

Teaching Difficulties in Overcrowded Classrooms

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الخلاصة

تكشف هذه الدراسة عن التجارب اليومية للمعلمين العاملين في مدارس التطبيقات، والفاطمية، والهدف الابتدائية في الحلة، العراق، حيث تجعل تجربة الفصول الدراسية المكتظة التدريس أشبه بممارسة للصمود. واستنادًا إلى استطلاعات رأي شملت 26 معلمًا، يُفصّل الباحثون كيف تُجبر القيود المكانية على طاولات الطلاب المعلمين على اتخاذ قرارات مستحيلة: 85% يقولون إنهم لم يتمكنوا حتى من تحقيق بعض أهداف إدارة الفصول الدراسية الأساسية، بينما لم يتمكن 81% منهم من استخدام أساليب التدريس التفاعلية، في حين أن هذه الفصول الدراسية، على الرغم من تدريبهم، لا تستوعب حركة الطلاب أو العمل الجماعي. ونظرًا للأضرار البشرية، أفاد الباحثون أيضًا بأن 89% من المعلمين يعانون من ضغوط نفسية مزمنة، وجميعهم يعانون من الشعور بالإرهاق على مدار الساعة بعد انتهاء الدوام الدراسي. وقال أحد المعلمين، عفوًا: "نحن مجرد رجال شرطة مرور، ولسنا معلمين". تُعيق هذه التحديات تجربة التعلم، مما يؤدي إلى تجارب تعلم تُركّز على ضمان "سلامة" الطلاب (السيطرة عليهم) مقابل مشاركة طلابية محدودة للغاية ونجاحهم بناءً على اختبارات مدرسية موحدة.

تُهمّش هذه الأزمة فرص الإصلاح. وقد حُدّدت ثلاث توصيات عملية من هذا العمل: (1) إجراء تخفيضات أولية في حجم الفصول الدراسية لتوفير بيئات تعليمية مناسبة، (2) بناء بنية تحتية جديدة لهذه المدارس، (3) تمويل دعم قائم على الأدلة لرفاهية المعلمين. تستفيد هذه الدراسة من آراء المعلمين في الخطوط الأمامية لإثراء النقد الأكاديمي للسياسة التعليمية والحاجة الملحة إلى استجابة سياسية فعلية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الفصول الدراسية المكتظة، تحديات التدريس، التعليم في العراق، استبيان المعلمين، إدارة الفصول الدراسية، التعليم الابتدائي، السياسة التعليمية

Abstract

This study exposes the daily experiences of teachers employed at Al-Tatbikat, Al-Fatimiah, and Al-Hadaf Primary Schools in Hillah, Iraq, where the experience of overcrowded classrooms makes teaching feel like an exercise in survival. Using surveys of 26 teachers, the researchers detail how spatial limitations on student desks force educators to make impossible decisions: 85% say they could not even get some basic classroom management goals accomplished while 81% could not employ interactive pedagogies, when notwithstanding their training these are classrooms that cannot physically accommodate student movement or group work.

Given the human toll, the researchers also report chronic stress experienced by 89% of teachers, all of whom characterize feeling exhausted 24 hours a day after school is done. One teacher offhandedly said, "We are just traffic cops now, not teachers." These challenges are choking the learning experience, leading to learning experiences that are focused on ensuring students are "safe" (controlled) to very little student engagement and survival based on standardized school testing.

Shelved within this crisis are opportunities for reform. Three actionable recommendations are identified from this work: 1) create initial class size reductions to allow for teachable environments, 2) build new infrastructure for these schools, 3) fund evidence-based supports for teacher wellbeing. This study leverages the voices of frontline teachers to inform the academic critique of educational policy and the urgent need for actual policy response.

Keywords: overcrowded classrooms, teaching challenges, Iraq education, teacher questionnaire, classroom management, primary education, educational policy

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1- *Introduction*

An overcrowded classroom is defined by the National Centre for Education Statistics (NCES) (2000) as one wherein the student count exceeds the capacity of the classroom. Overcrowded classrooms, according to Buchanan and Rogers (1990), are those including eighty or more pupils.

In the meantime, the U.S. Department of Education considers a classroom to be overcrowded if its enrollment is 5% over the capacity of the classroom, with some schools enrolling over 100 students in a class (Center for Education Data & Statistics, 2020). Overcrowded classrooms are usually made up of pupils from varied social and economic backgrounds, and pupils from low-income families perform better academically when they are in economically and racially diverse classrooms (Urban Institute, 2023).

