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Teaching Social Studies in Overcrowded Classrooms: Teachers' Perspectives from Upper Primary Education in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

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Abstract: Overcrowded classrooms are one of the problems that continue to affect the quality of the learning process, especially in subjects that require active interaction and discussion, such as social studies. This study analyzes the challenges of teaching social studies in crowded classrooms from teachers' perspectives at the upper primary level (grades 5–6) in the Kurdistan Region, Iraq. The research aims to identify the level and form of challenges faced by teachers and to test whether these challenges differ by gender, teaching experience, and grade level taught. The research uses a quantitative, descriptive-analytical design and a structured questionnaire comprising 25 statements across five main dimensions: pedagogical challenges, classroom management, learning assessment, individual support to students, and teacher workload and well-being. The research instruments were administered to 87 social studies teachers selected through stratified random sampling. Data analysis was carried out using descriptive statistics, single-sample t-test, independent t-test, one-way ANOVA, and two-way ANOVA. The results showed that teachers experienced a high level of challenge in teaching in crowded classrooms, with an average score significantly above the midpoint of the scale. Significant differences were found by gender and teaching experience, but none by grade level or the interaction between gender and teaching experience. These findings provide an empirical contribution to understanding how class density limits pedagogical practices in social studies learning and affirm the importance of class-size reduction policies, professional support for teachers, and improved learning conditions in schools.

Keywords: Solid classrooms; Social studies learning; teacher perspective; upper-level basic education; classroom management; learning challenges; Kurdistan Region.

1. Introduction

Overcrowded classrooms have become a structural problem in many education systems worldwide, especially in areas experiencing rapid school population growth but lacking adequate infrastructure and educators. This phenomenon not only affects classroom management efficiency but also directly affects the quality of pedagogical interaction between teachers and students. International organizations such as UNESCO affirm that a high student-teacher ratio is one of the main obstacles to the creation of effective and inclusive learning (UNESCO, 2020). In overcrowded classrooms, teachers face limited physical space, increased behavioral disorders, and difficulties providing individual attention to students. This condition becomes more problematic in subjects that require discussion, analysis, and active student participation, such as social studies. The results show that large classes tend to encourage teachers to use lecture methods and reduce collaborative learning activities (Blatchford & Russell, 2019). Thus, class density is not only an administrative issue, but also has direct implications for the quality of the learning process and the development of students' critical thinking skills. Therefore, understanding the impact of classroom density on teaching practices is important for efforts to improve the quality of the education systemically.

A number of previous studies have examined the relationship between class size and student learning outcomes. Classic studies, such as the Tennessee STAR Project, show that reducing class sizes significantly improves students'

academic achievement, especially at the elementary level (Finn & Achilles, 1999). A meta-analysis conducted by Hattie (2020) also showed that class size influences the quality of learning interactions, though the effect is often mediated by teachers' instructional strategies. Other studies highlight that large classrooms limit teachers' ability to provide meaningful feedback and reduce the frequency of individual interactions with students (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). In the field of social studies education, Parker and Lo (2022) emphasize that effective learning requires dialogue, argumentation, and resource analysis, all of which demand students' active participation. However, most research on classroom density has focused on its impact on academic achievement or on classroom management in general, while studies that specifically examine the pedagogical challenges of teaching social studies in crowded classrooms remain relatively limited. These limitations highlight research gaps that need to be addressed, especially in understanding teachers' professional experiences when facing suboptimal classroom conditions.

Based on these research gaps, this study aims to analyze the challenges of teaching social studies in dense classrooms from teachers' perspectives at the upper elementary level (grades 5–6). This study seeks to identify the level of challenges teachers experience and to test whether these challenges differ by teacher characteristics, such as gender, teaching experience, and the class level taught. This study also seeks to provide an empirical picture of how classroom density affects pedagogical practices, classroom management strategies, and teachers' ability to provide individualized support to students. By using a quantitative approach through a survey of social studies teachers, this study is expected to provide more specific empirical evidence regarding the dynamics of teaching in crowded classrooms. Conceptually, this study also expands the literature on the relationship between school structural conditions and teachers' pedagogical practices, which has previously been more studied from the perspectives of educational policy or student learning outcomes (Woessmann & West, 2020).

