



Effect of Class Size on the Academic and Social Life of Primary School Pupils in Nigeria: Teachers' Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the effect of overpopulation on the academic performance and social life of pupils in primary schools in Local Education District IV of Lagos State. The sample was selected using the systematic random sampling technique. Some research questions and hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. Questionnaires were employed to obtain information about the topic under study. The sample size was 100 respondents. The data collected were subjected to chi-square statistical analysis. The major findings of the study indicate that there is a significant effect of overpopulation on the academic performance of pupils in primary schools in Local Education District IV as the X^2 calculated value of 22.911 > the X^2 value that was 21.026 at 12 degrees of freedom. Also, there are significant effects of overpopulation on the social life of the pupils as data revealed that the X^2 calculated value was 35.829 > the X^2 value 24.966 at 15 degrees of freedom. Overpopulation has made teachers dispassionate about their jobs. It is then recommended that the government should devise means of ensuring that not more than 35-40 pupils are in a class for primary schools. Training for the teachers on how to effectively manage large classes where there are more than 40 pupils in a classroom was also recommended.

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INTRODUCTION

Overcrowding in schools has been a major issue for researchers in education. In many schools particularly in Lagos, the classes are overpopulated and teachers and pupils believe that there should be recommended class sizes that will enable the pupils to learn optimally. Often, pupils in large classes do not understand what the teacher is explaining; and are always overwhelmed when those sitting in the front rows inadvertently chorus positive nudges to the teacher to move ahead. Such pupils are always discouraged and afraid to ask questions. Sometimes, they are intimidated and ashamed to raise their hands to ask for an explanation of a concept that the majority of the pupils seem to understand. The issue here is not that the majority understands it, but that the volume of the

class allows the minority's voice to be loud enough to taunt even the majority of the pupils that don't have any idea of what is going on.

In other cases, when a teacher takes his time to make sure that all his pupils understand a particular concept for example a mathematical equation, the teacher may find that he has to explain to each pupil one by one; and by so doing, the time would be insufficient to explain to all and sundry except some compromises are made. The major compromises are usually on the side of the pupils to make sure that the class moves on. Concepts unclear to them are carried home because they are not confident enough to keep disturbing the teacher.

The ability of the teacher to single out pupils and have a personal relationship with them is also absent or compromised in an



overpopulated class situation. The teacher tries to salvage the situation by getting to know the class gradually but only has a close connection with only a few pupils. Most of the pupils only get along with the teacher much later and may find it hard to understand the things that they have missed. Also trying to single out people who are disturbing the class (making noise) will be easier in a class that is not overpopulated. In a class that is very rowdy and noisy, it is hard to single out the source of the noise; as it is merely a chorus of the hums made by the pupils not trying to make noise.

Sometimes, having a large class will be more encouraging to the teacher in terms of personal achievement of being able to both control and order a large group of people, it might be challenging but very fulfilling; and it allows the class to create its factions; and grow as a pseudo-community. While having a class that is overpopulated has its good and bad sides; there might also be effects on the academic performance and social life of the pupils.

Having an overpopulated class also might affect the nature and level of peer-to-peer interactions in the class. In a small class, it takes less time to know the names of everyone in the class; and have a full view of interactions in the class; while in a large class, some people might not get to meet each other until after a full session. This level of social interaction might give room to how the students turn out to be social; it might influence their tendency to socialize or be recluses; as this study intends to investigate; it might increase the tendency toward the perpetuation of prosocial or antisocial behaviour. A dead giveaway is the nature of public primary schools where the students whether overpopulated or under-populated are prone to perpetrating deviant behaviour due to the nature of relationships and individuals associated with the school.

There are many primary schools in Lagos state, both public and private. Public schools are particularly notorious for having overpopulated classes. The public schools are overpopulated due to the reduced or subsidized fees paid by the pupils' parents to maintain the pupils throughout their education. Private schools do not have this problem because of the high fees they charge.

Academic performance can be operationalized as the pupils' overall performance; assessed by the teachers who are majorly the respondents of this study while Social Life signifies the quality of interactions that school pupils experience; firstly, from the volume of socialization that is involved; and the level of kindness that the relationships allow; and the level of social activities that are participated in.