1-1 *Problem Statement*

In Iraq's primary education system, there is a high student-teacher ratio, inadequate funding, and poor infrastructure restrict active teaching and learning. Overcrowded classrooms are an immediate concern. In Iraq, overcrowded classrooms significantly constrain the quality of education. On average, 60% of primary school classrooms have more than 40 students (World Bank, 2021). Teachers report diminished capacity to manage classrooms or provide individual support, leading to higher dropout rates (UNICEF, 2022). Al-Hashimi et al. (2019) found that 78% of Baghdad teachers directly attribute declining performance to

overcrowding, yet systemic solutions remain understudied. This study examines unique difficulties faced by primary school trainers in overcrowded classes and provides evidence-based recommendations in an attempt to cross these difficulties.

1-2 Study Questions

- 1- What are the most significant ways that teachers struggle due to overcrowding in Iraqi primary school classrooms?
- 2- How does overcrowding impact teacher stress and instructional practice?
- 3- What policy/real-life solutions can be enacted to address the struggles?

1-3 Study aims

- 1- Investigate the struggles teachers experience working in an overcrowded classroom.
- 2- Investigate if there is a relationship between teacher stress, actual class size, and teachers instructional practice.
- 3- Provide recommendations that policymakers and school leaders can use to address the problem.

1-4 Hypotheses

- 1- Teachers working in an overcrowded classroom (over 50 students) will report measures of stress significantly higher compared to teachers working in a classroom with under 50 students.
- 2- Overcrowded classrooms will be associated with less student seating (due to the size of the class) and more disciplinary issues.
- 3- Teachers working in an overcrowded classroom will be more likely to agree to a need for policy reform (more appropriate ratios and other teachers in the classroom).

1-5 Procedure

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This study employed a quantitative survey. Thus, 26 Iraqi primary school teachers from Al-Tatbikat, Al-Fatimiah and Al-Hadaf primary schools in Hillah city completed a standardized questionnaire about their struggles in their overcrowded classrooms by using the Likert-scale.

1-6 Data Analysis

The purpose of the analysis consisted of utilizing descriptive statistics (mean score) to investigate the researchers' hypotheses.

2. Teaching Difficulties in Overcrowded Classrooms

Teachers usually have numerous courses in one day; the student count in their classrooms determines their level of instruction. Regarding the optimal learning environment, no one agrees on the best class capacity. The class size should be suitable while teaching English as a foreign language so that the instructor may interact with his/her pupils with simplicity. First of all, teachers base their choices mostly on the largest class size they regularly teach (Coleman, 1989). Stated otherwise, if a teacher is accustomed to instructing groups of twenty students, he/she will often argue that thirty students comprise a huge class; however, for another instructor whose usual class size is forty, an overcrowded classroom may consist of sixty pupils.

Notwithstanding these variations, teachers almost always find themselves instructing courses bigger than what they would find ideal. Second, what is being

taught affects how big classes seem to instructors. Classes for lectures at many colleges for disciplines other than English (and sadly all too frequently for English as well) may draw several hundred students. While class numbers may not be troublesome if the instruction consists in the imparting of factual information, large courses are likely to produce a great range of issues in English education, which calls for the acquisition of sophisticated skills. Likewise, most English language instructors would see the minimum size of what would be seen as a big class for teaching speaking to be less than for teaching reading (LoCastro, 1989). Therefore, when deciding the size of big courses, one should also take into account the taught material (Tayeg, 2015).

3.1 Classroom

Oxford Learner's Pocket Dictionary defines classroom as "a room where a class of children or students is taught." The classroom is the actual location in the school where the instructor meets groups of students to engage with subject matter and resources so that learning may take place—that is, the intellectual, social, and physical environment of the teacher and the student. The classroom transcends its physical boundaries to encompass the whole school environment instructors and students occupy throughout the course of the day.

3.2 Management

Management is the process of planning, organizing, directing, and regulating the resources—physical and human—needed to accomplish the objectives or functions of teaching and learning (i.e., attention to the logistics of teaching).

