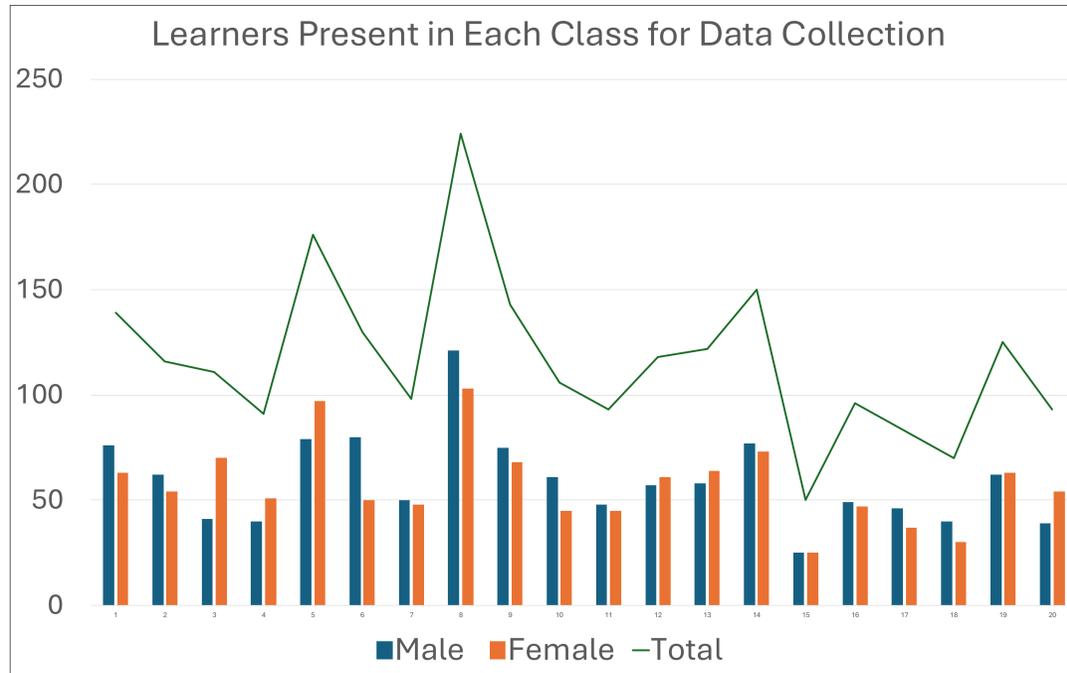


Exploring Instruction and Management Strategies in Overcrowded Classrooms

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Introduction

- Large class size presents unique challenges and opportunities for educators, particularly in resource-limited settings.
- In Malawi, where overcrowded classrooms are common, understanding how teaching practices evolve in these environments is crucial for improving educational outcomes.
- Through this research project, we explored the teachers' beliefs about large class pedagogy and management strategies.
- Our research team visited 27 Malawian classrooms and interviewed multiple teachers from different schools, asking about their pedagogies, classroom management strategies, methods that don't work, behavior consequences, and forms of assessment.
- There is a large gap in the literature of large class pedagogy, and nearly all published research is anecdotal, and to date, no empirical research findings have been located testing the effectiveness of large class pedagogy.
- This research is important because the issue of overcrowded classrooms is a global issue that affects all education systems in low and middle-income countries. Teachers in this context need to understand how to handle these classroom situations.
- The evidence from this research can support teacher learning.

