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Challenges faced by lecturers in handling large classes

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ABSTRACT

This case study employed qualitative methods to collect data using open-ended questionnaires on a census sample of 38 junior lecturers and face-to-face interviews with seven purposively selected senior lecturers in the School of Entrepreneurship and Business Sciences at the Chinhoyi University of Technology in Zimbabwe. Data were tabulated, analysed, and presented narratively using emerging themes permeating the study. The study found that class size does matter as it affects the performance and quality of student learning. Hence, large classes correlate with low student performance. The study recommends that if institutions of higher learning continue recruiting mass students then they should likewise recruit enough academic staff to deal with a large number of students. The conducive learning environments so created would in turn positively affect the academic performance of the students through active involvement of the learners with their content thereby higher-order cognitive abilities of problem-solving and critical thinking so characteristic of deep learning.

KEYWORDS

Challenges, lecturers, handling, large classes. Technology in Zimbabwe



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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Educational lecturers have mostly regarded class size as one of the essential determinants of academic performance over which educational lecturers in colleges and universities have no control. Ajayi, Audu and Ajayi (2017) defined class size as the number of students per lecturer in a given class. Debate on determining best class size continues to be generated with some suggesting that a large class is determined by facilitator/student ratio. There seem to be disparities among researchers, institutions and various nations as to what really constitutes a large class. There is no agreed definition of a large class nor should there be. What one may consider as a large class can be what someone may consider as a regular or normal class size. This obviously depends on a number of factors. However, a class can be considered large when the resources like learning venues, furniture, computers and so forth put into teaching it are inadequate including the skill employed by the facilitator. In addition, what is considered large varies from discipline to discipline and from programme to programme. For instance, a programme that involves practical training places limits on the number of students that can be accommodated at each session. Due to lack of research based benchmark for defining a large class, the study considered a large class not in terms of numerical threshold only but also relatively as an environment that negatively impacts the quality of teaching and learning by the number of students in that venue. Hence, even what we may consider a small class can become large when there are resource constraints.

Owing to the increase in the demand for higher education over the past few decades and the limited availability of financial resources to universities, some university modules are progressively taught in large classes. This has become the norm in the local tertiary educational system, particularly at Chinhoyi University of Technology in the School of Entrepreneurship and Business Sciences where degree programmes seem to be on high demand. Such classes often have a very high number of students especially on introductory modules.

Higher education and access to it are considered as key elements in national development, which is why increasing student numbers is a key objective in developing countries (Ischinger, 2008). Asodike and Onyeike (2015) underscore that the reasons for large classes in developing countries are not far from the favourable government policies and democratization education. This is in line with global initiative for universal basic education coupled with rapid population growth and the awareness that a literate population is more productive than an illiterate one.

However, when students are not motivated or demonstrate poor engagement with their subjects and where there seem to be no cultivation of higher order cognitive skills then quality of the learning environment and the educational experience is called into question.

Increased student enrolment, dubbed massification, is a challenge experienced by universities in Zimbabwe. This has had serious implications on the quality assurance system resulting in the establishment of the Zimbabwe Council of Higher Education (ZIMCHE) in 2006 (Garwe, 2013). The presence of many universities resulted in stiff competition for the same clientele base with even low pointers (minimum two points) finding their way into universities. Biggs (1999) observes that teaching larger numbers of students in higher and tertiary institutions, staff increasingly deal with a student population that is more diverse in age, experience, cultural background and socio-economic status than ever before. Whereas once those attending college were the brightest and the most highly motivated, and unfortunately also the most privileged; now college classes are comprised of students who vary in ability, interest and motivation (Kyne, 2010). This makes the situation worse for lecturers as they have to meet different demands on their teaching skills. In most Zimbabwean universities, there is massive enrolment where standards are compromised and students are now taken as a potential source of income to fund university activities (Madzimore, 2016). This research focused on challenges faced by lecturers in handling large classes in the School of Entrepreneurship and Business Sciences at Chinhoyi University of Technology in Zimbabwe.