Teachers in overpopulated schools worry about meeting the needs of more pupils with fewer resources. Pupils and parents complain about classroom conditions and insufficient books and lockers for pupils. Over the years, researchers have looked at why many urban schools are above capacity and proposed solutions to the overcrowding, such as private schooling and opening new facilities.

Overpopulated classes make it more unlikely for the individual pupil's voice to be heard by the teacher which would not be the case in a less populated class. Large classes also make a student feel drowned and inaccessible to others, and aid the formation of small groups and alienation of certain groups of people in the class; hence the individual has to have both a high level of social skill and deviance to fit in; because the class is too large for everyone to know each other. Overcrowding hasn't received the same research attention as other topics in education. There is a need to make available studies that will be able to engender the recognition of the need for less populated classes or the need for more populated classes as the case may be. Hence this study intends to investigate the effects of overpopulation on the social life and academic performance of primary school pupils in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims at investigating how teachers perceive the effects of overpopulation on the social life and academic performance of pupils in primary schools in Lagos state. Specifically, it aims to:

1. Examine the effects of overpopulation on the academic performance of pupils in primary schools in Local Education District IV of Lagos State



2. Examine the effects of overpopulation on the social life of pupils in primary schools in Local Education District IV of Lagos State
3. Examine the attitude of teachers towards overpopulation in primary school classes in Local Education District IV of Lagos State

Research Questions

Answers were sought to the following research questions in the work.

1. What are the effects of overpopulation on the academic performance of pupils in primary schools in Local Education District IV in Lagos State?
2. What are the effects of overpopulation on the social life of pupils in primary schools in Local Education District IV in Lagos State?
3. What is the attitude of teachers towards overpopulation in primary school classes in Local Education District IV of Lagos State?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested in the work

Hypothesis One

There will be no significant effect of overpopulation on the academic performance of pupils in primary schools in Local Education District IV of Lagos State.

Hypothesis Two

There will be no significant effect of overpopulation on the social life of pupils in primary schools in Local Education District IV of Lagos State.

THEORETICAL FRAME WORK

The theoretical framework for this study is the minimization of negative externalities (problematic behavioural and academic characteristics of pupils) achieved through the mechanism of smaller class size which impacts pupils' learning (Ready, 2008). The effectiveness of class size reduction (CSR) is based on the idea that reducing the number of pupils in a classroom alters the entire classroom environment, creating a more positive learning

environment. Pritchard (1999) stated that the pupil-teacher dynamic, student-to-student/pupil to pupil dynamic, and teacher-parent dynamic are all improved in smaller classrooms. In addition, teachers have more time, resources, and incentives to create improved lesson plans with greater levels of differentiation. This shows that socialization is also being highlighted in theoretical discussions; given the consideration of pupil to pupil/student to student dynamics.

Owoeye and Yara (2011) stated that after being assigned to smaller classes, teachers reported that students received more individualized attention. Teachers got to know individual students better and kept track of individual student's progress. In turn, students became more engaged because of this increased, personalized learning environment. Additionally, teachers spent less time on classroom management, which offered additional instructional time for all pupils in the classroom. Blatchford, Bassett, and Brown (2011) conducted a study at both the primary and secondary school level and found that in larger classes, pupil interaction with teachers decreased, which resulted in a lower level of pupil engagement. Englehart (2007) confirmed that in smaller classes, time spent on classroom management was decreased which led to improvement in academic achievement.

Atta, Jamil, Ayaz, Shah, & Shah, (2011) theorized that smaller classes resulted in a more positive environment due to pupils developing better social relationships with each other. Higher achieving pupils encouraged and assisted their peers, resulting in a higher-performing classroom. Gottfredson and Dipetro (2011) confirmed this theory as they found that social life in terms of pupil-pupil classroom dynamics improved in smaller classrooms, which in turn led to a more effective teaching environment. In addition, O'Brennan, Bradshaw, and Furlong (2014) found that pupil perceptions were improved in smaller classrooms.