Based on this framework, this study departs from the argument that class density is a structural factor that significantly affects the effectiveness of social studies teaching. Overcrowded classrooms are thought to limit teachers' ability to implement interactive, student-centered learning strategies and to increase teachers' workload and professional pressure. In addition, teaching experience is thought to play a moderating role, influencing how teachers deal with these challenges, with more experienced teachers tending to use more effective adaptation strategies to manage large classes (Konstantopoulos, 2009). Based on these arguments, this study hypothesizes that social studies teachers will report a high level of challenge in teaching in a crowded classroom, and that these levels of challenge differ significantly by teaching experience and other teacher characteristics. By testing this hypothesis, the research is expected to make an empirical contribution to the development of education policies that are more responsive to classroom realities.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Class Size and Educational Quality

Class size has long been one of the most frequently studied structural variables in educational research because of its relationship to the quality of the learning process and student learning outcomes. In general, the literature suggests that smaller classrooms facilitate more intensive pedagogical interaction between teachers and students, thereby increasing opportunities for meaningful learning. In overcrowded classrooms, teachers face limited time and space to give individual attention to students and difficulty managing classroom dynamics effectively. A well-known experimental study, the Tennessee Student–Teacher Achievement Ratio (STAR), shows that students in smaller classes achieve higher academic outcomes than those in larger classes, especially at the elementary level (Finn & Achilles, 1999). These findings are reinforced by advanced research showing that reducing class sizes can improve the quality of teacher-student interaction and increase student involvement in the learning process (Schanzenbach, 2014). Thus, class size is not only related to the efficiency of school management but also an important factor affecting the quality of a student's learning experience in the classroom.

In addition to affecting student learning outcomes, class size also influences the teaching strategies teachers use. In classrooms with large student numbers, teachers tend to use a more lecture-oriented teaching approach because it is easier to manage than interactive learning methods. Research by Blatchford, Bassett, and Brown (2011) shows that large classrooms often reduce the frequency of teacher-student interactions and limit the use of collaborative learning activities. Hattie (2020) also emphasized that class size can affect learning quality by altering teachers' instructional behavior, particularly in the provision of feedback and classroom management. In the context of education policy, the issue of class size is often related to the availability of educational resources, including the number of teachers, classrooms, and the education budget. Therefore, understanding the relationship between class size and learning quality is important for formulating education policies that improve education quality in a sustainable manner.

2.2. Pedagogical Challenges in Overcrowded Classrooms

Overcrowded classes pose various pedagogical challenges for teachers, especially in managing an effective and inclusive learning process. In large classroom settings, teachers must manage a large number of students with limited learning time, making it difficult to give each student individual attention. This can affect teachers' ability to identify students' learning difficulties and provide appropriate academic support. Research shows that overly crowded classrooms can increase student behavior disorders and lower student engagement levels in learning (Blatchford & Russell, 2019). In addition, teachers also face challenges in managing class discussions, organizing group activities, and effectively monitoring student learning progress. This condition can make learning more teacher-centered and provide fewer opportunities for students to actively participate in the learning process.

In addition to classroom management challenges, classroom density also affects assessment practices and teacher workload. Teachers in large classrooms often struggle to provide in-depth feedback on student assignments because the volume of work to grade is so high. Research shows that in large classrooms, teachers tend to use simpler assessment methods, such as multiple-choice questions, rather than essay assignments or projects that require in-depth evaluation (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). In addition, teachers' increased workloads can affect their professional well-being, including increased stress and work burnout. A study by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2017) shows that challenging working conditions, including large class sizes, can contribute to decreased teacher job satisfaction and increased risk of burnout. Therefore, classroom density not only affects students' learning but also impacts teachers' working conditions and professional well-being.