2.0 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Dealing with large classes constitutes a challenge to every higher education practitioner. Biggs (1999) pointed out that the practical problems faced by lecturers increase and change in their nature as class size increases, especially in higher and tertiary institutions where the student population is more diverse and the teaching staff have to deal with a variety of factors such as student ability, background, age and experience. Fortes and Tchantchane (2010) identify some of the challenges as diversity of students, lack of flexibility, class climate management, difficulty of setting and enforcing classroom behaviour (crowd control), minimum attention to students, limited monitoring of students' learning and difficulty in engaging students to activities. Most importantly effective teaching and learning is critically constrained by the large size of the class thereby affecting students' academic performance. The purpose of this study was to identify challenges encountered by lecturers in the School of School of Entrepreneurship and Business Sciences at Chinhoyi University of Technology in Zimbabwe in handling large classes and how these challenges affect the academic performance of students.

3.0 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The research sought to

- Examine challenges lecturers face when handling large classes at Chinhoyi University of Technology.
- Determine the effects of the challenges on academic performance of Chinhoyi University of Technology students.

4.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1 Challenges lecturers faced when handling large classes

The increased popularity of large class teaching and learning environments debatably negatively affects the quality of the educational experience along with student performance, motivation and engagement, and impacts upon the ability of students to gain valuable problem solving and critical thinking skills. In higher education, goals move beyond simple knowledge acquisition to promoting student engagement and higher order cognitive functions such as problem solving and critical thinking. These present as characteristics of deep learning. There are a number of challenges faced by higher education institutions particularly lecturers in teaching and supporting large class environments and positively affect students' performance. Some of these challenges are discussed in this section. Large class sizes cause teaching and learning to be critically constrained. Correa (1993) posits a theoretical explanation for the importance of class size in education production function that focuses on the role of individual faculty-student interaction. Correa's model describes that lecturers must consider efforts directed to the whole class versus individual student attention. When a class becomes large, the greater the lecturer's effort devoted to class-wide activities at the expense of individual attention.

As a result, individual student learning and outcomes decline as class size increases. Large class sizes affect assessment and evaluation of students. The most essential part of the teaching and learning process is assessment and evaluation of students (Amadahe, 2016). The primary purposes of assessment as articulated by Goerts (2009) are grouped into five namely diagnosis, inform teaching and learning, evaluation, public reporting and accountability. Goerts (2009) explains assessment as a diagnostic tool in teaching and learning. Lecturers use this tool in order to identify students' strengths and weaknesses at the beginning of the learning process so as to identify a suitable learning programme, redirect content and to establish appropriate instructional strategies. Lecturers also make use of assessment to ascertain whether learning has taken place and to identify any need for further clarification on the subject area. Generally speaking, large classes provide few opportunities for students to receive feedback on their understanding (McAlpine, 2004).

Large class sizes have a bearing on student engagement. Student engagement refers to the time, energy and resources spent on activities designed to enhance learning at university. Terenzini, Theophilides and Loran (1984), found classroom participation to be the only course experience variable that consistently correlated with students' cognitive growth. McKeachie (1986) notes that it is "because active thinking is so important to learning and retention of learning, constraints upon oral participation are likely not only to induce passivity but also to be educationally harmful. When students are not motivated or demonstrate poor engagement with their subjects and where there seem to be no cultivation of higher order cognitive skills then quality of the learning environment and the educational experience is called into question.

Relatedly, Ehrenberg et al., (2001) and Cuseo (2007) reported that class size affects the quality of the learning environment. In particular, they claim that large classes correlate with student low performance. Lazear (2001) argues that large classes allow students to be more disruptive. Students can even choose not to attend, exclude themselves from participation or even from classroom interaction. Bowden and Marton (1998) have presented arguments that class size is the primary environmental variable college faculties must contend with when developing effective teaching strategies.

The main objective of quality teaching policies is to better the quality of students' learning experiences and through this, the learning outcomes. According to Garwe (2014), massive enrolments have serious implications on the quality assurance system and this resulted in the establishment of the Zimbabwe Council of Higher Education (ZIMCHE) in 2006. Most institutions in Zimbabwe undertake massive enrolments which is a good indicator of compromised standards. The current economic situation has forced universities to be financially self-sustainable and institutions are now resorting to mass enrolment for income generation. Nunn (1996) stressed that large classes are a problem especially in commercials where academics end up using the lecture method, which does not cater for diverse learner's needs.

