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Student Behaviours from Large Classes in Tanzania Secondary Schools: A case of School Y in Morogoro Municipality

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of the study was to explore student behaviours in large classes. The study intended to establish student behaviours developing from large classes in a selected school in Tanzania.

Methodology: The study adopted a single case study design. The study collected data through semi-structured interview and unobtrusive observation. The data were collected from ten participants, and through unobtrusive observation of classes.

Findings: Student behaviours developed from large classes were: stealing, lying and hiding, laziness, getting late in classes, and truancy among others.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Policy and Practice: There are diverse student behaviours from large classes. The student behaviours in large classes are contextual and/or circumstantial. Most of student behaviours from large classes are rare in the existing literature. Further, large classes have unpopular nurturing effects to student behaviours. The student behaviours may last in life time after graduation. Teachers need capacity building on managing large classes to minimize unpopular nurturing effects from large classes.

Key words: *Student Behaviour, Large Class, Class Teacher*

1. Introduction

Educational processes have remarkable contribution in developing student behaviors. The knowledge, skills and values (attitudes) are developed through educational processes in education systems. The three components of education are developed intentionally through deliberate efforts. The teachers initiate intentional activities and instructions in classes and outside classes. The activities contribute to creation of intended values (attitude), skills and knowledge (education). This is how teachers help learners attain education through education systems. Teachers need always to be sensitive to changes in society in order to deliberately inculcate the right student behaviours at the right time. To achieve the intended education, learning environment matters. There should be optimal number of students in classes and enough number of qualified teachers among others. This is to say to create the kind of people society wants everything in the education system must be balanced including the number of students in relation to available teachers. In a situation where everything is balanced, an education system is expected to produce a graduate with the right values, skills and knowledge. The education that enables a student control their environment.

From the preceding understanding on education, the World Bank's vision is for all children and youth to be learning and acquiring the skills making them key players in life on the planet earth. Experience shows the concentration in the education systems in low-income countries like Tanzania is to ensure quality education is offered. However, since there are no adequate resources to support the achievement of intended educational outcomes, it is common to find shortage of teachers in schools in some subjects; shortage of chairs and desks, shortage of classrooms, shortage of resources to mention but a few. Without doubt, for students to learn, they need enough and quality teachers though most education systems pay little attention to what teachers know, what they do in classes and some in some instances whether or not they show up (World Bank, 2019). This tendency has negative implication in shaping student behavior through educational processes. Indeed, there is dearth literature on relationship between student behavior and class size (Wang & Calvano, 2022). The scholars (Wang & Calvano, 2022) further report most of studies have concentrated on the relationship between class size and academic performance. Results from such studies indicate small classes have better student academic achievement compared to their counterpart large classes (John, 2025).

While there are a few studies on the relationship between class size and student behavior, it is obvious that in Africa the population is steadily increasing; thus, impacting student population in classes in secondary education. For instance, in Uganda, more than 1.5 million babies are born each year. Secondary education takes place in distinct secondary school buildings. As scholars (Asodike & Onyeike, 2016) contend large classes result from favorable government policies providing free and compulsory basic education. This is in line with the global policy for Universal basic Education indicating global enrolment at primary education cycles stands at 89% (Wils & Ingram, 2011). This enrolment trend signifies an increase of enrolment rate at secondary school

level. Indeed, the Tanzania Education and Training Policy (2014, version, 2023) stipulates basic education as grade twelve (form four). Elevating basic education from grade seven up to grade twelve in Tanzania, it makes classes overcrowded in secondary education cycle. Moreover, in Tanzania, the situation will be worse in 2028 since the students will double in secondary schools and other levels of education in years thereafter. This is because pupils completing the education cycle in six years and those completing in seven years will graduate at the same time. This incident will have multiplier effect at other levels of education in Tanzania. Without doubt, classes will be the largest ever at some point in time at all levels of education.