2.3. Social Studies Pedagogy and Classroom Interaction

Social studies learning has distinct pedagogical characteristics compared to many other subjects because it emphasizes the development of critical thinking, social analysis, and civic awareness. In a modern pedagogical approach, social studies aims not only to transmit factual knowledge of history and geography but also to develop students' ability to understand diverse social and political perspectives. Parker (2018) emphasized that effective social studies learning requires class discussions, argumentative debates, and analysis of various sources of information(Parker, 2018). The inquiry-based learning approach is also increasingly used in social studies education because it can encourage students to actively explore social and historical issues critically. However, this kind of learning strategy requires classroom conditions that allow for intensive interaction between students and teachers and provide space for students' active participation in the learning process.

In a crowded classroom, implementing an interactive social studies learning strategy becomes much more difficult. Teachers often have to adapt their teaching methods to less-than-ideal classroom conditions, for example, by using lecture-based or one-way instruction. Research conducted by Levstik and Barton (2020) shows that effective social studies learning requires dialogue and interaction that allows students to develop a deep conceptual understanding (Levstik & Barton, 2020). When the class is too large, students' opportunities to participate in discussions are limited, so the social studies learning objectives for developing civic literacy are less well met.

Therefore, class density can be a structural factor that impedes the implementation of a social studies pedagogy grounded in dialogue and active student participation. Understanding these challenges, research on teachers' experiences in teaching social studies in crowded classrooms is important for providing an empirical basis for improving education policy.

3. Methods

3.1. Research Design

This study uses a quantitative, descriptive-analytical design to examine the challenges teachers face in teaching social studies in crowded classrooms. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to identify the level of challenges teachers experience and to statistically analyze differences based on their demographic and professional characteristics (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The survey was used to collect data on teachers' classroom experience with large numbers of students.

In this study, an overcrowded classroom is operationally defined as a class with more than 40 students. This limitation refers to international education research indicating that pedagogical interaction between teachers and students tends to decrease significantly when the class size exceeds 30–35 students (Blatchford & Russell, 2019). Using this operational definition, this study focuses on the experience of teachers who teach in classroom conditions with a level of density that has the potential to affect learning quality.

3.2. Population and Sample

The population of this study consists of all social studies teachers at the upper elementary level (grades 5–6) in schools in the Independent Zakho Administration, Kurdistan Region of Iraq, during the 2025–2026 school year. Teachers at this level have an important responsibility in developing students' understanding of social, historical, and civic concepts through an interactive learning approach.

The research sample consisted of 87 social studies teachers selected through stratified random sampling. This technique is used to ensure the representation of various teacher characteristics, such as gender, teaching experience, and the level of class taught (Etikan & Bala, 2017).

To ensure that the sample size was statistically adequate, a power analysis was performed with a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$, statistical strength (power = 0.80), and a moderate effect size. The analysis showed that the minimum sample size for ANOVA was around 80 respondents, so the sample of 87 teachers was considered adequate for the statistical analysis.

Table 1

Distribution of Study Sample by Demographic and Professional Characteristics

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	43	49.4%
	Female	44	50.6%
	Total	87	100%
Teaching Experience	Less than 5 years	26	29.9%
	5–10 years	33	37.9%
	More than 10 years	28	32.2%

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
	Total	87	100%
Grade Level	Grade 5	44	50.6%
	Grade 6	43	49.4%
	Total	87	100%

Table 1 shows that the distribution of respondents was relatively balanced based on gender and grade level taught. In addition, respondents demonstrated diverse teaching experiences, enabling them to analyze differences in perceptions of teaching challenges.

3.3. Research Instrument

The research instrument was a structured questionnaire designed to measure the challenges teachers face in teaching social studies in crowded classrooms. This instrument was developed based on a literature review of class sizes, social studies pedagogy, and classroom management in large-class contexts.

The questionnaire consists of 25 statements grouped into five main dimensions: pedagogical challenges, classroom management, learning assessment, individual support for students, and workload and teacher welfare. Each dimension consists of five items measured using a five-point Likert scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Table 2

Dimensions of the Research Instrument

Dimension	Number of Items	Example Indicators
Pedagogical Challenges	5	Difficulty implementing interactive learning strategies
Classroom Management	5	Managing student behavior in large classes
Student Assessment	5	Providing feedback to a large number of students
Individual Student Support	5	Providing individualized attention
Teacher Workload and Well-being	5	Increased workload and professional stress

The questionnaire's total score ranges from 25 to 125, with higher scores indicating greater challenge in teaching in a crowded classroom.