Quality education is an important aspect for socio-economic development and it is safe to say that all things being equal, quality education can be correlated to better income levels and economic growth. Recent intellectual sciences advise that human beings are not interested in learning passively but it speaks of active students. 'An active learner is someone who thinks critically about their environment and considers knowledge to be an evolving state of being where new information can fundamentally refocus understanding and approaches to everyday phenomena. If then, quality education is in part defined through the presence of these characteristics, how does one instil them in students in a teaching context that appears to result in the opposite?

University infrastructure and other resources are the facilities provided by the university that aim for teaching and learning more comfortable for the students to study (Schneider, 2002). Infrastructure is very essential in facilitating learning in large class circumstances. Infrastructure in a university can be viewed as related to education. The infrastructure we are referring to are structures such as classrooms, libraries, sports and recreation centres, furniture, laboratories; administrative blocks, electricity and water (Ciborra & Hanseth, 1998). Doane (2008) contends that within the facilities available in an institution the students are getting better expressed. According to Doane (2008), the teaching and learning processes are closely related to each other. A study by Schneider (2002) revealed that in a smaller class, students will receive clear instructions from the lecturers and in this way, it then becomes easy for both sides to achieve learning goals. However, a class can be considered large when the resources like learning venues, furniture, computers, internet connectivity and so forth put into teaching it are inadequate including the skill employed by the facilitator. This study identified challenges lecturers face when handling large classes in the School of Entrepreneurship and Business Sciences at Chinhoyi University of Technology.

4.2 The effects of the challenges, lecturers face when handling large classes, on the academic performance of students

In developing countries, teaching in large-class contexts has direct negative ramifications not only for the quality of the educational experience, but also for development *per se* (UNESCO, 2005). This is worsened by availability of a reduced financial support for institutions of higher learning. Higher and tertiary education lecturers have mostly regarded class size as one of the essential determinants of academic performance over which they have no control.

There is a long standing belief that large classes correlates with low students' performance. This study does take class size in and of itself as a distinctive aspect of student performance and it matters in relation to education goals including the quality of the educational experience. Looking at higher education, we find that education goals move further than simple knowledge acquisition to promoting student engagement and higher order cognitive attributes of deep learning. This is where class size really matters and can affect the quality of student learning (Cooper & Robinson, 2000; McKeachie, 1980; Mulryan-Kyne, 2010). When quality of students' learning is affected, their academic performance is affected also.

Most students enter higher education environments with learning strategies and approaches constructed around the memorisation of facts and the simple reproduction of knowledge, or so-called 'surface learning' (Exeter, Ameratunga, Ratima, Morton, Dickson, Hsu & Jackson, 2010). These students need to be shown how to adopt the problem-solving and critical thinking skills that are crucial for an innovation economy and a knowledge society (Biggs, 1999). Regrettably, environments posed by these large classes are normally counterproductive in this regard, as they reinforce educational teaching styles. Even if the lecturer offers that opportunity for any questions from students, the presence of a large number in class prevent them to do so. Performance of those students who require interaction for motivation is especially likely to suffer when the scope and intensity of student-teacher interaction decreases, as tends to happen in large-class environments (Mulryan-Kyne 2010; Exeter et al 2010). Mulryan-Kyne (2010) points out that regardless of their learning style, students also exhibit poor levels of engagement with material, less commitment to courses, and lower motivation levels when presented with large classes. It has been noticed with concern that in some cases the faculty has slackened the proper execution of tutorial sessions. Accounting Sciences and Entrepreneurship departments conduct tutorials but these are conducted with a larger number of students unlike what is required for a normal tutorial class. These tutorials will end up not yielding the benefits of close interaction between tutor and student. Not all things being equal, large classes emerge to be favourable to the development of higher order cognitive skills distinguished earlier.

