions, inability of teachers to know students' strengths and weaknesses and inability of the language laboratory to accommodate all the students during French lessons.

These findings were not surprising since the majority of the French students were in large class sizes, the tendency is there that teachers will not be able to attend to all the students. Some teachers might resort to attending to few intelligent students and neglecting others while some would try to carry every student along without achieving much due to their large number. This is in agreement with what Martins – Umeh & Ibe (2000) earlier stated that attention a teacher gives to each student in a class of sixty cannot be efficient and effective for learning when compared to that of a class of twenty-five students. Secondly, most schools do not have French language laboratory which is very necessary in learning of French language, let alone a laboratory that will accommodate every student during French lessons. Students attested that their teachers were effective and also that they have good relationship with their teachers but that teachers do not allow every student to touch the instructional materials and they get bored during French lessons due to the teachers' method of teaching. It is impossible for every student in a class of 98 to touch the instructional materials and teachers could resort to lecture method which makes students to be passive during lessons.

Conclusion

From the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn;

1. Large class size negatively affects the academic performance of junior Secondary School Students in French.
2. Small class size enhances or positively affects the academic performance of Junior Secondary Students in French.
3. With regards to the teaching-learning interaction, small class size positively affects teaching-learning interaction and large class size negatively affects teaching-learning interaction of teachers and students.

Recommendations

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

- In as much as education has been made much more accessible because of government funding (UBE) and has grown significantly because of great growth in population, the government should construct more structures to absorb the growing population and employ more teachers to care for the new created classes.
- The Federal Government including the Anambra State Government and Anambra State Education Commission should enact legislature to reduce class size in all the secondary schools to a maximum of 30 students per class. They should also appoint supervisors who would make sure that the law is implemented.
- Government should build French language laboratory in all the secondary schools in Onitsha Education Zone. This will motivate students to study French, help them to be efficient and competent in the use of French language.
- The Anambra State Education Commission should organize seminars or workshop for French teachers in order to expose them to various methods of teaching French language and how to select instructional materials for their lessons.
- The school principals should endeavour to control the enrolment of students in their schools to avoid large class size.

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