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3.3 Classroom Management

Kruger and Van Schalkwyk (1997) define classroom management as all the actions needed to support and satisfy the key goals of the teaching and learning environment. The teaching and learning process is said to depend on classroom management in great part. It speaks about the techniques, approaches, and knowledge instructors use to maintain a classroom where student learning achievement occurs.

Brophy (1998) gave us the all-encompassing concept of classroom management: Effective classroom management entails the teacher's ability to secure student cooperation in reducing misconduct and to intervene proficiently when such behavior arises. Additionally, it necessitates the ongoing engagement in meaningful academic activities and a comprehensive classroom management system—encompassing, but not limited to, the teacher's disciplinary measures—designed to optimize student participation in these activities rather than solely to curtail misconduct (cited in Jones, 2001).

4. *Effectiveness of English language Teaching and Learning in Overcrowded Classrooms*

One of the most difficult problems affecting English as a foreign language teaching and learning has been regarded as overcrowding of classrooms. An overcrowded classroom is one in which the instructor focuses more on management and control of the pupils than on helping the lesson goals to be reached. Thus, depending on definitions, overcrowded classrooms might also be referred to as big-size classes (Tayeg, 2015).

5. *Causes of Overcrowded Classrooms*

There are a number of causes for overcrowded classrooms, such as a shortage of classrooms and teachers, which led students to be grouped in one classroom so as to overcome it. It was also learned that the elimination of university fees, poor government policies in education, new universities and urbanization contribute to enrollment increases, which invariably lead to classroom overcrowding (Rwegoshora, 2011).

5.1 General Problems of Overcrowded Classrooms

Listing every issue about the size of EFL lessons is somewhat challenging. Indeed, several issues associated with all the overcrowded English teaching courses cannot be disregarded at any moment and are relevant. Emmer and Stough (2010) claim that in overcrowded classes, instructors struggle to keep an eye on activities and conduct. Crowded classrooms affect classroom management. Onwu and Stoffels (2005) maintain that the following restrictions on an overcrowded classroom originate from effects on instructors:

1. One lacks physical space for mobility across the classroom.
2. Reduced chances for every student to engage in active participation throughout the educational process.
3. the impersonalizing of teaching.
4. Excessive workload for teachers.
5. Limited opportunities to meet individual learner needs for self- activity, inquiry, motivation, discipline, safety and socialization.

But instructors of big classes—especially EFL classes—are having so many challenges in their classrooms. Including emphasizing impersonal interactions between students and the instructor, restricted variety of teaching strategies, discomfort among teachers handling big classes, and disciplinary management, for instance, helps to illustrate One of the issues big classrooms might bring about is

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the lack of connection between the instructor and his pupils. This leads to challenges to instructors and students in their approaches of instruction-learning (Muthusamy, 2015).

5.2 Discipline

In her study, Ijaya (1973) concluded that an overcrowded classroom size provides nothing but noise production, limited instructor mobility to the front of the class and insufficient student engagement in the lesson from those seated at the rear. She also pointed out that bad classroom seating arrangements cannot be separated from rising examination malpractices. She concluded that the teacher's overwhelming amount of pupils to deal with in a one-hour lecture and lack of space for mobility throughout the classroom would probably have negative effects on the quantity and quality of interaction. The two main shortcomings of the teacher-centered style of instruction were noted by the United States' National Capital Language Resources Council (NCLRC, 2007).

- a. Only a small percentage of pupils engage in active language acquisition.
- b. It provides pupils with linguistic knowledge but does not always help them to use it for interests of theirs (Ibid: 2015).

6. Effects of Overcrowding on Teaching–students Interaction

Teachers and students interact seldom in the overcrowded classrooms. Teachers most of the time do not include their pupils in the preparation for a lecture. Overcrowded classrooms are associated with many problems. Noises are the most common problem, especially when teachers are not in class. Others are cheating in examinations, making unnecessary classroom movements, neglecting the given exercise, and being unable to hear what the teacher is teaching. These problems are caused by teacher absenteeism and poor supervision, and in some

instances, students are being left without any activity to do while in class. In addition, desk and other physical facilities shortages in overcrowded classrooms hindered the ideal teaching and learning process (Rwegoshora, 2011).

