

Quality Learning In Large Classes

Basorun J. O.

Department of Urban and Regional Planning
School of Environmental Technology
Federal University of Technology, Akure
E-mail: nbason2003@yahoo.com

Abstract

The tension created by the increase in large classes in most universities worldwide call for serious attention. The overall decline in resources of these institutions coupled with the dramatic growth in student enrolment complicate the situation. Students are now more likely to have less consultation with their lecturers with inadequate access to learning support services. This paper makes a review of the case and adopts innovative strategies for quality teaching and learning in the universities.

Keywords: *classes, learning, quality teaching, university.*

1.0 Introduction

Teaching and learning occur simultaneously. Both have identifiable philosophies that are focused on outcomes and “implications for how University curricula and teaching strategies are developed and contribute to future social capital” (Hunt, 2003). Large classes are a common phenomenon on many University campuses globally. Faced with enormous challenges, such as decreased funding from governmental sectors, increased criticism about the quality of student learning, increased pressure of accountability, and increased student enrolment, higher education institutions strive to find creative ways to meet the learning needs of students in large classes (Stanley and Porter, 2003).

Evidently, the variables involved in teaching large classes are complex and are affected by numerous instructional dimensions (Wulff, Nyquist, & Abbott, 1987). From a student-focused conception, a teacher is interested in basic strategies that are likely to achieve the students learning aim and the most efficient method of disseminating knowledge on a wider scope. In this context, educating the student in a large class is facing a period of reform, this time addressing criteria of quality, diversity and sustainability.

The strength of any University depends on its ability to foster an environment of excellence in the full range of activities it undertakes. In the higher education sector, “the University is committed to providing an excellent campus-based education and to the centrality of teacher-student interaction in this increasingly technological era (McPhee, 2003). The main issue now is how to improve University teaching in multitude settings: in large lecture theatres, in extended groups and collaborative exercise for the students to acquire the desired knowledge, skills and values? This article reflects the benefits that can flow from the growing diversity of student cohorts and approaches adopted by those who teach them.

2.0 Quality Learning

Quality learning in the University is becoming increasingly recognized worldwide. As the highest citadel of learning, it places much premium on knowledge generation and transfer. Suffice to say that the lecturer as the fountain of wisdom demands remarkable excellence in the course delivery so that the content to be learnt is systematically organized for the purpose of facilitating qualitative attainment to meet the global desire of effective positive changes in the society (Opeloye, 2011).

In a competitive global knowledge economy, a country’s level of technological advancement is measured by the quality of learning of its people. Essentially, these are activities carried out for the purpose of attaining a degree of excellence and conformity with standards (local and international) in a manner to bear relevance to societal needs. However, the process must be systematic, well-structured and continuous with attention to quality maintenance and improvement.

Markwell (2003) asserts that a number of factors shape, the quality of learning. “These include the aptitude and motivation of individual students and their own approaches to learning (including collaborative learning), the quality and diversity of the student body of which they are a part, the curriculum they study, the caliber and strategies of those who teach them, the size and nature of their classes, the ways in which learning is encouraged by assessment process and feedback, the learning resources (libraries, laboratories and information technology) available for use, and the wider institutional and social context.”

3.0 Methodology

The study is based on quality learning in the Universities which is currently lacking in the tertiary institutions and adopted the qualitative research approach through the review of relevant literature in order to contextualize current research in the field of study. Data were sourced from published material such as books, journal articles, as well as from the internet amongst others. These gave an in depth knowledge on the pattern of teaching and learning in the Universities.

4.0 Teaching Qualities

The teaching method in institutions of higher learning is lecturing which involves a three-fold task of giving information predominantly by oral methods, generating understanding and creating interest (Olotuah, 2011). Loss of interest leads to little understanding and without information, nothing is understood. The most important thing in lecturing is “not what the lecturer says or writes but what the students have learnt and what encourages them to learn more.”(Brown, 1978). As highlighted by Ramsden (2003), University teaching qualities include:

- producing graduates who are more useful in the community;
- making people delight in embracing change;
- inspiring the learners;
- creating a vision of the future
- equipping people for a life of learning and service; and
- stimulating students to greater mental effort under the intellectual stimulus of being part of a group of very able learners.

Improving teaching quality requires multiple levels of intervention (individual academics course, school, faculty, and department) as well as resolute management, explicit policies and a clear vision to make changes.

5.0 Teaching Large Classes: Innovative Approaches

Teaching large classes poses numerous challenges which a good teacher must strive to surmount. These challenges range from, poor concentration, ineffective engagement of students, inability to build rapport among students, to inadequate evaluation of student learning outcomes, grading and maintenance of classroom decorum. The fact is that sustainable approaches must emerge to ensure that fundamentals of good teaching and learning are embedded in everyday practice.

5.1 Arrangement of Lecture in Modules

In respect of the concept of alignment of teaching with high quality student learning, the teacher needs proper planning for compatibility of lecture with the context. The lecture should be arranged into sections of about 20 minutes each (Zubairu, 2008) usually in a 2 hour contact period so that the first and the last 10 minutes of lecture are used for brief revision of last lecture and responses to question on the topic respectively. This allows students to reconcile information and content of knowledge on a particular lecture topic.

5.2 Avoiding Lecturing Verbatim from Scripts or Textbooks

Effective teaching should be oriented towards innovative thinking. The teacher who works with full focus on concepts in old lecture notes, textbooks or the teachers’ own knowledge structure without acknowledgement of what the students may contribute to the topic will fail to capture the

attention of the class. Generally student hate writing notes, and “feel disengaged when a lecturer reads from a prepared text or material” (Day, 1980).

5.3 Adopting Student-Focused Approach in Teaching

Teachers adopting this approach see their role as helping their students develop and change their conceptions or views about a lecture topic. With this method, the large class is arranged in buzz groups where students can compare their understanding of the lecture topic and give feed back to the teacher for assessment on lecture delivery. The approach encourages students to adopt a more active attitude in learning. During the whole process, the students experience collaborative learning (Micknney & Graham – Buxton, 1993; Oxford, 1997; Storch, 2002).

5.4 Encouraging Interactive Lectures

This lecturing format is adapted particularly in large classes. It evolves around orderly brainstorming in which students generate ideas in response to a question or prompt (Olotuah, 2011). In this case, the teacher asks students some focusing, probing and summarizing questions and randomly selects students to answer them or express their thoughts on the questions. This gives the students the opportunity and motivation to speak (usually English) in public (Tsou, 2005) and have effective participation in class through conversations, discussions and debates.

5.5 Introducing Audio-Visual Teaching Aids

The introduction of new information technologies in teaching puts university education on notice with respect to the quality of learning. This classroom equipment includes power point projectors; public address system etc that will facilitate the chances of the students to concentrates in a large class. For example, after watching a scene or well-arranged teaching points, students learn to retell what they have seen or heard. However, the materials (audio file, transcript file and the relevant information) must be carefully selected and involve real-life context, be interesting and suitable for most students (Material, 2010). All these motivate students to adopt an active learning attitude and provide sufficient references for subsequent studies.

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