The final rationale for improved pupil achievement in smaller classrooms as theorized by Pritchard (1999) was that teachers had more time, resources, and incentive to create improved lesson plans with greater levels of differentiation. Teachers spent less time grading, which allowed



more time for lesson planning. In addition, teachers had more opportunities for collaboration with other teachers and had more room available to transition classes into a larger variety of teaching formats. DiBiaise and McDonald (2015) confirmed that smaller classes did increase teacher curriculum development.

Empirical Review

In the 2007-2008 school year, Ontario, a province in Canada, implemented the Primary Class Size Reduction (PCSR) initiative in all its primary (elementary) schools. This law required all classes to be reduced to a maximum class size of 20 pupils (Mascall & Leung, 2012). Bascia and Faubert (2012) found many positive outcomes from the implementation of this law in elementary grades including improved pupil-teacher relationships, more individual support for "at-risk" pupils, more resources devoted to all levels of elementary classes, additional teacher training, and increased personal space which allowed for more diverse learning strategies to be introduced.

Brühwiler and Blatchford (2011) in a combined study of 26 primaries and 23 secondary Swiss schools found that, on average, a one pupil reduction in class size resulted in a half-point increase in pupil test scores. The researchers noted that Swiss schools on average already had small class sizes, with the average class size being 19 or fewer pupils, which implied that even with small classes, the class reduction could still be effective in increasing academic achievement.

Konstantopoulos (2008) investigated whether decreasing class sizes could close the achievement gap between high and low-level achievers. His findings did not show that the achievement gap was closed. However, the reason for this outcome was not that CSR did not help low achieving pupils, but that it helped high achieving pupils even more. McKee, Sims, and Rivkin (2015) investigated patterns of heterogeneity in the effects of class size on pupil achievement in the Project STAR classes that showed improvement. They found that pupils in higher-poverty schools and academically gifted pupils both benefitted from smaller class sizes. The researchers conjectured that in higher

poverty classrooms, there are a larger number of interruptions and classroom management issues that can be minimized with smaller class sizes. In academically gifted classrooms, smaller classes can result in more individualized and challenging instruction.

Kassile (2014) analyzed the effect of the pupil-teacher ratio on pass rates on the Primary School Leaving Examination in Mainland Tanzania and found that the pupil-teacher ratio had a statistically negative effect on pupil achievement with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.74176 and $p = .0001$. Milesi and Gamoran (2006) conducted a study of kindergarteners and found classroom size did not affect pupil achievement. Konstantopoulos and Traynor (2014) found similar results in their study of fourth-grade reading test scores on the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) in Greece. They found a small insignificant association between Class Size Reduction and pupil achievement.

Englehart (2007) conducted a qualitative study on why a reduction in class size could have a significant effect on pupils' achievement. He found that pupils were able to transition from one task to another quicker in the small class and spent a greater amount of time engaged in the material presented. In addition, the pupils interviewed stated that in the small class, the atmosphere was much more conversational and familial. This helped facilitate their learning by opening lines of communication between pupils and pupils.

According to Fitzgerald, Mann, Carbrera & Wong, (2003), a child's socialization in school is affected by many factors including school climate, staff: child ratio, staff education and training, the setting of the school developmentally, and terms of the curriculum; safety conscious structural facilities; these go a long way in determining the student's level of socialization than just class size. However, the researchers opine that large classes were more likely to produce anti-social and deviant behaviour as opposed to small class sizes.

METHODOLOGY

The study utilized a descriptive survey research design. The population is primary



school teachers in Local Education District (LED) IV of Lagos State, in the 2018-2019 academic session. The population of primary school teachers in Lagos LED IV is 258 while that of pupils in the district stands at 274,025 at the time of the study. The study adopted the systematic random sampling strategy. Five schools in the district were randomly selected since all the public schools in the area were largely overpopulated. 20 teachers were randomly examined in each of the five schools; bringing the sample size to 100 respondents (teachers).