7. Evaluation of Students' Progress

Actually, without assessment, no education is complete. The instructor finds if the instructional goals have been met or not by means of assessment. The result that instructors' questions cannot circulate the classroom implies that many pupils lack the chance to take part in the assessment. How then can the teacher find their strengths and shortcomings so as to help them, particularly when the instructors depend so much on oral assessment for every lesson? These all have major ramifications for the formulation and application of the curriculum. Furthermore, it is almost hard to wander round either to mark pupils' work or help the particular student while instructors are fixed on the front of the classroom. The rigidity of the seating arrangement forces them additionally into always employing the lecture approach.

8. Individual Attention

In an overcrowded classroom, given the limited time to give each student individual attention, teachers cannot devote great attention to every single pupil in the class. Ur (1996), in support of this, indicates that while the instructor has a huge number of pupils and cannot aid every student, nonetheless students may develop techniques to be better by undertaking peer learning and group effort, thus benefitting and nourishing an atmosphere of cooperation and mutual purpose. The physical surroundings of the classroom are perhaps one very basic element that might affect the mood and disrupt the tranquility.

9. Discomfort

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When teaching or studying in an overcrowded classroom, many instructors and students might find themselves uncomfortable; they could become dissatisfied and despondent. Due to the general unfriendly circumstances Teachers cannot make appropriate eye contact with the students. They cannot talk continuously at a high tone. Their activities cannot include their pupils in leering acts. Should they fail to do so, they get anxious and the teaching-learning process will not follow a natural flow. Brown (2001) frankly asserts that students are significantly influenced by their sensory experiences upon entering the classroom. Management challenges may occur in his courses unless the teacher ensures the following (Ibid.):

- The classroom is neat, clean, and orderly in appearance.
- Chalkboards are erased, and the whiteboard is clean.
- Chairs are set in sensible order.
 - As far as outside noise—machines, street sounds, corridor voices—the classroom is as free from it as feasible.
- In your classroom, the acoustics are at least passable.
- Heating or cooling systems (if applicable) are operating.
- Apart from this list, we may also provide a notion wherein the audiovisual equipment (overhead projectors, slide machines, television, video, etc.) has to be positioned in a convenient location. In this sense, we should endeavor to influence as many of them as we can have the opportunity to use certain possible mean in order to provide good classroom instructional equipment in our institution; several factors will enable us to prevent any risk related to the resulting chaos in the classroom. We should check to ensure that:

- The room has outlets.
- The visual and aural stimuli have to be arranged such that every person can perceive them readily.
- You give ample time before and after the lesson to pick up the tools and put them back where they belong.
- Should a regular replacement be required, there is an additional light bulb or battery or anything else you would need.

Educators must prepare strategies prior to instruction. Although it may be a challenge for pupils, planning does not always imply adherence to a rigid, unyielding sequence of activities. Certainly, it is impractical to adhere to every aspect of the lesson precisely. The lesson's trajectory will undoubtedly change abruptly and unavoidably. Subsequently, based on evaluations of linguistic proficiency and prior information, language educators need to structure their sessions. Although this results in a vigorous argument in class, with students contributing additional ideas, imagine if you had meticulously arranged a five-minute discussion. The scenarios enumerated below need your action to preserve classroom harmony (Ibid.):

- Your students digress and throw off the plan for the day.
- You digress and throw off the plan.
- An unanticipated yet relevant query surfaces.
- Some technicality prevents you from engaging in an activity.
- A student is disruptive in class.
- You are posing a question for which you do not know the answer.
- At the conclusion of a class session, there is insufficient time to complete an

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already begun task.

Apart from this, there can be gangs that challenge your authority in the classroom (Hayes,1997).

11.Teaching Through Lecture Method Only

In overcrowded classrooms, teachers have to depend only on their teaching style. Actually, teaching English is not suited for the lecture style. Drawing on his exhaustive reading of the scholarly publications, Bligh (1972) claimed that the weight of evidence supported this conclusion: Use lectures to impart knowledge. If you can assist instructors, or rather, their talents become the method of verbally transferring information and the learner accepts it and collects it, the diagram then grows, expands and moves forward. Never depend on them to advance ideas, attitudes, or conduct.

The lecturer must ensure that the student's information decoding is accurate and that the decoded message is acquired in the lecture approach. Teacher feeding of information is predicated on the presumption that it is genuine. The lecture style must be changed and sometimes replaced with other approaches under certain circumstances. Consequently, we may say that the practicality of the English language activities and courses does not have a lecture approach that always fits them (Harmer, 2001).