Lecturers play a very important role in improving the quality of university education yet another concealed challenge is when lecturers are recruited, they are appointed without proven teaching abilities and are offered very little support, if any. The perception of teaching being simple is based on a particular understanding of what teaching in higher education involves, with the dominant discourse that it is about communicating key disciplinary concepts to students. While teaching and learning must focus on the type of product that comes out, the big question is 'are the semi-qualified lecturers able to articulate teaching and learning outcomes in terms of skills, knowledge, attitude and values that the students must gain?' As a result, newly engaged academics take hours preparing PowerPoint presentations and then deliver the lecture they carefully constructed. (Exeter, Ameratunga, Ratima, Morton, Dickson, Hsu & Jackson, 2010) reiterates that it is one thing to be able to deliver an effective teaching experience in one large room full of students and it is another to manage the delivery of an effective teaching experience across several venues or time slots involving several large rooms full of students.

Of today, institutions mostly focus on recruiting lecturers without considering whether the person also holds an andragogic qualification that is a very essential skill in teaching and learning. Rather, more emphasis is placed

on paper qualification than the skill possessed while in actual fact, having a masters or doctoral degree does not guarantee necessary skills and abilities to teach (Tadessa, 2016).

Feedback to students is supposed to assist students recognise where they are, areas they need to improve and what they need to do for them to reach the apex of the learning ladder. Most lecturers find it difficult to provide feedback on time when assessing mass classes and the quality of feedback to students can be much reduced. Lecturers are put in an impossible position of offering the required individual student attention through increasingly unmanageable class size. Giving assignments to students is now being dreaded by lecturers considering the overwhelming amount of work to mark, record and feedback given to students. Coping with large numbers of assignments and examination scripts is a source of difficulty. Lecturers face difficulties in completing the marking of assignments and examinations in time, as a result, feedback to students is delayed.

Empirically, a study was carried out by Mohamedbhai (2000) on the effects of large classes on seven African universities. The study found that large classes caused serious challenges for student assessment. It indicated that, it was impossible to make provisions for adequate continuous and interim assessments. It was also established that only a single continuous assessment was done in a semester while interim assessment no longer contributed to undergraduate grades. Due to this, students are said to be graduating with little practice for undertaking research, critical analysis and writing.

Handling a large class to improve academic performance can be a taxing responsibility. Allen and Tanner (2005) are of the view that logistical concerns, such as attendance, grading, and providing frequent and detailed feedback, can become unmanageable. Monitoring of attendance can be difficult, thus encouraging students to cut classes. To account for these logistical concerns, many lecturers may end up applying unproductive teaching methods like relying strictly on the lecture method (Cuseo, 2007). Very little interaction between learner and facilitator may come about as a result of the lecture based large class teaching causing some students to feel anonymous and isolated. These feelings of isolation might lead to students' lower motivation, poor engagement, lower attendance, and more distracting behaviours such as students talking, texting, surfing online and so forth (Cuseo, 2007; Mulryan-Kyne, 2010). In a large class where lecture-based approaches are mostly used, students are more likely to report low satisfaction levels on semester evaluations (Walker, Cotner, Baepler & Decker, 2008). When there is lower motivation, poor engagement and a decrease in satisfaction levels, students may find it difficult to attend classes thereby hampering performance.

Nunn (1996) concurs that student participation in the classroom is viewed as essential for learning however, large class size have been found to reduce the likelihood of classroom participation. A disengaged student typically takes notes during the lecture and memorises facts and key points in order to obtain a 'pass' for the course (Biggs, 1999; Marton and Säljö, 1976). More so, this is evidenced by lack of facilitator-student interaction. Today we witness massive enrolments where even low pointers (minimum two points) are finding their way into higher education. If we take a closer look, these students enter university with considerably higher self-reported levels of academic disengagement in high school. These students frequently report about feeling bored in class, missing class and they spend less time on their studies outside class (Astin, et al., 1997). Apparently, these characteristics are carried forward to university. Enrolling such students and exposing them in large classes, lecture driven environment appears to be the ideal method for promoting and worsening their situation as this will promote passivity, anonymity and lack of individual accountability. If we simply put, the student's greater involvement or engagement in academic work or in the academic experience of college, the greater his or her level of knowledge acquisition and general cognitive development" (Astin, et al., 1997).