A questionnaire titled "Overpopulation, Academic and Social Life of Pupils (OASLP) was constructed by the researchers. The instrument consists of two sections. Section A, covered personal information about respondents, while section B dwelt on research questions related to the effects of overpopulation on academic performance and the social life of pupils. The

questionnaire was a 4-point Likert-like scale ranging from Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree to Strongly Disagree. The respondents were expected to select from the options the one that represents their opinion, feelings, or attitudes. The instrument was vetted by two experts in Measurement and Evaluation. Their input was reflected in the final draft of the instrument. The test-Retest method was used to ascertain the reliability of the instrument. A calculated reliability index of 0.82 was attained using Cronbach alpha correlational analysis. The collection of data involved the distribution of questionnaires to the teachers after permissions were sought and obtained from the appropriate authorities. Frequencies, Percentages Means, and Standard Deviation was used to answer the research questions while the hypotheses were tested using Chi-square statistical tool.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondents' Demographic Information

Table 1: Teachers Response Distribution by Gender

Gender	Number of Respondents	Responses in Percentage
Male	56	56
Female	44	44
Total	100	100

Source: Researcher's Output (2020)

From the above table, 56 male and 44 female teachers responded to the questionnaire which represented 56% and 44% respectively

Research Question 1. What are the effects of overpopulation on the academic performance of pupils in primary schools in Local Education District IV of Lagos State?

Response to Research Questions

Table 2: Overpopulation and Academic Performance

	Items	SA	A	D	SD	MEAN	STD. DEV	DECISION
	Overpopulation and Academic Performance							
1.	Pupils will perform better when in a larger class	10 10%	9 9%	11 11%	70 70%	2.33	0.752	DISAGREED
2.	Pupils find it easier to learn in a large class.	8 8%	14 14%	18 18%	60 60%	2.020	0.317	DISAGREED
3.	Pupils ask more questions in a large class	54 54%	30 30%	12 12%	4 4%	3.04	0.346	AGREED
4.	Pupils demonstrate desire to	25	15	30	30	2.35	0.783	DISAGREED

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	learn in a very large overpopulated class	25%	15%	30%	30%			
5	Pupils find it easier to grasp concepts when the class is overpopulated	12 12%	23 23%	40 30%	35 35%	2.32	0.337	DISAGREED
6	The general performance in subjects is better in overpopulated classes	15 15%	20 20%	30 30%	35 35%	2.25	0.557	DISAGREED

Table 2 above shows that 19% of the respondents agreed that pupils will perform better when in a larger class, while 81% disagreed with a mean of 2.330 and a standard deviation of 0.752. Only 22% of the respondents agree that pupils find it easier to learn in a large class while 78% disagreed, with a mean of 2.20 and a standard deviation of 0.317. The table shows that 84% of the respondents agreed that pupils ask a lot of questions in a large class while the remaining 16% disagreed with the statement with a mean of 3.040 and standard deviation of 0.346. 40% of the respondents agreed that Pupils demonstrate a desire to learn in a very large overpopulated class while the remaining 60% disagreed with the mean of 2.35 and standard deviation of 0.78. Still, on the table, 35% of the participants agreed that pupils find it

easier to grasp concepts when the class is overpopulated but the remaining 65% of the respondents disagreed with the statement with a mean of 2.320 and a standard deviation of 0.337. Lastly, on the table, 35% of the respondents agreed that the general performance in subjects is better in overpopulated classes while the remaining 65% disagreed with a mean of 2.250 and a standard deviation of 0.557.

It could be concluded therefore that overpopulated classrooms have negative effects on the academic performance of the pupils.

Research Question 2. What are the effects of overpopulation on the social life of pupils in primary schools in Local Education District IV of Lagos State?

Table 3: Overpopulation and Social Life

	Items	SA	A	D	SD	MEAN	STD. DEV	DECISION
7	Pupils in overpopulated classes fit into the situation well	8 8%	27 27%	45 45%	20 20%	2.090	0.518	DISAGREED
8	Pupils in overpopulated classes have higher tendencies for deviant behaviour	64 64%	16 16%	13 13%	7 7%	2.810	0.706	AGREED
9	Pupils in overpopulated classes have higher tendencies for truancy	57 57%	19 19%	15 15%	9 9%	3.160	0.545	AGREED
10	Pupils in overpopulated classes have no friends and move in a solitary fashion	5 5%	12 12%	49 49%	34 34%	2.100	0.574	DISAGREED
11	Pupils in overpopulated classes find it hard to mingle in public	10 10%	14 14%	48 48%	28 28%	2.050	0.544	DISAGREED
12	Pupils in overpopulated classes cannot work well in groups	34 34%	26 26%	16 16%	24 24%	3.120	0.686	AGREED