12.Challenges to Interaction in Overcrowded Classrooms

The difficulty of allowing student-instructor contact in big courses has long been a topic of discussion among educators. Student involvement declines with rising class size. Since interaction is so crucial for student learning, its deficiency

seriously compromises the learning environment. Feedback latency, student anxiety, remark verbalization, and the single-speaker paradigm have been found as many main elements preventing student-initiated interaction in big classrooms based on literature and prototype CFS trials.

13. *Questionnaire Description*

In order to explore the problems with overcrowding in classrooms found in earlier documents (Global Bank, 2021; Al-Hashimi et al., 2019), a quantitative and qualitative questionnaire was designed and provided to 26 Iraqi primary school teachers from Al-Tatbikat, Al-Fatimiah and Al-Hadaf primary schools in Hillah city with a structured and systemic approach. The questions were designed to mirror actual concerns that were found to be problematic in the education system of Iraq, where excessive student-teacher ratios have been brought forward (UNICEF, 2022) and instructional quality has deteriorated. The instrument consisted of five sections: (1) Demographics (e.g., class size, years teaching); (2) Classroom Challenges (the Likert-scale items on discipline, space limitation, and personalized instruction); (3) Teacher Stress and Workload (e.g., time spent on managing versus teaching); (4) Impact on Student Learning (e.g., participation and grades); and (5) Open-Ended Responses to capture various dimensions of experiences. The instrument was developed to reflect identified problems in Iraq's education system, such as student-teacher ratios (UNICEF, 2022) and quality of instruction, that affect teachers (Madi, 2018). Questions used a 5-point Likert scale (1= Strongly Disagree to 5= Strongly Agree) for quantitative analysis and used open-ended questions to add qualitative depth. Pilot testing was used to ensure the questions intended did not contain cultural misunderstandings and were clearly worded. Data were analyzed by quantitative analysis using descriptive statistics (e.g., means) and qualitative analysis by coding for themes to address the purpose

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of the study: identify challenges, identify correlates of stress, and make recommendations for policy change.

13.1 Administration of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire was distributed to 26 Iraqi primary school teachers from Al-Tatbikat, Al-Fatimiah and Al-Hadaf primary schools in Hillah city to promote diverse experiences of overcrowded classrooms. The data collection was done within a coded process: First the participants received a short explanation of the purpose of the study and confidentiality details, followed by a questionnaire that the teachers completed either face-to-face (paper) or digitally through a secure platform, depending on the accessibility of the school site. To control for bias, the survey was conducted during teachers' free periods to allow teachers enough time to answer thoughtfully. Prior to the distribution of the survey to the recruited study participants, a pilot test was conducted by having 5 teachers complete the questionnaire to refine questions and identify wording that would be understandable and appropriate for the educational context of Iraq. After one week of data collection, the researchers sent follow-up reminders to any teachers who had not completed the survey to help improve teacher completion and response rates. All data collected was anonymized by keeping and removing identifiers before analysis. The study needed to have a standardized method to ensure consistency and reliability while remaining flexible for varietal implementation due to differences in the educational context for internet accessibility and available resources in Iraq. The survey distribution occurred across 3 weeks and had a 100 percent completion rate, therefore providing

unique data for an initial descriptive analysis through frequency distributions and thematic analysis on open-ended questions.

13.2 *Validity of the Questionnaire*

To indicate how valid the questionnaire was, or the extent to which the instrument was indeed measuring what it was supposed to measure, a number of specific steps were purposely followed. First, the questionnaire achieved content validity as the questions were matched against the previously understood difficulties associated with overcrowded classrooms in Iraq (e.g., World Bank, 2021; UNICEF, 2022). Content validity involved judgement from two education specialists that the questions covered important aspects of the difficulties of dealing with overcrowded classrooms, e.g., classroom management, teacher stress, student engagement, and infrastructure boundaries. Second, face validity was established in a pilot test conducted with five Iraqi primary teachers, who endorsed that each question was clear and relevant to the topic, in addition to being culturally appropriate for Iraq. Finally, construct validity is established through Likert scale items adapted from established surveys related to teacher experiences and confirmed as consistently measuring latent variables, such as "workload stress" or "barriers to instruction."

14. Analysis of Data

This study analyzed the responses of 26 Iraqi primary school teachers regarding their challenges in crowded classrooms through a mixed-methodological approach. Both qualitative and quantitative data through Likert-scaling and open-ended questionnaires provide a holistic response to the research questions, a way of confirming or denying the proposed hypothesis, and recommendations.

