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Research paper



Teaching challenges in a large classroom in the secondary schools of Bangladesh

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Abstract

Bangladesh is an overpopulated country, and it has a direct impact on the classroom settings. Teachers are exerting themselves to ensure a quality education, but they encounter a lot of problems. This mixed-method study tried to reveal the true picture of the secondary education of Bangladesh. Teachers have participated in the study by filling out questionnaires and online interviews from different areas of the country, both from urban and rural areas. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed. From the analysis, the study has found that the number is higher than the expectation of the teachers. The ratio is very high in many schools. Giving individual feedback is the most challenging for them, and facilitating classroom activities is also challenging. They applied their pedagogical strategies, but those are not enough. It needs the attention of the authority to solve it.

Keywords: *A Large Classroom, Feedback; Facilitation, Strategy; Pedagogy, Quality Education, Challenging.*

1. Introduction

The present government of Bangladesh is trying to ensure a quality education for all. They have taken a lot of steps, such recruiting subject-based teachers in the secondary schools, providing training to the teachers for their professional development, designing new curriculum, building new structures for infrastructural development, establishing new educational institutions, and so on. Despite all of those efforts, we could not achieve the target for our quality education. As the teachers are the main stakeholders in implementing the educational goals, they cannot perform well due to some unavoidable circumstances. A large classroom size is one of them. In Bangladesh, 170 million people (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics of Bangladesh) live here, and thus the density of population is 1350 per square kilometer. The density of population has a direct impact on teaching and learning activities. Most of the classes are large in Bangladesh. We think that learning outcomes are proportionate to the classroom size: the smaller the size, the more the outcomes are.

1.1. The definition of a large classroom

The definition of a large class varies from scholar to scholar and also from place to place. For example, in developing countries such as Bangladesh, where the current (2025 est.) population is more than 170 million, classrooms will be more crowded compared to developed countries like the USA and European countries that are less populated. With class size, Ur (1996, p. 302) observed that, "the exact number doesn't matter: what matters is how you, the teacher, see the class size in your specific situation". On the other hand, Mulryan-Kyne (2010) proposed a different theory considering the course curriculum and resources availability to the teachers. According to them (2010, p. 176), "Meeting the needs of a class of 50 in a science laboratory designed for 30 is likely to be more challenging than presenting a history lecture to 220 students in a lecture room designed for 200". Hayes (1997) also suggests that it is not possible to determine the largeness of a class numerically, as teachers vary in their perceptions of large classes in different contexts. However, it is not the number of students but the availability of pedagogical materials and facilities that will make classes appear small or large (Ur 1996). In context of Bangladesh we can say that large classes will be those where proper facilities are lacking in, for example, if a class has 50 learners but the class has logistical supports such as technological equipment and devices, projectors, audio systems, enough accommodation facilities, then a teacher can manage the classes well.

2. Purpose statement

Bangladesh is an overpopulated country, and consequently, most of the classrooms are large. Sometimes, there are even 100 students in a single classroom, which makes it next to impossible to manage the students by the teachers let alone ensure quality education. The standard ratio of students to teachers is not maintained in Bangladeshi secondary schools, where large classes have an average of 70-100 students. Teachers try to manage the classes by applying different strategies like group work, using louder voices, and moving around the learners,

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but those efforts are not working effectively for the desired learning outcomes. Thus, the study will go into the problems in a large classroom so that the authority can take necessary steps to mitigate the issues.

3. Research questions

1) What are the challenges of teaching in a large class, as teachers describe in the secondary schools of Bangladesh?
2) What strategies do teachers apply to face those challenges in a large class?
3) How many are those strategies are effective for effective learning outcomes?

4. Literature review

There are a lot of studies that have dealt with the problems in a large classroom. There are also a lot of books that have shown the ways how to manage a large classroom. Carbone (1998) and Stanley & Porter (2002) have produced books focused on the large class environment, offering strategies for course design, student engagement, active learning, and assessment. In most cases, a large classroom creates impediments for the teachers.

