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# A Review Study on Reasons for Large Class Sizes in Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

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**Abstract:** This paper discussed the reasons for large class sizes in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Secondary data was used in the paper. Data were collected from print and online publications. The paper presented poor implementation of academic brief, poor implementation of carrying capacity, corruption, inadequate infrastructural facilities, shortage of academic staff, project abandonment, inadequate tertiary institutions and political influence as reasons for large class sizes in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Based on this findings, the paper recommended increment in budgetary allocation of tertiary institutions employment of adequate academic staff and provision of adequate infrastructural facilities.

**Keywords:** Large Class Sizes, Tertiary Institutions, Budgetary Allocation

## Introduction

Large classes in tertiary institutions of learning appears unavoidable due to the population boom and the reality of the Education for All (EFA) programme in the majority of developing countries worldwide. Nigeria, the giant of Africa, may be setting the standard for big class sizes at its higher education institutions. Additionally, these environments have been posing significant difficulties and potential risks to the quality of education for Nigerian lecturers as well as students, as a result of the overuse of educational resources which results in inefficient teaching and learning. Hence, this paper. The National Universities Commission Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS) of 2007 as cited by Ogunode, Akinlade and Musa (2021) stipulated the following teacher/students ratio: 1:20 in science; 1:15 in Engineering and technology; 1:10 in medicine, veterinary medicine and pharmacy, 1:15 in agricultural and environmental sciences and 1:30 in education, management science, social sciences, law and arts. The Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS) on lecturer students' ratio have not been fully implemented in many higher institutions in Nigeria ((National Universities Commission [NUC] of Nigeria, 2007; Arubayi, 2009; Teacher Registration Council of Nigeria, 2010; National Commission for Colleges of Education, 2012).

The introduction of the Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS) for the universities was to ensure quality university education and to ensure standard and prevent teaching of large class sizes in the universities in Nigeria. It has been observed and appeared that lecturers in most tertiary institutions in Nigeria are teaching or lecturing over a hundred students per class in many higher institutions in Nigeria. The submission is affirmed by Federal Ministry of Education in the needs for assessment of Nigerian public universities report that was presented to the Federal Executive Council in 2012. According to the report, the faculty-to-student ratio is very low in many Nigerian universities. For instance, the National Open University of Nigeria was reported to have a faculty-to-student ratio of 1:363; the University of Abuja, 1:122; and Lagos State University, 1:114.

Also, Bala (2013), reported that the teacher-student ratio in tertiary institutions in Katsina State is estimated to be 1:500. Egu, Ogbonna, Obike and Obiuto (2014), who worked on managing stress among lecturers in polytechnics of South-east, Nigeria, revealed among others that poor teaching and laboratory tools are real stressors among teaching-staff in the University, hence overstretched class enrolment had mean of 2.90, poorly equipped laboratory/technical workshop had mean of 2.90 and lack of teaching facilities recorded mean of 3.10.

Watts and Robertson (2011), whose study was conducted in the United States of America, found that the teaching staff in the University were exposed to high numbers of students to be handled or taught at the same time. The Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards as official recommendations are not so in Nigerian tertiary institutions and such

perhaps could be happening in other parts of the world (Arubayi, 2009). It is imperative to examine the reasons for large class size in tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

## **Methodology**

The methodology employed in this study involves a descriptive and analytical approach to examine the reasons for large class sizes in Nigerian tertiary institutions. This study draws on diverse sources, including the National Universities Commission Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS) of 2007, academic studies, and reports from the Federal Ministry of Education.

## **Result and Discussion**

### **A. Reasons for Large Class Sizes in Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria**

This paper considered the following; poor implementation of academic brief, poor implementation of carrying capacity, corruption, inadequate infrastructural facilities, shortage of academic staff, project abandonment, inadequate tertiary institutions and political influence as reasons for large class size in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