Problems often experienced by teachers in large class environments include dealing with large numbers of students entering and exiting the lecture room, which often results in teaching sessions starting late, dealing with

noise levels during in-class tasks (Ward & Jenkins, 1992). During the lecture, if students feel bored, they become uncontrollable with some having unrelated conversations and noise making during the lesson, some may even become busy with their phones ignoring whatever will be taking place. Some students may even choose to remain anonymous throughout the semester without participating in classroom activities. Due to the large number of students in the class, it can be a cumbersome task for the facilitator to identify each student and to monitor attendance.

Due to the optimal class size in tertiary education (Lazear, 2001), large classes may create negative externalities for students, due to noise or disruptive behaviour (congestion effects), and students may benefit less from teacher explanations and have fewer opportunities for interactive discussion or to ask for clarification. In addition, lecturers responsible for large classes may be unable to identify the ability and interests of the average student. There is a long-standing belief that the number of students in a class affects the quality of the learning environment' (Hornsby, 2013). Mckeachie (2013) actually believed that large classes correlate with low student performance. He further argues that class size in and of itself is a distinguishing feature of student performance, class size matters in relation to education goals and the quality of the educational experience. In higher education, education goals move beyond simple knowledge acquisition to promoting student engagement and higher order cognitive functions such as problem solving and critical thinking characteristics of deep learning. In this regard, class size does matter as it affects the performance and quality of student learning.

The growing popularity of large class teaching and learning environments have negative effects on the quality of the educational experience alongside learner performance, motivation and engagement, and affects students' ability to achieve valuable problem solving and critical thinking skills. The majority of students today find their way into higher education environments with learning strategies built around the memorisation of facts and the simple reproduction of knowledge, or so-called surface learning. There is need for such students to be taught how to acquire the problem solving and critical thinking skill which is vital for a nation and an innovation economy. Regrettably, large class learning environments usually cannot allow this to take place as they support didactic teaching approaches. Performance of those students who require interaction for motivation is especially likely to suffer when the amount and intensity of student-teacher interaction decreases, as tends to happen in large class environments (Hornsby, 2013). Regardless of their learning style, students also exhibit poor levels of engagement with material, less commitment to courses and lower levels of motivation when presented with large classes. Overall, a large class does not provide a conducive learning environment to facilitate the establishment of higher order thinking.

In another instance, for those large classes experienced at the campus, lecture venues are usually inadequate. Issues of overflowing classes are not a new thing and in most cases, there is no equipment to enhance good communication such as speakers and in venues where the speakers are available echo is a serious issue. The lecturer to student ratio may force lecturers not to conduct tutorials thereby short changing students (Madzimure, 2016). Quality in teaching and learning is compromised because lectures lack proper engagement and as a result, students end up memorising module content in order to pass at the end of the semester. Students cannot become critical thinkers when they memorise but can only become information adapters. In this pretext, the Directorate of Quality Assurance has a very hard time to serve, guarantee and sustain quality in university education system.

It is true that quality teaching and learning goes beyond resources to include andragogic practices. Lecturers being critical assets, when it comes to standards in universities, their sense of ownership are important in ensuring quality teaching and learning. Sometimes poor quality in teaching and learning is because of inadequate human resource where institutions end up trying to cover the gap by engaging inexperienced

academic staff. However, due to lack of resources, universities are finding it difficult to provide quality education under large classes that result from these massive enrolments.

In some cases, timetabling becomes unfriendly to users taking into cognisance the participation that is required of the students the delivery that is required of facilitators. Some lectures start as early as seven o'clock in the morning and some could end at seven-thirty in the evening, which is not good and convenient considering quality and the exhausted facilitator. Furthermore, exhausted students cannot concentrate and some may even choose not to attend lectures because of exhaustion.

Quality assurance practices emphasise that physical facilities and quality teaching goes hand in hand with availability of infrastructure. Deteriorating infrastructure in universities is a major drawback as far as quality assurance is concerned. Institutions of higher learning like Chinhoyi University of Technology were meant for a sizeable number of students due to the bottleneck screening system that prevailed during that time. For example, when Chinhoyi University of Technology was established it started as a Technical Teachers' College and the existing infrastructure was meant at that time to accommodate a sizeable number of students into college. Currently, due to massive enrolments as a university, the institution has been experiencing a problem of learning venues. This has also led to the lecture timetable being stretched until evening. Overflowing classes have become an order of the day in most cases within the School of Business Sciences and Entrepreneurship, a clear indication of inadequate resources. Consequently, universities are finding it difficult to provide quality education under large classes that result from massive enrolments.