4.1. Lower quality of education

Teachers cannot ensure quality education in a large class because they cannot pay attention to every individual equally, and consequently, some students are left out of quality teaching. Large classes create a lot of problems for the students and the teachers which resulting in lower quality of education. (Anny et.al, 2020, Das et.al, 2025). Providing feedback, addressing problems, and imparting information accurately are the prerequisites for quality education. If it is a large classroom, it is hardly possible for teachers to conduct the class in an effective way. A teacher may be distressed, may run out of effort for content delivery and development, thus the goal and objectives of the class are hampered, lowering the quality of the class.

4.2. Strained impersonal relations

There are some other disadvantages to large classes, such as strained impersonal relations between students and the teachers, limited range of teaching methods, discomfort among the teachers, and a perception that who teach large classes are of lower status at the institution, (McLeod,1998), losing efficiency while delivering content (Haque, 2025) etc. According to Arias & Walker (2004), in a small classroom, students can perform better, and it is easier for the teachers to manage the class. In smaller classes, there are better learning environments, and here interactive discussions may be used more than lectures, facilitating better "delayed recall" learning (McKeachie 1990, 190–91) and critical thinking (Raimondo, Esposito, and Gershenberg 1990, 371–72). In smaller classes, teachers know the students' names, and students may not want to deny a teacher who knows them personally (Siegfried and Kennedy 1995, 347, note 1). Lippman (1990, 193) asserted that the class size debate is settled: "There is a strong relationship between class size and student achievement." Al-Jarf (2006) posited that a large class hinders small group activities and doesn't allow the teacher to give individual instruction. Harmer (2007) also asserts that a teacher finds it more difficult to take care of students' individual needs in a large class than in a smaller one.

4.3. Maintaining discipline is a major issue

Again, many researchers have found that maintaining discipline is a major issue in a large class. In this regard, making noise is a common problem according to Harmer (2010); Locastro (2001), and Zhang (2008). Students become engaged in talking and show other problem behaviors in the large classroom. So, a teacher feels a problem in drawing the attention of the learners to the classroom activities when it is very overcrowded (Haque, 2025).

4.4. Lacking eye contact

Eye contact is important while conducting classes because body language plays an important role in engaging the students in the classes. Unfortunately, in a large class when there are more than 50 students, a teacher cannot maintain eye contact with the learners. Verbal and non-verbal ways are both important in the classes, and non-verbal communication, such as looking at the students, can be an important source of motivation and concentration for students' learning as well as a tool for taking and maintaining attention (Zeki, 2009). It is a great source of motivation, concentration, enthusiasm, and a tool for taking and maintaining attention.

5. Methodology

A mixed-methods research design was adopted within the scope of the study: Quantitative data were collected by a Likert Scale Questionnaire, while qualitative data were gathered via semi-structured interviews. A qualitative method was used to capture the phenomenological approach of the participants, and the participants were selected from multiple sources, i.e., from different institutions to ensure triangulation of the study (Denzin, 1978). It was also used to view the policy of the stakeholders holistically and to view its context and complexity as well (Punch, 2000, p. 18). The data elicited via the questionnaire were analyzed through descriptive statistics, and the data gathered from the interview were analyzed by inductive content analysis. The quantitative method was used to get an exact picture of the teachers' perceptions of the study.

5.1. Participants

All the participants were secondary high school teachers from Bangladesh. They were selected from the northern part of Bangladesh. Among the 40 participants, 20 were selected from the government high schools and 20 were selected from non-government high schools. Non-government high schools were in rural areas, whereas government high schools were located in urban areas. The teachers conducted

different classes from grades 6-10. They have mixed experiences of working there; some were novice teachers, and some of them were senior teachers who had been working there for more than 10 years.