As such, increased enrolment may affect the quality of education in situations where there are scarce facilities, resources and any other ingredients important for quality education (UNICEF, 2014). In addition, Eze (2009) opines that quality education requires healthy environment, adequate resources and facilities. Further, physical facilities are one of the most important elements for providing quality education since without which the provision of quality education turns to be a mystery. In any school, physical facilities such as classrooms are the most important resources that help both teachers and learners to achieve a certain learning goal (Mvuyekule, 2017).

School physical facilities are important in every educational institute (school). They seem to have an indirect effect on learning which is hard to measure. Facilities like classrooms are one of the major factors for the enhancement of students' effectiveness in the learning process (UNICEF, 2014). Enough classrooms in a school are important because they can afford the large number of students enrolled in a certain school.

Despite the importance of physical facilities such as classrooms, Adesua and Akomolafe (2016) and URT (2025) report classroom shortage as a concern that requires attention in secondary education and other levels of education in Tanzania. It is a matter of concern because there is inadequate provision of the facilities. Moreover, the available facilities may sometimes not be maintained. Despite the inadequate classrooms in Tanzania, the student enrolment in secondary education stands at an increase of 9.6% each year (URT, 2025).

From experience, many public secondary schools, available have overcrowded classes compared to some private secondary schools that have few numbers of student's hence small classes. This tendency has been fueled by the fee-free education in public schools (URT, 2025). Increased enrolment result in large classes in most public secondary schools in Tanzania, the researchers are curious to know behaviours developed from large classes in public secondary schools following the surging enrolment in secondary schools in Tanzania. From this situation, the begging question is: What behaviours students develop from being groomed in large classes in secondary schools in Tanzania?

2. Methods

The study adopted an exploratory research design. The designed was selected because it is appropriate for studying a phenomenon that is now well known. Since little is known on behaviours

developed from large classes, the design is appropriate. The study involves teachers with 10 or so years of working experience. The study used semi-structured interviews and unobtrusive observation as data collection methods. Semi-structured interview was used to collect information on behaviours developed or caused by large classes among students in secondary schools. Unobtrusive observation was used to observe student behaviours in classes in the meantime associating the same with overcrowding of a class. The researchers selected classes with the largest number of students in a school Y. The study used content analysis to analyse the data, which was aided by Atlas ti. Software.

3. Findings

3.1. Behaviours from Large Classes

This part shows behaviours that were developed in large classes. The purpose was to learn about behaviors were developed or were likely to be developed from large classes.

3.1.1 Long discussions

During interview, it was revealed that there was a tendency of overcrowded classes to discuss in depth a topic under discussion. Students were likely to discuss a concept for a longer time in an large class than in a small class. The propensity was associated with diversity of students. The more diverse the class the more students were likely to contribute their ideas on a topic under discussion. In this regard, a teacher was asked: *What behaviours are observable/developed from large classes?* In this question, the researcher wanted to know some behaviours a student is likely to develop in class and/or during entering in or getting out of classes. As it regards, one of participants said:

There are bad and good habits that the students develop in large classes which affect teaching and learning process. In large classes, it takes a lot of time to discuss one minor concept. This is because a large class has students with different perspectives and they tend to have some battles during the discussion which is not bad if the concept they are discussing is relevant and useful. .

Furthermore, during unobtrusive observation, it was revealed that in entering a classroom students showed behaviours such as pushing each other as they entered through the door; collided, tickled, and pinched. These behaviours made students take longer time to enter a classroom. As such, it took about three minutes entering and settling in a classroom. Indeed, during observation of classes, it was revealed that students took long time discussing one concept because of contrasting argumentations during discussion. This was something good; however, it was time consuming at times. A teacher took long time to clarify a particular concept for the students to follow.

Other behaviours reportedly common in large classes were: cheating, lateness, indiscipline, stealing; truancy and ineffectiveness in learning among students. Moreover sleeping, and pretency behaviours. These behaviours are clarified under:

3.1.2. Cheating

During interview, it was revealed that cheating was a common behavior in large or overcrowded classes. One out of ten participants report about students cheating tests and examinations in large classes. This is a red flag from behavior in large classes. One teacher had this to say:

There is an increase of cheating practiced by students in the classroom due to large class size. Most of students tend to cheat during exams and quizzes. In large classes, cheating behaviour is worse because they are many. So, sometimes it is difficult to invigilate large classes. In addition, the cheating habit is more common among male students than among female student counterparts.