Infrastructure is said to be one of the major factors affecting academic performance. Inadequate infrastructure, for example overcrowding is an infringement on the right to quality education. Inadequate infrastructure can be an obstacle that can lead to realisation of educational as a primary legitimate right. Infrastructural facilities certainly affect the academic attainments and subsequent placements of the graduates (Singh & Kumar, 2016). Their research findings are a clear pointer to the importance of the infrastructural facilities on campus as it provides a learning-enabling atmosphere and thus motivates students to concentrate on their academic work and perform better.

This study determined the effects of the challenges on the students' academic performance of students faced by lecturers when handling large classes in handling large classes in the School of Entrepreneurship and Business Sciences at Chinhoyi University of Technology.

5.0 METHODS

This qualitative research determined the effects of the challenges faced by lecturers in the School of Entrepreneurship and Business Sciences at Chinhoyi University of Technology when handling large classes. This case study used open-ended questionnaires on all the thirty eight (38) junior lecturers and face-to-face interviews with seven (7) purposively sampled senior lecturers in the school. Data were tabulated, analysed presented narratively using emerging themes permeating the study.

6.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

6.1 Challenges lecturers face when handling large classes

The study sought to established challenges experienced by participants in handling large classes. These are shown in Table 6.1 below.

Table 6.1: Challenges lecturers face when handling large classes
N=40

Challenges	Frequency
Congested classroom environment	38
Lack of student involvement	36
Lack of critical engagement & understanding of module content	36
Students lack motivation	36
Delayed feedback on assessment	36
Difficult to assess and evaluate learning	34
Students anonymity and passivity	33
Constrained teaching and learning	33
Difficulty to engage all students learning styles	32
Poor attendance for lectures	28
Development of negative attitudes towards learning	24

Source: Primary Data

The modal challenge expressed by the respondents was that of congested classroom (n=38) followed by the lack of student involvement in the learning process (n=36) due to poor interaction student-student, lecturer-student and student-lecturer-student interaction. These would result in poor grasping of concepts (n=36) leading to stifled critical understanding of module content. Three lecturer interviewees who said aptly captured this:

- *The large numbers in a lecture room results in congestion. It thus becomes hard for the lecturer to actively involve the class in the learning process.*
- *Student participation in the learning activities is compromised leading to flawed critical engagement and poor understanding of module content.*
- *It leads to poor grasping of concepts and few opportunities for development of critical thinking skills.*

Follow up interviews further revealed that teaching and learning was greatly constrained in large classes with lecturers reporting on difficulties of carrying out proper assessment and evaluation of learner's work (n=34).; The content learnt severely restricted in scope, extent, or activity. Students felt demotivated by the large numbers of students in a single venue, lack of engagement and inadequate furniture. The demotivation triggered poor attendance for lectures, coupled with absenteeism and late coming including leaving lectures early (n=28). As a result this breeds negative attitudes towards learning (n=24).

During teaching learning engagements, the lecturer makes concerted effort to engage students' learning styles. The visual learning style is for those who prefer using pictures, images, and spatial understanding while the aural or auditory for those who prefer using sound and music. The verbal or linguistic learning style is for those who prefer using words, both in speech and writing while the physical or kinaesthetic for those who prefer using their body, hands and sense of touch. The logical or mathematical learning style is for those who prefer using logic, reasoning and systems. The social learning style is for those whose acquisition of concepts benefits learning in groups or with other people. Finally, the solitary learning style is for those who prefer to work alone and use self-

study. However, some lecturers (n=32) found difficulty to engage all students learning styles thereby deleteriously affecting their acquisition of concepts.