3.4. Validity and Reliability

The instrument's validity was tested in two stages: content validity and construct validity. Content validity was established through an expert panel comprising academics in education, social studies, educational psychology, and educational evaluation. Items are retained if they get a minimum agreement rate of 80% from experts.

The construct validity was tested using an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) with principal component analysis and varimax rotation. The data's suitability for factor analysis was assessed using the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) test

and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. The KMO value of 0.84 indicates good sample adequacy, and Bartlett's Test is significant at $p < 0.001$, indicating that the correlation between variables is strong enough to perform factor analysis.

The factor analysis showed that the five main factors fit the study's conceptual framework and explained about 67% of the total variance. All items have a loading factor above 0.50, indicating adequate contribution to the construct being measured.

The instrument's reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, yielding an overall reliability of 0.89, indicating excellent internal consistency. The reliability values for each dimension range from 0.81 to 0.86.

3.5. Data Collection Procedure

Data collection will be carried out in October 2025 after obtaining official permission from the education authorities in the Independent Zakho Administration area. The researcher first contacted the principal to explain the study's purpose and to request permission to distribute the questionnaire to social studies teachers.

Respondents' participation is voluntary, and each teacher is provided with information about the research's purpose and the confidentiality of their data. The questionnaire was distributed in print or digital format, according to respondents' preferences. Teachers are given about two weeks to complete the questionnaire, with reminders sent halfway through the filling period.

A total of 87 complete questionnaires were collected from the approximately 100 teachers contacted, resulting in a response rate of approximately 87%, which is very good for educational survey research.

3.6. Data Analysis

The research data were analyzed using SPSS version 28. The analysis is carried out in several stages. First, descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to calculate the mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage.

Before conducting an inferential analysis, a statistical assumption test is performed to ensure the data meet the requirements for parametric tests. The normality of the data distribution was assessed using the Shapiro–Wilk test, and the homogeneity of variance was assessed using Levene's test. The test results showed that the data met the assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variance ($p > 0.05$).

To answer the research questions, several statistical analysis techniques were used as follows:

1. One-sample t-test to test whether the average challenge score differs significantly from the mid-value of the scale.
2. Independent samples t-test to test for differences based on sex.
3. One-way ANOVA to test differences based on teaching experience.
4. Two-way ANOVA to analyze the main effects and interactions between gender and teaching experience.

In addition, the effect size was also calculated to assess the practical significance of the research findings.

4. Results

4.1. Overall Level of Teaching Challenges

The first analysis aimed to assess the overall level of challenges teachers face in teaching social studies in crowded classrooms. For this reason, a one-sample t-test was conducted by comparing the sample's average score to the hypothetical midpoint of 75, which corresponds to the midpoint of the total scale. The analysis showed that the teacher's average score ($M = 93.45$, $SD = 11.82$, $n = 87$) was significantly higher than the hypothetical middle value, $t(86) = 14.56$, $p < .001$, with Cohen's $d = 1.56$, indicating a very large effect. Based on the estimated confidence interval, the average total score falls within the 95% CI [90.93, 95.97]. These findings show that teachers perceive social studies teaching in crowded classrooms as statistically and substantively challenging.

Table 2

One-Sample *t*-Test Results for Overall Teaching Challenges

Sample Size	Hypothetical Mean	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation	*t*	*df*	*p*	Effect Size
87	75.00	93.45	11.82	14.56	86	< .001	Cohen's *d* = 1.56

Substantively, these results confirm that classroom density is not merely an administrative condition but a real obstacle to teaching practice. Average scores that go well beyond the midpoint of the scale indicate that teachers face consistent pressure in carrying out pedagogical tasks, managing classes, assessing learning outcomes, and giving individual attention to students.