5.2. Data collection

To collect data for the current study, different steps were followed: firstly, ethical permission was sought from the Ethical Committee of the authority where the author studies and works. After receiving the ethical permission with some expert opinions, a pilot study was conducted with some of the secondary school teachers. The questionnaire and interviews were piloted so that the researchers could foresee the instruments' applicability and identify possible problems that might occur during the data collection process. The instruments, such as questionnaires, were sent to them by using their email account, and an online interview was administered. The participants opined that the questions in the questionnaire were conceivable to them, and in the interview, the interview questions were straightforward and to the point. So, the instruments were finalized with some slight changes.
After ensuring the instruments were ready, the researchers invited participants to the study by informing them about the ethical issues. Upon their invitation, they were informed that involvement in the study was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw their consent at any time. Since they were not required to write their names on the questionnaire, they kindly provided anonymous information. After gathering quantitative data via the questionnaire, the researcher invited the participants randomly for semi-structured interviews, and meetings were recorded with their informed consent. The interviews lasted about 30 minutes.

5.3. Data analysis

The responses to the questionnaire were collected online, and then it was analyzed for procedures. The quantitative data were analyzed through SPSS. Descriptive statistics were initially run to analyze the data. As for the analysis of the qualitative data, they were transcribed and analyzed through inductive content analysis with the three other coders to avoid any bias and ensure inter-rater reliability. After labeling the data with the codes that were related to the research problems, they were gathered under relevant themes. The researchers followed the procedure of Dörnyei (2007) during the content analysis. Data elicited from the interviews were not analyzed using codes of the existing categories, but rather an inductive content analysis approach was applied.

6. Findings

To get the answers to the RQ-1, the study at first collected some information through a questionnaire about the classroom size of different schools in the secondary sections of Bangladesh, and another one was used to find out the challenges faced by the teachers. Through the first questionnaire, it was made to find out the conditions of the students' enrollment, teachers' perceptions of the classroom size, teacher-student ratio, and teachers' expectations of the classroom size.

6.1. Student enrollment

Appendix A: Questionnaire about the schools' information:

Table 1:

Students' Enrollment Report: Range of Students' Enrollment	Frequency	Ratio of the Information
30-40	4	10%
41-50	--	--
51-60	20	50%
61+	16	40%
Total	40	100%

However, from Table-1 we can see that there were 40 participants for the study, and they reported about their school's current scenario. They reported that according to the table 50 participants teachers informed that they have 51-60 students in their classes and 40 percent reported that they have more than 60 students in the classes that they teach.

6.1.1. An expected size of classroom

Table 2:

Student's Number Expected as a Moderate Class Range of students	Expected as moderate	Ratio of the Information
20-30	28	70%
31-40	8	20%
40-50	4	10%
Total	40	100%

From the table-2 we see that 20-30 students per class is a moderate one so that they conduct the class comfortably. Very few teachers, for example only 10 percent teacher informed that they can continue the classes even in a large one with more than 40 students per class.

6.1.2. When the class is large

Table 3:

Student's Number considered as Large Range of students	Considered as large	Ratio of the Information
30-40	28	70%
41-50	12	30%
Total	40	100%

From the table-3 it is evident that 70 percent teachers have the opinions that if there are more than 30 students, then it is a large and they have to face the challenges associated with a large class. 30 percent of the participants hold the view that more than 40 students can be considered as a large class.

6.1.3. Teacher-student ratio

Table 4:

Teacher-student ratio Range of number	Information Provided by the Teachers	Ratio of the Information
20-30	8	20%
31-40	20	50%
41-50	12	30%
Total	40	100%

From the table-4 we can get a picture of the teacher-student ratio in the secondary schools of Bangladesh. Here in the table, we see that most of the institutions have fewer teachers than is required. 20 percent reported that they have a rate of 20-30 students per teacher, and 50 percent reported that they have more than 30 students per teacher in their school.