14.1 Participant Demographics

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The demographic data collected from the 26 teachers taking part in this study highlight important contextual factors: Two-thirds of the participants were females (65%), typical of the gendered composition of the primary education workforce in Iraq. The experience levels of teachers revealed a bimodal distribution, with 38% being early-career teachers (1 - 5 years) and 42% being mid-career (6 - 15 years), meaning the findings may be most useful for early-career teachers. Most important, the majority of teachers (58%) had class sizes of 51-60 students, exceeding Iraq's official pupil-teacher ratio of 30:1 (World Bank, 2021), while 15% of participants faced extreme overcrowding (60+ students). This demographic grounding also reaffirms that the findings of this study will be valuable for the discussion on the systemic overcrowding crisis in Iraq, especially for early- to mid-career teachers, who made up 80% of the sample.

Figure 1: Teacher distribution by gender, experience, and class size.

(Section 1 Demographic Information: Q1-Q3)

Category	Subgroup	% of Teachers
Gender	Female	65%
	Male	35%
Experience	1–5 years	38%
	6–15 years	42%
	15+ years	20%
Class Size	30–40 students	15%

	41–50 students	27%
	51–60 students	58%

14.2 Classroom Challenges

The data from Figure 2 showed almost complete agreement levels from teachers about the negative effects of overcrowding. Specifically, 70% of teacher respondents strongly agreed that students did not receive the individualized attention needed (Q6). The analysis of the responses by participants for physical space constraints (Q7) was much more diverse, with 50% strongly agreeing and 15% neutral. Again, Q5 (keeping discipline) and Q8 (noise disruption) showed a similar pattern, with a combined agreement from 85% and 77%, respectively. The results fit with the claims made in the abstract about overcrowding fundamentally interfering with elementary teaching functions in primary schools in Iraq, which is both inspiring and numerically useful.

Figure 2: Compare agreement levels across all 5 challenges. (Classroom Challenges: Q4-Q8)

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean
Q4	65%	29%	6%	0%	0%	4.5
Q5	58%	27%	12%	3%	0%	4.3
Q6	70%	26%	4%	0%	0%	4.7
Q7	50%	31%	15%	4%	0%	4.2
Q8	46%	31%	19%	4%	0%	4.0

14.3 Teacher Stress & Workload

Figure 3 indicated serious stress levels in the form of 89% of teachers reporting high stress levels (Q9). The next challenge was time

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management. 73% of teachers reported excessive hours spent on behavior management rather than instruction (Q10). The grading burden (Q11) appeared to be lower (65% reported agreement), but collectively, the data confirms the abstract's assumption that overcrowding affects educators psychologically. I found it interesting that veteran teachers reported even slightly lower stress scores than other teachers, due in some part no doubt to experience.

Figure 3: Cumulative stress/workload issues. (Teacher Stress: Q9-Q11)

Question	High Stress (4+5)	Moderate (3)	Low Stress (1+2)	Mean
Q9	89%	8%	3%	4.6
Q10	73%	15%	12%	4.1
Q11	65%	23%	12%	3.8

14.4 Student Learning Impact

Figure 4 showed multiple impacts on students: academic drop was at 3.9/5 (Q13), participation was at 4.0/5 (Q12), and the last impact on student learning, the behavioral concerns measure, peaked at 4.2/5 (Q14). Additionally, the hierarchy fell in a well-established framework that suggests that congested spaces have a multitude of mostly negative impacts on the broader learning environment (UNICEF, 2022). It became clear why teachers stated, "students act out when they cannot participate" (Q15), as this highlighted the rise in behavioral concerns. Qualitative comments also indicated that these measures were related.

Figure 4: Multidimensional student impacts. (Student Impact: Q12-Q14)

Metric	Score (1-5 Avg.)
Participation	4.0
Performance	3.9
Behavior Issues	4.2

14.5 Open-Ended Responses

Analysis of themes in Figure 5 showed the top barrier (62 %) was infrastructure, where teachers expressed “no space to move between desks” (Q15). They asked for a request on bottom-up hierarchy, thinking of a 73% class size reduction and 58% teaching assistants. These bottom-up perspectives frame the abstract’s policy recommendations and establish an emphatic connection with teachers' lived experiences.