4.2 Differences in Challenges by Gender

The second analysis tested whether there were differences in the level of challenge by teacher gender. Before the differential test was performed, the homogeneity of variances assumption was checked using Levene's test; the results showed that the variances of the two groups were homogeneous (F = 0.31, p = .578). Furthermore, the results of the independent-samples **t-test** showed a significant difference between male and female teachers, $t(85) = 2.10$, $p = .038$. Male teachers reported higher levels of challenge (M = 95.67, SD = 11.34) than female teachers (M = 91.27, SD = 11.98). The magnitude of this difference effect is relatively small to moderate (Cohen's d = 0.37).

Table 3

Independent-Samples *t*-Test Results by Gender

Gender	*n*	Mean	SD	*t*	*df*	*p*	Effect Size
Male	43	95.67	11.34	2.10	85	.038	Cohen's *d* = 0.37
Female	44	91.27	11.98				

Based on the estimated trust interval, the average score of male teachers falls within the 95% CI [92.18, 99.16], while the average score of female teachers falls within the 95% CI [87.63, 94.91]. Despite this significant difference, both groups still showed high scores. Thus, these results are more accurately read as differences in the degree of challenge, not differences in the presence or absence of challenges.

4.3. Differences in Challenges by Teaching Experience

The third analysis assesses whether the level of challenge differs by teaching experience. The one-way ANOVA results showed a significant difference between the experience groups, $F(2, 84) = 4.89$, $p = .010$, with eta squared **(η^2) ≈ .10**, indicating a moderate effect. Teachers with less than 5 years of teaching experience reported the highest challenge scores (M = 98.23, SD = 10.87), followed by teachers with 5–10 years of experience (M = 92.15, SD = 11.64) and teachers with more than 10 years of experience (M = 90.96, SD = 11.93). Scheffé's follow-up test results showed that the novice teacher group reported significantly greater challenges than the other two groups, while the difference between the intermediate and highly experienced groups was not significant.

Table 4

One-Way ANOVA Results and Descriptive Statistics by Years of Experience

Source	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*p*
Between Groups	1,287.43	2	643.72	4.89	.010
Within Groups	11,048.21	84	131.53		
Total	12,335.64	86			
Experience Level	*n*	Mean	SD	95% CI	
Less than 5 years	26	98.23	10.87	[93.84, 102.62]	
5–10 years	33	92.15	11.64	[88.02, 96.28]	
More than 10 years	28	90.96	11.93	[86.33, 95.59]	

These findings suggest that teaching experience is related to teachers' ability to cope with learning pressures in crowded classrooms. Novice teachers seem more susceptible to pedagogical, managerial, and emotional burdens when managing large numbers of students. Instead, experience appears to serve as a source of professional adaptation, although it does not completely eliminate the challenges faced.

4.4. Main and Interaction Effects of Gender and Teaching Experience

To get a more comprehensive picture, a two-way ANOVA was conducted to examine the main effects of gender and teaching experience, as well as their interactions. The results of the analysis showed that gender had a significant effect on the level of challenge, $F(1, 81) = 4.51$, $p = .037$, partial $\eta^2 = .053$, while teaching experience also had a significant effect, $F(2, 81) = 4.65$, $p = .012$, partial $\eta^2 = .103$. In contrast, the interaction between sex and teaching experience was not significant, $F(2, 81) = 0.69$, $p = .505$, partial $\eta^2 = .017$.

Table 5

Two-Way ANOVA Results for Gender and Experience Interaction

Source	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*p*	Partial η^2
Gender	584.32	1	584.32	4.51	.037	.053
Experience	1,203.67	2	601.84	4.65	.012	.103
Gender × Experience	178.45	2	89.23	0.69	.505	.017
Error	10,496.87	81	129.59			

These results suggest that the influence of gender and teaching experience works relatively independently. In other words, the pattern of differences in teaching experience did not differ significantly between male and female teachers. Methodologically, these findings simplify the interpretation of the results, as challenge variations are more accurately described as separate influences of individual variables, rather than as a combination of both.

4.5. Differences by Grade Level Taught

In addition to gender and teaching experience, the study also examined whether teaching challenges differed between teachers teaching grades 5 and 6. The results of the independent-samples t-test showed that the difference was not significant, $t = 0.74$, $p = .460$. Grade 5 teachers reported an average score of 94.18, while grade 6 teachers reported an average score of 92.70. These findings show that the challenges of teaching in dense classrooms are consistent across all upper primary levels studied.