Table 3 above shows that 35% of the respondents agreed that Pupils in overpopulated classes fit into the situation well while the remaining 65% disagreed with a mean of 2.09 and a standard deviation of 0.52. Also, 80% of the respondents agreed that pupils in overpopulated classes have higher tendencies for deviant behaviour, while the remaining 20% disagreed with a mean of 2.81 and a standard deviation of 0.71. Still, on the table, 76% of the respondents agreed that Pupils in overpopulated classes have higher tendencies for truancy but 24% disagreed with a mean of 3.160 and a standard deviation of 0.55. Also, 17% of the respondents agreed that Pupils in overpopulated classes have no friends and move in a solitary fashion, while 83% disagreed with a mean of

2.10 and standard deviation of 0.57. 24% of the respondents agreed that Pupils in overpopulated classes find it hard to mingle in public but 76% disagreed with the statement with a mean of 2.05 and standard deviation of 0.54. Lastly, on the table, 60% of the respondents agreed that Pupils in overpopulated classes cannot work well in groups but the remaining 40% disagreed with a mean of 3.12 and a standard deviation of 0.69. From the results above, it is concluded that overpopulation also has negative effects on the social lives of pupils in primary schools in Lagos.

Research Question 3. What is the attitude of teachers towards overpopulation in primary school classes in Local Education District IV of Lagos State?

Table 4: Attitudes towards Overpopulation

	Items	SA	A	D	SD	MEAN	STD. DEV	DECISION
13	I find it challenging to take charge of an overpopulated class	43 43%	23 23%	21 21%	13 13%	3.170	0.587	AGREED
14	I like the fact that classes are overpopulated	20 20%	12 12%	42 42%	26 26%	2.970	0.904	DISAGREED
15	Classes are meant to have many pupils so that the teacher will be encouraged	23 23%	11 11%	23 23%	43 43%	2.050	0.509	DISAGREED
16	In a class, I would love to teach many pupils at a time, rather than just too few pupils	19 19%	11 11%	39 39%	31 31%	2.230	0.566	DISAGREED
17	Overpopulation is a norm in certain schools and is not necessarily a problem	23 23%	25 25%	34 34%	18 18%	1.750	0.575	DISAGREED
18	Overpopulation is a problem that should be tackled	61%	16%	8%	15%	3.260	0.824	AGREED
19	Schools should build more facilities to reduce the size of their classes and combat overpopulation	60 60%	17 17%	9 9%	14 14%	3.040	0.695	AGREED
20	There is a deep sense of fulfilment in teaching a very large class.	14 14%	15 15%	40 40%	31 31%	2.060	0.750	DISAGREED

Table 4 above shows that 66% of the respondents agreed that they find it challenging to take charge of an overpopulated class while the remaining 34% disagreed with the statement

with a mean of 2.97 and standard deviation of 0.90. Also, 32% of the respondents agreed that they like the fact that classes are overpopulated but the remaining 68% disagreed with a mean of



2.05 and a standard deviation of 0.51. Furthermore, 34% of the respondents agreed that classes are meant to have many pupils so that the teacher will be encouraged while the remaining 66% of the respondents disagreed with the statement with a mean of 3.23 and a standard deviation of 0.57. Still, on the table, 30% of the respondents agreed that in a class, they would love to teach many pupils at a time, rather than just too few pupils but the remaining 70% disagreed with a mean of 1.75 and a standard deviation of 0.58. Moreover, 48% of the respondents agreed that overpopulation is a norm in certain schools and is not necessarily a problem but the majority of the respondents 52% disagreed with a mean of 2.260 and a standard deviation of 0.82. Also, 76% of the respondents agreed that overpopulation is a problem that should be tackled but the remaining 23% disagreed with the statement with a mean of 3.04 and a standard deviation of 0.70. Still, on the

table, 77% of the respondents agreed that schools should build more facilities to reduce the size of their classes and combat overpopulation but the other 23% disagreed with a mean of 3.040 and a standard deviation of 0.695. Finally, the table result revealed that 29% of the respondents agreed that there is a deep sense of fulfillment in teaching a very large class but the remaining 71% disagreed with the statement with a mean of 3.06 and a standard deviation of 0.75.