During unobtrusive observation, the researcher witnessed some students tended to copy from each other in quizzes. Some of students did not write anything. It was difficult for the teacher to notice that behavior.

3.1.3. Fighting

It was revealed that two out of ten reported that students tended to fight each other when the class was large in secondary school Y. As one of the participants said: *"The acts of fighting among students happen in the form of verbal abuses, physical fight bullying, and arson attacks"*. The other teacher said that;

"Fighting occurs in a classroom if there is no teacher. In addition, it happens in taking meals; participating in social events and when going back home. Further, these may lead to the destruction of school properties which are potential for supporting teaching and learning process in classes.

In addition, based on the extract, fighting does not only happen in large classes, but in classrooms and other social gatherings where there is no teacher.

3.1.4. Getting late in class

It was revealed seven out of ten participants reported that students tended to enter class late. This behavior was speculated to be associated with distance from their residences and poor classroom management skills among teachers. One of the participant said:

"...The bad behaviour which is a challenge to schools' administration is student getting in class late...thus, students getting late in class is on the increase behavior. Five to ten students enter the class ten or more minutes every day later after the normal time of 08:00 am".

Students do not enter classes in time. The behavior is a fast-growing one among students. Students are no longer punctual in classes as one would expect. This behavior was also seen during unobtrusive observation.

3.1.5. Stealing

It was revealed that seven out of ten participants reported that there was behavior of stealing among students in the secondary schools due to large classes. In most cases the behavior is common among boy students. As one of participants reported:

Stealing is a behaviour common to most of students in our school. The behavior of stealing is common among male students, and it is more dominant in grade eleven compared to other grades in the school.” Another participant said: “Students steal because they want a property, and hence they can cause conflict with their fellow students in a classroom.

3.1.6. Truancy

It was revealed that six out ten of participants said that truancy was common among students in large class. The behavior is particularly common among boy students and day ones. At times, truancy is an outcome of a class teacher failing to manage a large class. Some of participants said:

Truancy increases overtime. The behaviour of truancy results in student absence in large classes. Truancy is the most dominant problem of all. Most students come to school at their own convenience. We have students who can stay home for a week without any information to a class teacher. Most of these students with such behaviours are day scholars. Truancy is a common behaviour among boy students who are day scholars.

Another teacher who was interviewed said that

Teacher inability to manage a class results in student truancy. Truancy is common among classes with irresponsible class teachers. A large class with one class teacher only incapacitates his/her ability to manage it appropriately. It is not easy for a class teacher to handle a class of more than ninety students. This is particularly true for advanced level students.

Based on the extracts of voices from participants, it is not easy for a teacher to handle an overcrowded class. This is particularly the case with advanced students.

3.1.7. Laziness

It was revealed that five out of ten said that students in large classes were more likely to be lazy in class most of the time. Most of student in large classes sleep when there no teacher in class. This tendency may affect student learning. One of the participants said:

Since the class is large, there is the possibility of some of students being lazy in the teaching and learning process. The students become lazy because of poor class management of teachers in teaching. Hence, it fuels student poor performance in their studies

During unobtrusive observation, students tended to sleep in classes mostly when a teacher was not in class.

3.1.8. Concealing culprits

At times, students made noisy in class. When teachers made efforts to identify those who made noisy, students hid, or were not ready to reveal those who made the noisy. They chose not to mention the noise makers in classrooms. One teacher participant had this to say:

Some classes are very stubborn. We can hear them making noisy; however, when we try to find out the responsible students for the noisy, we cannot establish. This is a common behaviour in large classes.

From the extracts, large classes are attributable to hiding students with unwanted behaviours. This is particularly related to concealing unwanted behaviours.