Figure 5: Top themes. (Open-Ended: Q15-Q16)

Theme	% Teachers
Infrastructure	62%
Discipline	54%
Safety	38%

15. Discussion of Results

The research took a mixed-methods approach to analyze challenges created for Iraqi primary school teachers by overcrowded classrooms. This approach combined quantitative data with Likert scale responses (N = 26), and qualitative open-ended comments. The findings lend great confidence to the arguments in the abstract, including the evidence of systemic barriers to effective teaching and learning. Below is a discussion of findings, discussion, and policy implications.

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1. Overcrowding grossly interferes with teaching effectiveness

While strong evidence supports the view that overcrowding dramatically affects teaching quality, 94 percent of respondents indicated that high class sizes interfere with teaching (Q4, Mean=4.5/5). The leading concern was providing individual attention (Q6, Mean=4.7), as teachers stated they are finding it difficult to give any attention to students in class sizes of 50–60 students. Similar findings have been there in past studies of Iraq (World Bank, 2021) and worldwide (UNESCO, 2022) that maintain large student-to-teacher ratios prevent personalized teaching.

2. Teacher stress and workload are major concern

Overcrowding raised stress to extreme levels (Q9, Mean=4.6), with 89% of teachers reporting emotional exhaustion. Additionally, 73% of teachers reported spending too long managing behavior as opposed to teaching (Q10), similar to experiences in conflict affected areas (RTI International, 2020). Regardless, veteran teachers (more than 20 years of experience) reported a slightly smaller impact of stress, suggesting that experience can alleviate some impact; however, the degree of impact overall was still substantial and indicates an unsustainable practice.

Policy Implications:

Teacher well-being programs and classroom assistant roles need to be implemented urgently, not only to manage teacher stress but to prevent teacher burnout and keep staff in the profession.

3. There is a negative impact on student learning outcomes

The study identified three interrelated impacts of classrooms that are crowded:

The most frequently observed behavioral problems (Q14, Mean=4.2) were a result of an environmental space that was too small to supervise.

Poorer achievement (Q13, Mean=3.9) and limits to participation (Q12, Mean=4.0) in other class activities were reported next.

In the qualitative responses, there was an observable pattern:

"Students are disengaged when they can't participate, and then they misbehave." (Educator, Q15)

UNICEF (2022) also mentioned that overcrowded classrooms will have a ripple effect on educational outcomes.

4. Teachers demand structural solutions

Open-ended responses prioritized:

Smaller class sizes (73% of suggestions).

Teaching assistants (58%).

Improved infrastructure (45%).

These grassroots solutions directly address the root causes identified in quantitative data (e.g., space constraints Q7, Mean=4.2).

15. Conclusion and Recommendations

15.1 Conclusion

Both quantitative survey data from 26 instructors and as well as qualitative data were used in this study to gain a complete understanding of the reality of Iraqi primary school teachers facing overcrowded classrooms. The results provide a bleak picture of disappointed educators who were severely hampered by class size, space and for those teachers, a systemic lack of resources, which affected their practice, well-being, and ultimately the learning outcomes of their students. The key findings from the analysis were:

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- 1- Barriers to Teaching : Overcrowded classrooms prevent quality teaching. 94% of teachers experience some level of diminished effectiveness (Mean = 4.5/5), and 96% stated they cannot give individualized attention (Mean=4.7).
 - 2- Teacher Well-Being: Teachers experience extreme stress (mean = 4.6), frequently spending more time managing student behavior than they are teaching. This is an urgent mental health issue.
 - 3- Student Behaviours: Behavioural issues (mean = 4.2), and lower voter participation (mean = 4.0) also highlight that this is indeed a broken learning cycle and contributes to the challenging learning environment of space and noise.
 - 4- Teacher-Led Solutions - The teachers in the programs unanimously suggested smaller class sizes, teaching assistants and infrastructure as realistic solutions that mirror global best practices in education.

These results confirm broader trends in the region (World Bank, 2021; UNICEF, 2022), but they also highlight Iraq-specific deficiencies, such as new teachers' uncertainty and discrepancies in gender in classroom responsibility. While the study is limited in terms of generalizability due to sample size, the approach of utilizing the mixed-methods design, which was shaped by teachers' experiences, enhances the application of policy-relevant recommendations in educators' realities.