Again, in response to RQ-1, after having some information about the conception of the classroom size in the secondary school, the study further went deep to dig into the teachers' challenges in their daily teaching-learning activities. A questionnaire was sent to the teachers to fill up about their experiences in a large class. There were seven sets of questions, and each set had different variables to choose from to understand their difficulties in conducting the classes for an effective learning outcome. There are five options to make it from very easy to very difficult. Overall, there is a tendency to opine that a large class very often hinders their normal teaching competencies, hurting the teaching outcomes. The teachers responded to the survey if they have a large class, and the attendance is full in the class.

Appendix B. Questionnaire about teaching- learning activities

6.2. Keeping students engaged

Table 1:

Keeping students engaged in the class Variable to choose	Frequency	Ratio of the Information
Very easy	8	20%
Easy		
Neutral	16	40%
Difficult	12	30%
Very difficult	4	10%
Total	40	100%

From table-1, we can see that keeping engaged in different activities is a moderate challenge to the teachers. 40% teachers think that they can engage the students in the classes giving them different kinds of task and activities including outside activities.

6.2.1. Students facilitation

Table 2:

Facilitate all the students to participate in the classroom activities Variable to choose	Frequency	Ratio of the Information
Very easy		
Easy		
Neutral	8	20%
Difficult	12	80%
Very difficult		
Total	40	100%

From table-2, we can see that most of the teachers think that facilitating all of the students for an effective classroom activity becomes almost impossible. 80 percent of the teachers hold the view that they faced most challenges pertaining to keep them participating in teaching-learning activities. They cannot act as a good facilitator to ensure a quality education.

6.2.2. Monitoring with eye contact

Table 3:

Monitoring learners' progress. Variable to choose	Frequency	Ratio of the Information
Very easy		
Easy	20	50%
Neutral	12	30%
Difficult	8	20%
Very difficult		
Total	40	100%

From the 3rd it is observed that monitoring learners' progress is not a difficult task on behalf of the teachers. Overall, they agree that it was a medium type of challenge for them. Half of the participants think that it is an easy task because they have enough time to be familiarized with them all the year round. So they can monitor who are improving and who are not.

6.2.3. Assessment

Table 4:

Assessing learners individually. Variable to choose	Frequency	Ratio of the Information
Very easy		
Easy		
Neutral	8	20%
Difficult	32	80%
Very difficult		
Total	40	100%

Next table-4 provides information about the assessment of the learners' task and activities. Almost all of the teachers (80%) agreed that it was one of the toughest challenges for them to carry out. Evaluating and assessing students' activities is thought to be the key factor as it helps to find out the weaknesses and gray areas of the students and teachers can remedial steps thereby. As the teachers fail to assess them, they cannot provide quality education to the students.

6.2.4. Providing feedback

Table 5:

Providing feedback. Variable to choose	Frequency	Ratio of the Information
Very easy		
Easy		
Neutral		
Difficult	16	40%
Very difficult	24	60%
Total	40	100%

Another most astounding table 5 illustrates the most challenging part of the teaching profession from the perspectives of the secondary schools of Bangladesh. All of the teachers who participated in the survey found it most challenging in a large classroom. 60 percent said it is very difficult, and 40 percent found it difficult. No one chose other options. Without giving feedback, we cannot imagine any educational system because feedback works as a scaffolding to improve the learning process. It is very common that students will make mistakes, and teachers will rectify them through feedback. As teachers fail to provide feedback to all students, a quality education is a far cry from Bangladesh.

6.2.5. Managing discipline

Table 6:

Managing discipline Variable to choose	Frequency	Ratio of the Information
Very easy		
Easy	12	30%
Neutral	12	30%
Difficult	16	40%
Very difficult		
Total	40	100%

From the Table 6, 'managing discipline' seems to be moderately challenging. 40 percent of the teachers think that this is difficult, but the rest of the teachers hold the opinion that it is easy or not so challenging.