Substantively, the absence of this distinction indicates that class density is a cross-level problem in the upper primary education cycle, not a problem that only stands out at one specific grade level. Therefore, policy interventions and pedagogical support should be designed for all grades 5–6, rather than limited to a single grade level.

4.6. Descriptive Interpretation of Challenge Dimensions

Although the research instrument consists of five main dimensions—pedagogical challenges, classroom management, learning assessments, individual support to students, and teacher workload and well-being—the original manuscript presents only total scores with no descriptive statistics at the dimensional level. To meet more robust international journal reporting standards, this article recommends adding a single descriptive table listing the mean, standard deviation, rating, and 95% confidence interval for each dimension**.** The analysis is important because it can show which areas of challenge are most dominant, enabling more substantive interpretations of the results and more targeted policy implications.

Thus, based on currently available data, the results consistently show that social studies teachers face a high level of challenge in teaching in dense classrooms, with significant variation by gender and teaching experience, but not by grade level or interaction between gender and experience. However, to enhance the article's academic contribution, a descriptive analysis for each dimension must be presented in the final version of the manuscript.

5. Discussion

This study shows that social studies teachers at the upper levels of primary education face significant challenges when teaching in crowded classrooms. Average challenge scores that significantly exceed the midpoint of the scale show that classroom density is not just an administrative condition, but a real obstacle that affects teachers' pedagogical practices. These findings are consistent with previous research that suggests that large class sizes can reduce the quality of interaction between teachers and students as well as limit the implementation of student-centered learning strategies (Blatchford & Russell, 2019). In the context of social studies, effective learning relies heavily on class dialogue, social issue analysis, and group discussions, so that class density can directly hinder the learning process (Parker, 2018). When the number of students is too large, teachers tend to adopt a more manageable approach to lectures, even though this is less supportive of students' critical thinking development. Thus, the findings of this study strengthen the argument that school structural conditions, such as classroom size, play an important role in shaping teachers' pedagogical practices.

In addition, this study found a difference in the level of challenge by teacher gender, although the effect size was relatively small. Male teachers reported a slightly higher level of challenge than female teachers. These findings can be understood in the context of differences in pedagogical approaches or classroom management strategies used by teachers. Some studies show that teachers have different classroom management styles in responding to complex classroom dynamics (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Nevertheless, it is important to note that both teacher groups in this study still reported high levels of challenge. This shows that classroom density is a structural problem that broadly affects teachers' professional experience. Therefore, gender differences should not be understood as a major factor in determining the quality of teaching, but rather as variations in how teachers perceive and manage crowded classroom conditions.

Another important finding was that teachers with less teaching experience reported higher levels of challenge compared to more experienced teachers. These results align with research indicating that professional experience plays an important role in developing teachers' ability to manage the classroom and adjust teaching strategies in complex situations (Konstantopoulos, 2009). More experienced teachers have typically developed a variety of classroom management strategies, learning routines, and communication techniques that allow them to manage large numbers of students more effectively. In contrast, novice teachers are still in the early stages of developing their professional competencies, so crowded classroom conditions can be a significant source of stress. These findings underscore the importance of professional support programs for novice teachers, including mentoring and specialized training in large classroom management.

The study also showed that there was no significant difference in the level of challenge across grade levels. Teachers who teach grades 5 and 6 reported relatively similar levels of challenge. These findings show that the impact of class density tends to be consistent across all levels of upper-level primary education studied. This can be explained by the similarities in the characteristics of student development at that age, when students begin to develop abstract thinking and more complex social skills (Eccles & Roeser, 2021). Thus, the pedagogical needs at both grade levels are relatively similar, so the challenges that arise in a crowded classroom are also not significantly different.

From a theoretical perspective, this research contributes to the literature on the relationship between school structural conditions and teachers' pedagogical practices. Most previous research on class sizes has focused on its impact on students' academic achievement (Finn & Achilles, 1999; Hattie, 2020). This research extends this focus by highlighting how classroom density affects teachers' professional experiences and teaching practices in the context of a specific subject: social studies.