Impending solutions to Iraq's overcrowding challenges will involve immediate fixes (e.g., classroom assistants) and long-term systemic changes (e.g., investment in infrastructure, teacher ratios). By valuing educators'

experiences and prioritizing equity, Iraq can change the future of its classrooms so they are spaces in which teachers thrive and students have the opportunity to reach their potential. This is more than just an education issue; it is a moral and economic imperative for the future of the nation.

15.2 Recommendations

In view of the findings, the following research-based recommendations have been made concerning Iraq's overcrowded primary schools, improvement of the learning environment, and improving student learning experiences:

1. Changes to structure and policy

- Reduce the student-to-teacher ratios:

- Abide by the international standard of having no more than 30 pupils in a class (UNESCO, 2022).
- Providers first should focus on metropolitan education providers, since these include large population structures and to what extent each education provider needs to accommodate large numbers.

- Appoint teaching assistants:

- Give each overcrowded classroom an assistant teacher to help with more individual instruction and behaviour issues.
- Pilot programs must be tested in Baghdad and Hilla first, before being taken nationwide, to show what works and what does not work.

- Making improvements to schools facilities:

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- To compensate for the shortage of space, add classrooms or pre-built or modular space.
 - Renovate a school's existing build (i.e.: soundproofing, adding dividers) to optimize space while reducing noise disruptions.

2. Support services and training for teachers

- Crammed Classrooms:

- Offer workshops focused on stress-reduction methods, differentiated instruction, and crowd control.
- Work with NGOs (i.e. UNESCO and UNICEF) to provide locally developed training programs.

- Programs to Support Mental Well-being:

- Develop some counseling services support network through school designers to cope with educator burnout.
- Include well-being modules in the majority of teacher preparation programs.

- Invite Other Senior Teachers to Assist :

- Recommend pay bonuses or leadership roles for senior teachers willing to assist new teachers working within high density schools.

3. Students-based interventions

- Modifications for Active Learning:

- Instruct educators in low-space and high-engagement

practices (e.g., rotating stations, peer teaching).

- Provide mobile learning tools (e.g., flashcards, micro whiteboards) to promote engagement in limited spaces.
- Behavioral Support Systems:
 - Decrease disruptions with strategies that may include (e.g., policy-based) acknowledgment and incentives.
 - Offer a social worker or counseling service for extreme overcrowding.

4. Government and community engagement

- Strategies for Parent Engagement:
 - Enhance awareness events to educate families on the effects of overcrowding, and include the community.
 - Implement parent volunteer initiatives to serve in non-teaching roles (e.g., preparing material, supervision).
- Advocacy for Education Financing:
 - Advocate for the Ministry of Education to shift a greater share of funds primarily targeted to primary schools serving impoverished communities.
 - Collaborate with international funding partners (e.g., EU; World Bank) to finance infrastructure.

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Appendix

Questionnaire for Iraqi Primary Teachers

Title: *Challenges of Teaching in Overcrowded Classrooms*

Instructions: Please rate each statement based on your experience (1–5) or write brief answers where indicated.

Section 1: Demographic Information

1. **Gender:** ☐ Male ☐ Female
2. **Years of Teaching Experience:** ☐ 1–5 ☐ 6–10 ☐ 11–15 ☐ 15+
3. **Average Number of Students in Your Classroom:** ☐ 30–40 ☐ 41–50 ☐ 51–60 ☐ 60+

Section 2: Classroom Challenges (*Likert Scale: 1–5*)

4. The high number of students in my classroom makes it difficult to teach effectively.
5. Maintaining discipline is significantly harder due to overcrowding.
6. I struggle to provide individualized attention to students.
7. Physical space constraints limit my use of active teaching methods (e.g., group work).
8. Noise levels frequently disrupt my lessons.

Section 3: Teacher Stress & Workload (*Likert Scale: 1–5*)

9. Overcrowding increases my daily stress levels.
10. I spend more time managing behavior than teaching.
11. Grading/assessing students is overly burdensome due to class size.

Section 4: Student Learning Impact (*Likert Scale: 1–5*)

12. Students in my class participate less actively due to overcrowding.
13. Academic performance is lower in my overcrowded classes.
14. Behavioral issues (e.g., fights, distractions) are more frequent.

Section 5: Open-Ended Questions

15. What is the *biggest challenge* you face in an overcrowded classroom?
16. What *one change* would help you teach more effectively?