6.2 Effects of the challenges on the academic performance of students

The research participants indicated the effects the challenges, faced by lecturers in handling large classes, on the academic performance of the students. These are shown in Table 6.2

Table 6.2: Effects of the challenges on the academic performance of students
N=40

Effect	Frequency
Large classes result utilisation of poor teaching methods	40
Poor levels of engagement with material	38
Instructional materials not used properly	36
Pose problems with student assessment	36
Low acquisition of skills, knowledge, attitude and values acquisition	35
Poor development of higher order cognitive skills	33
Lower motivation levels of large tutorial sessions;	33
Classroom management is always difficult	32
Less commitment to learning	30

Source: Primary Data

The highest response by the research participants (n=42) was that large classes lead to utilisation of poor teaching methods by the lecturers. Because of the large class sizes the lecturers use teaching methods that result in decreased intensity of student-teacher interaction thereby killing the motivational spirit in the students. Mulryan-Kyne (2010) and Exeter et al (2010) concur that in large-class environments performance of those students whose learning style require interaction for motivation suffers when the scope and intensity of student-teacher interaction decreases. Nunn (1996) underscores that student participation in the classroom is viewed as essential for learning. However, large class size has been found to reduce the likelihood of classroom participation. Cuseo (2007) adds that many lecturers end up resorting to unproductive teaching methods like relying strictly on the lecture method (Cuseo, 2007) wherein there is too much lecturer talk with students listening meekly. Freire (1993) calls this the banking concept of education wherein the lecturer treat students as passive recipients of information. There is need to spruce up the lecture method so that students actively engage with their content. Ideally, it is their content and not the lecturer's. Whatever content the lecturer selects to teach is for the students. The students should benefit from that content.

Under large class environments the lecturers fail to use instructional materials properly and effectively (n=38). For instance, the lecturer finds it difficult to make all the students especially those at the back see teaching media. Such media include videos, realia, models, objects, pictures and images, the inscriptions on the whiteboard and any form of spatial understanding.

Large classes pose problems with student assessment (n=36). A study carried out by Mohamedbhai (2000) on the effects of large classes on seven African universities found that large classes caused serious challenges for student assessment. This study revealed that it was impossible to give enough continuous and interim assessments. Lecturers were forced to give students only one or two group assignments rather than individual work due to the amount of time that it requires assessing individual assignments giving meaningful and constructive feedback. Participants indicated that the number of assignments and the quality of marking decreased thereby compromising students' academic performance.

Relatedly, students exhibit low acquisition of skills, knowledge, attitude and values (n=35). Exeter, Ameratunga, Ratima, Morton, Dickson, Hsu and Jackson (2010) observe that this results in surface learning. Cooper & Robinson (2000), McKeachie (1980) and Mulryan-Kyne (2010) add that this surface learning is tantamount to poor quality learning resulting in poor academic performance by the students. When quality of students' learning is affected, their academic performance is affected also. Hence, the larger the class the poorer the academic performance of students.

The surface learning alluded to results in poor development of higher order cognitive skills as students (n=33). The students cannot engage in higher order cognitive skills like assessing, evaluating, examining, analysing, comparing, applying, contrasting and justifying phenomena. Hence, the development of their problem-solving and critical thinking skills is crippled. These skills are crucial for an innovation economy and a knowledge society (Biggs, 1999).

Large class environments are related to difficult classroom management (n=32) by the lecturers since such classes are always noisy and disruption of teaching sessions by the number of students entering and exiting the lecture room. At Chinhoyi university of Technology and elsewhere in Zimbabwe, Business and Entrepreneurship classes are large. As such, the concentration and motivational levels of the students are compromised. Their commitment to content grows less (n=30). The students fail to engage with their content. Consequently, the academic performance by the students becomes compromised also. Arguably and agreeably, large class size contributes to poor academic performance.

7.0 CONCLUSIONS

Class size in and of itself is a distinguishing feature of student performance. Hence, the number of students in a class affects the quality of the learning environment. Large classes correlate with low student performance. The low performance is a result of surface learning, which is, not answers the education goals of institutions of higher learning. These goals promote student engagement and higher order cognitive abilities of problem solving and critical thinking so characteristic of deep learning. In this regard, class size does matter as it affects the performance and quality of student learning. The study recommends that if institutions of higher learning continue recruiting mass students then they should likewise recruit enough academic staff to deal with the large number of students. The conducive learning environments so created would in turn positively affect the academic performance of the students.

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