4. Discussion

In-depth discussion in large classes takes long time. This implies that a concept presented in a large class is normally discussed for a long time. This further infers that if a teacher uses student-centred method a discussion of a concept consumes a lot of time. This is because a class comprises students with different socio-economic backgrounds. The differences in socio-economic background signifies varied views, opinions and perspectives. The differences in perspectives are as many as individuals comprising a large class. Individuals are different even in terms of mental capabilities, which culminates in different arguments across students in a class. This tendency in large classes promotes a democratic behaviour in society. In addition, it promotes tolerance when there are different perspectives. It nurtures the behaviour of self-criticism and accepting new perspectives from others. In this way, it creates society with ability to rely on logic of an argument rather than on who says it. Importantly, the discussion in large classes cultivates the behaviour of individuals attacking arguments rather than individual persons. This is one of positive behaviours that is likely to develop from large classes.

One of common behaviour in large classes is cheating behaviour in quizzes or examinations. This implies students in large classes develop the behaviour of cheating in tests or examinations. Probably, this is because an invigilator cannot see all students in a large class, or the students have a feeling that they cannot be seen by an invigilator because of the size of a class. Therefore, this means that students in large classes feel that the chances for being caught in cheating in large classes are narrow. This is to say human being behaviour is sometimes contextual.

Indeed, this further indicates that students are not faithful in tests and/or in examinations. This further implies that human beings are not hundred percent faithful, at times, if they find a chance of doing something bad and there is no possibility of being caught; they can attempt to do it. This may also mean that the employees and leaders in government machinery graduate from different levels of education while are not faithful. From this tendency, they can attempt or plunder public resources or deliberately mismanage public funds. At times, the government machinery may override legislations or laws of the land. These behaviours start from a family level; then, changed

or are maintained at school level or in education systems. As such, large classes are attributable to behaviours that are normally shown when there is no possibility of being caught or seen by community, and/or family members, or even teachers or clergymen. There might be low statistics on a particular bad behaviour because it is done in secrecy, but in actual sense the behaviour is at commonplace. Large classes are likely to create graduates who are liars compared to their counterpart small classes.

Furthermore, large classes develop the behaviour of fighting. This implies that in large classes when a teacher is not their students tend to fight each other. When there is no leadership in class or at home or village, the list goes on. The likelihood is that the class or family or village is likely to be chaotic or erratic. Individuals require strong leadership all the time to comply with the laws of the land or classroom rules. Chaotic behaviour has its home in a society where there is no leadership, government or watchdog to moderate the behaviours of individuals. In theory and in practice, we need society with complete faithful individuals even in the absence of leaders, government, or watchdogs in order to prevent fighting or grievances among members of society. Importantly, the behaviours we see among people in society, in schools, in families, in churches, in mosques, and elsewhere are shadow behaviours. The really behaviours are seen in the absence of people individuals' respect. To conclude the behaviours of human beings are contextual, or circumstantial. This is to say individuals careful decide when and how to behaviour based on the inner goals (what they want to achieve) and the people around them.

Large classes are associated with student behavior of getting late in class. This implies that large classes may necessarily have students who arrive late in class because of their diversity. Probably, this is because large classes increase the chances that some students stay far away from the school. That means a large class is likely to comprise a good number of students who stay away from the school. Thus, having some of students with circumstantial behavior of getting late in class because of distance from their residences to a school. Teachers need to be wary of presence of students in large classes who stay far away from a school, and develop skills for handling large classes for effective learning to occur. Furthermore, this infers that the larger the class the more diverse it becomes. The diversity of large a class means more teacher energy and creativity are required to control students. Therefore, class teachers for large classes require more commitment and reflection to ensure that their decisions are just; thus, making everything go smoothly through effective handling of classes. This behaviour of getting late in classes, or social gatherings is a commonplace practice in Tanzania. Experience shows that people in Tanzania whether learned or illiterate tend to get late in scheduled meetings, activities or programmes. In short, there is no concept of time in Tanzania.