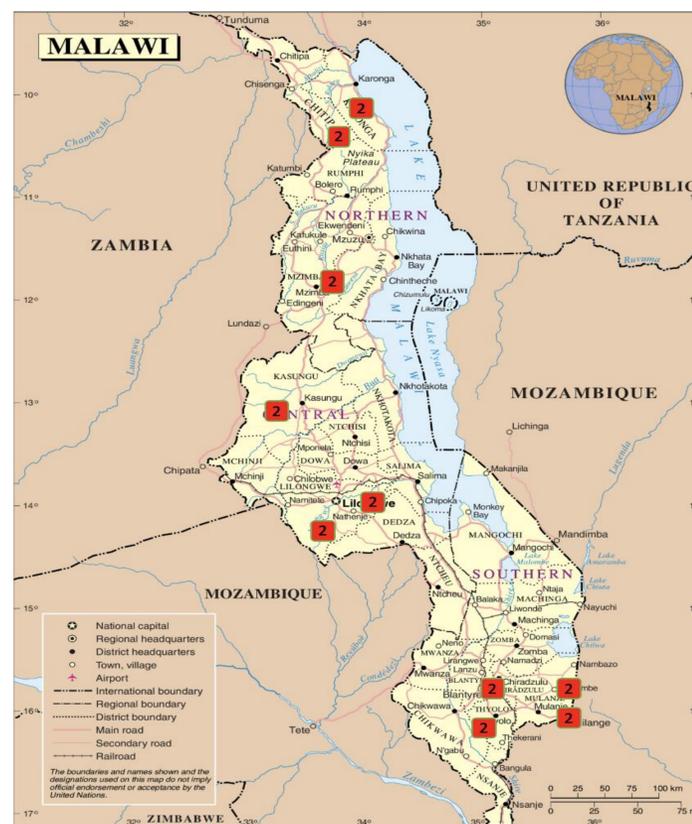


Results

- In our preliminary findings, we have discovered that teachers believe group work is one of the most common activities in large classrooms to encourage learner participation.
- Teachers also use group work because it is easier for them to control several groups vs 200 individual learners. In Malawi, “marking” (grading) is a major task for a teacher, so by only having to mark 20 groups’ work vs 200 also helps so they can stay on track with their lesson plans.
- We found that teachers delegate authority to some students as a management strategy. These students are often called group leaders or secretaries, and they have a lot of control over their peers. These students are given tasks such as leading their group, peer teaching, and reporting back to the teacher on other students' behavior.
- By determining what pedagogy and management strategies are culturally and contextually appropriate, training programs can be developed for teachers.

Methods

- In July of 2024, two of our team members, along with two Malawians, visited 10 schools and 20 classrooms across Malawi and interviewed head teachers, section heads, and classroom teachers.
- Before beginning the data analysis, we edited a previous codebook from the first round of data collection/analysis to include new codes or remove codes that weren't relevant to the latest data collected.
- Interview and focus group transcripts were analyzed following a thematic analysis approach (Miles et al., 2019)
- Transcripts were initially coded using a combination of deductive and inductive codes using NVivo 14 qualitative data analysis software and a priori codebook.
- Second-cycle analysis techniques were then used to develop themes and findings (Saldaña, 2021)
- We divided the different codes between different team members and turned these codes into code summaries that were shared in weekly meetings.
- The team worked collaboratively to analyze data, employing methods outlined by Richards and Hemphill (2018) for rigorous collaborative coding and multiple strategies to enhance trustworthiness, such as reflexive memo writing and triangulation of data sources.



Sites of Data Collection included Ten primary schools located across the three regions of Malawi

Discussion

- To the best of our knowledge, many studies haven't been done to see how the pedagogy is impacted by class sizes of this nature.
- Preliminary results indicate that the teacher mostly utilizes group work in large classes and very rarely utilizes individual work.
- Teachers also believe that even if they had more training on how to manage a class of this size (100+ students) it wouldn't help them teach better.
- Teachers feel like they need more teachers to be allocated to the school so the students can be spaced out more.
- Further studies should test the effectiveness of providing training to teachers on the use of whole-class instruction that incorporates active learning, group work where skilled learners are tasked with leading groups, efficient classroom routines, and positive behavior management strategies.

Resources

- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. (2019). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Richards, K. A. R., & Hemphill, M. A. (2018). A practical guide to collaborative qualitative data analysis. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 37(2), 225–231. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jtpe.2017-0084>
- Saldaña, J. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Sage.

“You have to make sure that each and every learner participates actively in that group work.”
Head Teacher – Lunzu, Malawi

“We use group work in order to accommodate all learners”
Section Head – Dyanyama, Malawi