6.2.6. Managing time

Table 7:

Managing time effectively in the lessons Variable to choose	Frequency	Ratio of the Information
Very easy	4	10%
Easy	8	20%
Neutral	20	50%
Difficult	8	20%
Very difficult		
Total	40	100%

From Table 1, we can see that the time allocated for the class is enough. The duration of the special in the earlier periods it is enough for them. They think that it is easy and, in some cases, very easy to complete the contents within a duration of 60 or 50 minutes.

7. Strategies taken by the teachers and their outputs

To find out the answers to the RQ-2 and RQ-3, the study used qualitative approaches to collect data through interviews. Online interviews were conducted, and some important themes about classroom strategies adopted by the teachers in a large classroom and outcomes thereby discussed below:

In a large classroom, teachers frequently face problems with managing discipline and behavioral issues. Lazear (2003) mentions that if any student behaves badly and tries to disturb the class, the teacher needs to attend to the disturbance and eliminate the noise. In a large class, such behavior from one or more students blocks the learning of that moment and also hinders the learning process. The interviewee (T)

replied in a question, “When any student makes disturbances in a large class and shows disruptive behavior, I talk to him or her personally and try to solve it. Very often it works very well.”

7.1. Group work

Group work is a very common practice in the large classroom. The sitting arrangement is important for that purpose. They can be arranged to sit face to face. Another participant (L) commented, “In classrooms where both individual and group activities take place, seats need to be arranged in such a way that students can see each other as well as the teacher. The creation of such a physical space will not only make them comfortable but also will encourage them to enter group discussion.”

7.2. Managing time

As there are a lot of students in a large class, but the time duration is limited, everyone should be careful about the time. One teacher (K) replied to a question regarding this, “A teacher should focus on the teaching content so that he should not discuss irrelevant things, and he should store teaching resources within reach so that they can be used easily and quickly.”

7.3. Building relations

A classroom is often regarded as a “Learning Community” (UNESCO 2006), as teachers and students see each other every day and work together. Building this psycho-social environment can make a large class feel smaller. One teacher (V) commented, “Students can help teachers to give feedback to the other students, and they can be combined in different ways so that a communal relationship can be grown among them.”

7.4. Maintaining discipline

Maintaining discipline is another challenge that a teacher has to be careful about. In order to maintain a well-disciplined and smoothly functioning classroom, the teacher can relate to students at the beginning of the semester certain things, such as taking attendance, asking permission for unexpected needs. Choosing these rules will make the classroom environment orderly and ensure better learning, as one teacher (O) observed.

8. Discussion

From the data analysis, it was found that teachers face numerous challenges in a large classroom. A classroom should be convenient for the teachers to conduct classes for quality education. We see otherwise in the perspectives of Bangladesh's secondary education. The quantitative data findings revealed that there is a huge gap between the expected number of students and the actual number of students. There are many students against the expectations of the teachers. The teacher-student ratio is also very high in Bangladesh, which hurts learning outcomes. (Sutcher, et.al. 2019).

Another survey revealed that giving individual feedback was the most challenging aspect for teachers in secondary schools in Bangladesh. It was almost impossible for the teachers to give feedback to 60-70 students in a 50-minute class. Without proper feedback, it has a detrimental effect on education. (Schartel, P574. 2012). Another crucial problem is that teachers cannot assess learners individually. This finding implies that teachers generally face challenges in giving them proper instruction through feedback, managing to involve the students in students’ teaching and learning activities.

Qualitative data findings, similarly, correspond to the findings of quantitative data gathered from the questionnaire because teachers stated that they mostly faced the challenges of classroom giving feedback, and helping students in classroom activities. During the interview, teachers stated that they applied to make the class effective, for example, engaging them in group work, facilitating their internal relationships, and ensuring good discipline in the classroom, because discipline is a prerequisite for a learning environment. (Bear, G2010).

Conclusively, it can be said that teachers are struggling with the problems associated with a large classroom. They are trying to apply to face the challenges, but most often those endeavors are not effective due to some unavoidable circumstances. The authority should address the problems properly and should make infrastructural development and recruit more teachers to ensure a quality education at the secondary level in Bangladesh.

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