Stealing other student effects is one of behaviours from large classes. This implies that large classes increase student confidence to steal from others. This is probably because it is not easy to be caught because classes are overcrowded. Overcrowded classes, motivate some students to steal effects from others. As has been noted elsewhere in this paper, bahvaiour of an individual is sometimes

contextual. This is to say the same students who steal other students' effects in large classes are not likely to steal in small classes. This is because it is easier to spot a person who might be responsible for stealing something from someone in small classes. This further means that human being behaviour is not always the same in all contexts. You can trust someone in a certain context, and you may not need to do the same to the very person in another situation. Therefore, the behavior of an individual is contextual. Indeed, behaviours of individuals at times lies on situations or contexts and at given point in time.

Truancy is one of behaviours some students demonstrate in large classes. This implies that large classes result in truancy. Probably, it happens mostly in large classes because the students have a feeling that a teacher or anybody else may not easily notice the absence in class or in a school. Surprisingly, the truancy behaviour is common among boy students compared to their female student counterparts. Further research may be needed to study on the reason for boy students being more truant than girl students. Though, one explanation could be boy students are given a label in society as masculine and brave whereas girl children are perceiving as weak, feminine. As such, boy students are likely to risk in terms of behaviour such as that of truancy. The URT (2025) prisoner statistics indicate there are more male inmates compared to their female counterparts. The discrepancy between imprisoned men and women is remarkable, and men lead in every form of crime in Tanzania (URT, 2025). Indeed, the findings are in line with the observations in this study. Boy students are more likely to engage in truancy than girl students.

Large classes culminate in a behavior of laziness among students. This infers that when a class is large some students are likely to be lazy. Great number of students in class acts as a camouflage for laziness. A student assumes that it might not be easy to be noticed in a large class. As such, a student may choose not to write an assignment or to participate fully in the teaching learning process. Experience show that this behavior is common in group works. If a group work is not well coordinated, some of group members may not participate and leave a hearty work to be done by a group member. This further infers that when individuals are in groups tend to use other members as a shield to direct participation in a process. This means that teachers need to be wary of how students are engaged in a teaching-learning process. The teachers need to make teaching-learning process inclusive.

Concealing unwanted behaviour or culprits' classrooms. This means that students in large classes are not likely to discern students who misbehave in the absence of a teacher. This is to say they cannot reveal a responsible person for an unwanted behaviour. This behavior of concealing the responsible person for an unwanted behaviour is attributable to sociological understanding of society. Individuals who belong to the same unit in society are likely to protect each other. A school has units of "society". These units are: teachers, female teachers, male teachers, students, female students, male students, non-teaching staff, the list may continue for some time. Based on the units one can learn that students are more likely to protect members from their unit from being harmed. This could be one of the reasons that may cause students to conceal culprits, or their

colleagues who are responsible for a particular unwanted behaviour. Furthermore, members of the same family are likely to protect each other against any form of an enemy. In classes, a teacher may be perceived as an enemy as he/she does not belong in a unit of students in a school but that of teachers. This behaviour observed in large classes in a school; it is likely to re-occur in life after school. The society is likely to comprise people who protect each other even when things go wrong provided, they belong to the same unit in society. A society with such habits is not likely to grow socially and economically.

5. Conclusion

There are various behaviours which manifest in large classes. The chances for the same behaviors to appear in small classes are narrow. The behaviours manifesting in large classes are nurturing effects from large classes, and at times result from inability of class teachers to manage them (large classes). Indeed, student diversity from large classes is one of reasons that result in various behaviours in class. In view of this, for a class teacher to manage a large class, it requires teacher's commitment and informed decisions to achieve the goal of handling a class successfully. That is to say a class teacher is obliged to work extra mile hard to maintain discipline in a large class.

6. Policy implications

The schools and families have to discourage the behavior of stealing among male children. This is for the welfare of the nation. In view of this, schools and families have to concentrate on the male child to get rid of the vices seemingly common among boy children (students). Further, schools and families have taught the children (students) how to manage their time well in their day-to-day schedules. This practice will create society that keeps time in all situations in life. Finally, the ministry responsible for educational matters should provide capacity building programmes on how to handle large classes.

7. Area for further research

Researchers may study to find out leading behaviours in large classes, and how to get rid of such behaviours in classes in education systems.

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