### **B. Poor Implementation of Academic Brief**

Poor implementation of academic brief in the tertiary institutions appear to be one of the reasons for large class sizes in the different tertiary institutions across the country. The Academic brief of the University according to Ogunode, Ahaotu and Ayisa (2021) described the projection estimates of the University as relates to students' enrolment, staff capacity, infrastructural design, and community development. The academic brief is a document that contains all the programs the University will start with and all the programs the University is intending to establish in the future. It shows the numbers of students the university will commence with and the projected students the university will be admitting as they are unfolding new programs in the future. The document also gives details about the human resources that the university will employ as they unfold their new programs and the infrastructural facilities that will be put in place phase by phase as the university is developing. The academic brief gives a brief about the various units, departments and faculty of the Universities, the projected capacity of the university in terms of students, staff and infrastructure. Academic brief was introduced to curtail excesses of tertiary institutions manager in areas of establishment of academic programme and to reintroduce orderliness in the development of academic programme in tertiary institutions. Ohiare, Ogunode and Rauf (2021) and Ogunode (2020a) argued that the poor implementation of the academic brief in the tertiary institutions in Nigeria has resulted to most of the problems facing the tertiary institutions such as the large class sizes.

### **C. Poor Implementation of Carrying Capacity**

The poor implementation of carrying capacity policies in tertiary institutions seem to have contributed to the problem of large class sizes in the different tertiary institutions in Nigeria. In order to ensure quality tertiary education in Nigeria, the various regulatory institutions formulated carrying capacity policy. Oladipo, Adeosun and Oni (undated) and Ogunode, Akinlade and Musa (2021) observed that carrying capacity of a university is the maximum number of students that the institution can sustain for quality education based on available human and material resources. Admission into Federal institutions is based on merit, catchment and educationally disadvantaged States. The poor implementation of carrying capacity policies in many tertiary institutions in Nigeria has resulted to the problem of larger class crisis. Poor implementation of tertiary institutions policies has led to large class problems in the tertiary institutions according to Ogunode, Ajape and Jegede (2020). Ifeanyi, Ogunode and Ajape (2021); Olaleye and Oyewole, (2016) noted that carrying capacity policies was aimed to ensure quality assurance in tertiary institutions.

### **D. Corruption**

Corruption in tertiary institutions appear to have some link with large class sizes in the different tertiary institutions across the country. Corruption have been described as a major problem hindering development in tertiary institutions in Nigeria by Priye (undated); Ololube (2016) and Ojo (2018). Ogunode, Josiah and Ajape (2021) identified corruption as responsible for shortage of infrastructural facilities in the tertiary institutions. Also, Dawood (2012); Godwin (2017); Ojelade, Aiyedun and Aregebesola, (2019) and Ogunode, Isaiah and Ajape (2021) maintained that corruption is a major factor contributing to inadequate academic staff in the various tertiary institutions across the country. Osunyanmi, (2018); Ebehikhalu and Dawam (2017) observed that many of the stakeholders in the university system in Nigeria are also responsible for the rot in the University system. ASUU has struggled to force the government to fund the Universities properly, but these funds are managed poorly, embezzled and stolen. This high level of corruption is a practice common among the universities' administrators. The corrupt practices in higher institutions are similar to what is obtainable in the civil service and in the political world.

Corrupt practices in the accreditation processes in the various tertiary institutions is also contributing to the challenge to large class sizes in the different tertiary institutions in Nigeria. It therefore appears that many tertiary institutions in Nigeria do present fake data and facilities for accreditation process which resulted to accreditation of academic programme without equivalent human and materials resources on ground. In some Universities. Akpan and Etor (2018) acknowledged that management does not release money on time to affected departments to prepare for the exercise. It seems our Ivory towers are plagued by inadequate infrastructural facilities and teaching personnel for quality instructional delivery. In some institutions, facilities and equipment are borrowed and used for accreditation and the selection of members of the accreditation team is handled only by NUC.

### **E. Inadequate Infrastructural Facilities**

The problem of inadequate infrastructural facilities in many tertiary institutions in Nigeria is also a factor contributing to the problem of large class sizes in the different tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Many tertiary institutions across the country have infrastructural facilities deficit. Infrastructural facilities can be defined as equipments, buildings and everything physically used that aids delivery of academic and non-academic services in educational institutions. Infrastructural facilities include; libraries, laboratories, halls, offices, administrative blocks, hostels, roads facilities, water, electricity and internet. Okebukola, in Ishaya and Ogunode (2021) reported the need assessment survey of National Universities Commission and identified the following: (a) only about 30% of Nigerian students' population has adequate access to classrooms, workshop, lecture halls, laboratories and libraries. (b) deficient libraries in terms of currency and number of books, journals, and electronic support facilities. Due to inadequate infrastructural facilities in many institutions, manager of such institutions have to manage the available facilities for the teeming population of students resulting to large class size for the available lecturers and facilities.