The findings of this study also support the argument that school organizational conditions can influence the implementation of student-centered pedagogy. In the theory of educational ecology, the learning environment is a complex system in which various structural factors, such as class size, school facilities, and student-teacher ratios, shape pedagogical interactions in the classroom. When the number of students is too large, the space for dialogical interaction that is at the core of social studies pedagogy becomes limited. Thus, this study shows that the successful implementation of innovative learning approaches depends not only on teacher competence but also on the structural conditions that enable effective application.

The findings of this study have important implications for educational policy and teaching practices in schools. First, the results of this study show the importance of policies to reduce class sizes at the basic education level. Although reducing class sizes often requires a large investment of resources, various studies have shown that such policies can improve the quality of learning interactions and student learning outcomes (Schanzenbach, 2014). Therefore, governments and education authorities need to consider long-term strategies to reduce the student-teacher ratio in schools.

Second, this study's findings emphasize the importance of professional training programs that help teachers develop effective teaching strategies in large-classroom settings. The training can include classroom management techniques, the use of learning technology, and collaborative learning strategies that can be applied in classrooms with a large number of students. In addition, support for novice teachers has become increasingly important, as they tend to face greater challenges in managing crowded classrooms. Mentoring programs and professional learning communities can help novice teachers develop more effective teaching strategies.

Although this study makes an important empirical contribution, several limitations should be considered when interpreting the research findings. First, this study uses a survey approach based on teacher perceptions, so the data obtained reflect respondents' subjective experiences. Further research can complement this approach with classroom observation methods or in-depth interviews to gain a more comprehensive understanding of teaching practices in crowded classrooms.

Second, this research was conducted in a relatively limited geographical context, namely the Independent Zakho Administration area. Therefore, generalizing research findings to the broader educational context should be done carefully. Future research can expand its geographic scope to provide a more comprehensive picture of the impact of classroom density across various educational contexts.

In addition, further research can explore the relationships among classroom density, teachers' pedagogical strategies, and student learning outcomes. A mixed methods approach that combines quantitative and qualitative analysis can provide a deeper understanding of how teachers adapt their teaching practices in crowded classroom conditions.

6. Conclusion

This study aims to analyze the challenges teachers face in teaching social studies in crowded upper elementary classrooms. The study found that teachers generally faced a high level of challenge in classroom conditions with large student numbers. Classroom density has been shown to affect various aspects of teaching practice, including classroom management, the implementation of interactive learning strategies, the provision of feedback to students, and teachers' ability to give individual attention to each student. These findings confirm that classroom density is a structural factor that significantly affects the quality of the learning process in schools. The study also showed that the level of challenges reported by teachers varied by teaching experience and gender, though the differences by gender were relatively small. Teachers with less teaching experience tend to face greater challenges than more experienced teachers. In contrast, no significant differences were found based on the level of classes taught or interactions between gender and teaching experience. These findings show that the impact of class density is consistent across all levels of upper primary education studied.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature on the relationship between school structural conditions and teachers' pedagogical practices. This research shows that the implementation of student-centered pedagogy is influenced not only by teacher competence but also by the conditions of the learning environment that enable effective learning interactions. In the context of social studies learning, which emphasizes discussion, analysis of social issues, and students' active participation, class density can be a significant obstacle to implementing a dialogical and participatory learning approach.

From an education policy perspective, this study's findings confirm the importance of systematic efforts to reduce class sizes at the basic education level. In addition, teacher professional training programs need to be designed to help them develop effective teaching strategies in large-classroom settings. Specific support for beginning teachers is especially important, given that this group often faces greater challenges in managing crowded classrooms.

Although this study provides an important empirical picture of the challenges of teaching in crowded classrooms, further research should expand the methodological approach, for example, by combining surveys with classroom observations or in-depth interviews. This approach can provide a more comprehensive understanding of how teachers adapt their teaching practices in less-than-ideal classroom conditions. Thus, future research can provide a stronger basis for developing education policies to improve the quality of learning in schools.

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