It could be seen, from the findings of this research that teachers are not at their best when the classrooms are overpopulated.

Test of hypotheses

Hypothesis One

There will be no significant effect of overpopulation on the academic performance of pupils in primary schools in Local Education District IV of Lagos State.

Table 5: chi-square table of overpopulation and the Academic Performance of Pupils in Primary Schools

Variables	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency	N	Total frequency	χ^2 Cal.	χ^2 Tab.	df	Remark
Overpopulation	511	422	100	15490	36.70	11.070	5	Reject
Academic	335	422						

$P < 0.05$

From the information in Table 5, the calculated Chi-Square (χ^2) value of 36.70 is greater than the critical Chi-Square (χ^2) value of 11.070 at a 0.05 level of significance and 5 degrees of freedom. Given this, the null hypothesis which states that "There will be no significant effect of overpopulation on the academic performance of pupils in primary schools in Local Education District IV of Lagos State" is rejected. Therefore, there is a significant effect of overpopulation on the academic

performance of pupils in primary schools in Local Education District IV of Lagos State.

Hypothesis Two

H₀: There will be no significant effects of overpopulation on the social life of pupils in primary schools in Local Education District IV of Lagos State.

H₂: There will be significant effects of overpopulation on the social life of pupils in primary schools in Local Education District IV of Lagos State.

Table 6: Effects of Overpopulation on the Social Life of Pupils in Primary Schools

Variables	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency	N	Total frequency	χ^2 Cal	χ^2 Tab	Df	Remark
Overpopulation	509	422	100	15138	35.87	11.070	5	Reject
Social Life of Pupils	335	422						

$P < 0.05$



Information in Table 6 shows that the calculated Chi-Square (χ^2) value of 35.87 is greater than the critical Chi-Square (χ^2) value of 11.070 at a 0.05 level of significance and 5 degrees of freedom. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that "There will be no significant effects of overpopulation on the social life of pupils in primary schools in Local Education District IV of Lagos State" is rejected. Hence, there are significant effects of overpopulation on the social life of pupils in primary schools in Local Education District IV of Lagos State.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study revealed that there are significant effects of overpopulation on the academic performance of pupils in primary schools in Local Education District IV of Lagos State. This is supported by O'Brennan, Bradshaw, and Furlong (2014) who found that pupil perceptions were improved in smaller classrooms. Agba (2010) asserted that students' overpopulation harms the tone of the school which in turn dampens the morale of both teachers and students. On the whole, researchers have noted that effective teaching and high academic performance can only be achieved when supported by adequate infrastructural facilities and a manageable class size.

Hypothesis two result shows that there is a significant effect of overpopulation on the social life of pupils in primary schools in Local Education District IV of Lagos State. This finding supports Gottfredson and Dipetro (2011) as they found that social life in terms of pupil-pupil classroom dynamics improved in smaller classrooms. Englehart (2007) also found that in smaller class sizes, the atmosphere was much more conversational and familial and this helped facilitate students' learning by opening lines of communication between pupils and pupils. Nyiam (2012) also reported that overcrowded examination halls pave way for students to indulge in examination malpractice.

CONCLUSION

The result of the investigation showed that overpopulation has a lot of negative

influences on the teaching and learning process as it negates proper individualized attention to and assessment of students. It also impedes effective classroom management and control by the teacher, as the teacher uses much of the time to handle disciplinary cases at the expense of academic activities. This implies that the achievement of the desired quality outcome from public primary schools in the state could be difficult under this present condition of student population pressure.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this work, these recommendations are offered:

- (1) The government at all levels should ensure that the provision of school plants/facilities matches the remarkable increase in student population to avoid student population pressure and its attendant problems.
- (2) The government and educationists should adhere to UNESCO's recommendation of a 1:25 Teacher and Students ratio.
- (3) The authorities should admit based on the available spaces because admitting all and offering half education is dangerous.
- (4) Old school structures should be renovated and new ones constructed to enhance the academic performance and social lives of pupils.
- (5) Education is of foremost importance to society; because without it Technological advancement cannot be achieved therefore the government should consider it necessary to declare a state of emergency on education.

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