### **F. Shortage of Academic Staff**

The shortage of academic staff in many tertiary institutions across the country is also responsible for the problem of larger classes in most tertiary institutions. Ogunode and Adamu, (2021) viewed academic staff as those teaching staff in higher institutions. Academic staff are the implementer of the school curriculum and lecture presenters. Academic staff are the teachers and delivery of instruction in the higher institutions. Academic staff are the knowledge and character builder/importers in the higher institutions. The academic staff are the engine room of the higher institutions. They are the pillar and foundation of higher institutions. The functions of the academic staff include lecturing, preparing the lecture note, preparing the lesson note, sourcing instruction materials, giving assignment to students, assessing the students through continuous assessment and examination, setting examination questions, marking the answer sheet, supervising students' research work, especially projects, theses & dissertation and preparing the students grade points. Many tertiary institutions lacks adequate academic staff to cater for the teeming population of students (Akomolafe, &Ibijola, 2014; Ojo, 2018; Ogunode, Akinjobi&Abubakar, 2022; Ogunode &Ahaotu 2020a). National Universities Commission (2021) noted that 100,000 academic staff members were attending to 2.1 million students in Nigerian universities. For instance, the report of Dateline (2022) as captured in National Universities Commission data indicated that Federal Universities in Nigeria suffer a shortage of full-time professors. According to the data, no Federal University scored up to 50 per cent in the ranking of full professors. This implies that no Federal University has the required number of full professors. Some of the Federal Universities ranked in the top 10 are the Usman Dan-Fodiyo University, Sokoto, with 36.44 percent; ObafemiAwolowo University, Ile Ife, 35.80 percent; Federal University of Technology, Akure, 27.28 percent;

Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, 27.25 percent; the University of Abuja, 25.33 percent; the University of Benin, 23.26 percent; University of Port Harcourt, 21.26 percent; the University of Calabar, 21.20 percent; and the University of Ilorin, 21.12 percent (Punch, 2022; Ogunode & Okwelogu, 2022). Managers and administrators of tertiary institutions in Nigeria in order to temporarily solve the problem compress students under few academic staff available. The problem of larger classes is common in general studies courses where there are limited lecturers to handle the courses. The situation has led to an increasing culture of visiting lecturership in the system. Few available qualified lecturers are recycled as visiting, adjunct, sabbatical and contract lecturers to work in many universities at the same time. Many of them are always on the road travelling from one university town to another and unable to meet their primary obligations with their tenure-employer (Federal Ministry of Education, 2012). Yelkpieri et al. (2012) lamented that large class size has recently become a necessary evil for public universities in the nation and noted that the staffing shortage in public universities has forced management to turn to large class size, especially in general courses, where one lecturer is responsible for over 500 students in a single lecture session.

### **G. Project Abandonments**

The problem of project or facilities abandonment in many tertiary institutions also appeared to be responsible for the challenges of large class crises in the different tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The problem of project or facilities abandonment is a very pronounced problem in many tertiary institutions. It appeared that almost all public tertiary institutions in Nigeria has an abandoned infrastructural facilities projects. These projects should have helped to provide adequate infrastructural facilities that should have reduced the crisis of large class problem in the different tertiary institutions. For example, Ogunode and Olanrewaju (2022) remarked that one of the major problems facing the public universities in Nigeria is the problem of several abandoned project. Recently, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Calabar bemoaned the high rate of abandoned projects in the institution and vowed to complete them before embarking on new ones. The VC, Prof. Florence Obi, made her feelings known to journalists while inspecting the ongoing remodeling, completion of abandoned projects and commissioning of a female hostel to mark her first anniversary in office. According to her, the institution has a bad record of being one of the universities with the highest number of Federal Government funded abandoned projects in the country. Also, Ogunode, Jegede, Olamoyegun, Akinjobi and Olatunde-Aiyedun (2022) and Ojo (2017) lamented that the former President Goodluck Jonathan inaugurated the 20-man Ibrahim Bunu-led Presidential Projects Assessment Committee on March 4, 2010, to among other things, take inventory of all Federal Government projects, assess level of funding, and project status. The committee on June 2, 2011 submitted its report to the ex-President. It made an inventory of 11,886 ongoing projects (as of then) with N7.78tn estimated cost out of which the Federal Government paid N2.696tn to contractors leaving a balance of about N5tn. Volume one of the report shows



that of the geopolitical zones, the South-South zone has 1,755 projects amounting to N2.1tn followed by the North-Central with N630bn with 1,844 projects. The last in ranking is the North-East zone with 466 projects amounting to N98bn. These infrastructural facilities abandoned included those sited in educational institutions like Federal Colleges, Polytechnics, Colleges of Education and Universities. Olalusi and Otunola, (2012); NnamdiOjiego (2020) and Ojo (2017) agreed that abandoned infrastructural facilities have affected development of tertiary institutions in Nigeria leading to inadequate infrastructural facilities.

## **H. Inadequate Tertiary Institutions**

The inadequacy of tertiary institutions in Nigeria has also contributed to the large classes crises in the different tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Many administrators and managers of tertiary institutions across the country are forced to admit more students seeking admission yearly in the few available tertiary institutions. Ogunode, (2022) and Allafrika (2021) observed that inadequate higher institutions in Nigeria are responsible for the admission crisis that is making many young Nigerians not to get admitted even though qualified and merited the admission. The space available for the higher education is not adequate for the teeming youths. The inability of young Nigerians to secure admission have made them, to seek for foreign higher education. Also, Ogunode, Akinjobi and Olatunde-Aiyedun (2022) noted that the increment in the population of students graduating from secondary schools to higher education is another factor contributing to the admission crisis in the various higher institutions in Nigeria. The population of Nigerian Universities in the 1980's and 1990's were less than five hundred thousand but presently the population of students in the Nigerian universities are 2.1millions. The population of students graduating from the secondary schools yearly and coming to seek placement in the various higher institutions is increasing every year. Ogunode, Akinjobi and Abubakar (2022) noted that every year more than one million students writes Joint Admissions and Matriculations Board (JAMB) to seek for higher education admission. The increase in the population of students is responsible for the admission problems because the available higher institutions do not have the capacity to admit them all. It is observed that the current schools can only accommodate 25 per cent of the over one million candidates seeking admission in Nigeria's tertiary institutions of learning every year. Okebukola (2005) released the list of some overcrowded universities recently where OlabisiOnabanjo University Ago-Iwoye topped the list with an excess enrolment of 24,628 students. This development will surely affect the quality of university education in Nigeria, since excess enrolment usually leads to overcrowded classrooms, ineffective teaching and examination malpractices.

## **I. Political Influence**

The problem of political influence in the administration and management of tertiary institutions also appeared to have been responsible for the problem of large class sizes in the different tertiary institutions. Manager and administrators of tertiary institutions are

influenced to admit more than the carrying capacity of some professional programme like medicine, engineering and ICT. For instance, programme with a carrying capacity of 50 per session because of political influence, 80 students were admitted into the programme. Politicians have at least a slot in any admission processes in Nigerian higher institutions. Sometime their candidates may not qualify; they influence the admission against the admission policies. The activities of political officeholders and politicians in the Nigerian higher institutions are a threat to the sustainability of higher education policies. Ekundayo and Ajayi, in Ogunode and Musa (2022) observed that universities these days are not totally free from the hand of politics outside the university system. Government of the day, most especially in the state-owned varsities, interfere a lot in terms of selection and choice of the chief executive, deans, departmental heads, directors of programmes and above all the selection of vice-chancellors. A situation whereby the members of the university are not totally free to choose who should head tier affairs without government intervention would not augur well for the university system. Ekundayo and Ajayi, (2009) and Adegbite in Olayinka (2018) submitted that another area of political interference is in the constitution of visitation Panels by the Visitor at wills instead of the minimum five years intervals, the main aim of which is to witch-hunt or crucifies the vice-chancellors and the University authorities.

## Conclusion

This paper examined the various reasons for having large class sizes in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Secondary data was used in the paper. Data were collected from print and online publications. The paper revealed that poor implementation of academic brief, poor implementation of carrying capacity, corruption, inadequate infrastructural facilities, shortage of academic staff, project abandonment, inadequate tertiary institutions and political influence are reasons for large class sizes in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Based on this findings, the paper recommended increment in budgetary allocation for tertiary institutions' employment of adequate academic staff and provision of adequate infrastructural facilities.

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