



Overcrowded classroom in an ESL Situation: Challenges and Solutions in the South Region of Jammu and Kashmir

¹Aadel Yousuf Khanday, ²Zulfi Syed

¹(Ph.D. Research Scholar, School of Languages Literature and Society (English Department) Jaipur National University, Rajasthan, India)

²(Language Instructor at preparatory year, Najran University)

Abstract: *The importance of English as a second language learning has been widely accepted in recent years and the English language is now considered as an international language. There is a growing importance of teaching and learning English language in education all over the world. But, there are many barriers in language teaching at higher secondary schools in the South region of Kashmir. One of the most important barriers in English as a second language teaching is overcrowded classes. In crowded classes, classroom management, getting results from language approaches becomes difficult. In addition to this, a small number of class hours per week are another barrier in language teaching. Higher secondary schools and colleges in Kashmir have been observing a significant growth in student enrolment for a decade ultimately resulting in overcrowded classrooms with limited resources. A large classroom can be referred to a higher secondary school English language class with the number of students ranging from 70 to 130. Large classrooms present several pedagogical challenges before the teacher. Therefore, it matters how the teacher responds to the challenges of an overcrowded classroom which might necessarily breed morale and discipline issues. This study explores the challenges of the overcrowded classroom in an ESL setting. It attempts to incorporate teachers' and students' perspectives on the overcrowded classroom inevitably affecting teaching and learning practices. To achieve these objectives, the researchers used the mixed-method approach. The population of the study is 10 Higher Secondary (grade 10-12) schools in the South district of Kulgam. The researchers distributed questionnaires to 32 students (20 boys and 12 girls). The researchers distributed the questionnaires (quantitative tool) and semi-structured interview (qualitative tool) among 17 teachers (10 male and 7 female) to obtain and analyze teachers' views on the issue. The data was analyzed by using (SPSS). The study assumes to offer solutions to overcrowded classroom problems.*

Key Words: *over-crowded classroom, teaching-learning issues, mixed method, SPSS, ESL.*

Introduction:

The process of teaching-learning is as old as human beings. The process had gone several changes from non-formal to formal with the passage of time. Teaching is an act of spreading information to the learners in the classroom according to tradition. The concept of overcrowded classes differs from region to region. But, most English classes at higher secondary schools in South Kashmir exceed 70 students per class, even though many scholars' considered 30-40 students overcrowded class. Baker and Westrup (2000) stated that a large class can be any number of students unless the teacher feels that there are too many to progress. Smaller classes have been found more effective when instructional goals involve higher-level cognitive skills including application, analysis, and synthesis. Boysen and Edvin (1999) Smaller classes provide good contact between students and teacher, which appears to be most needed for students with low motivation, those with little knowledge of the subject matter, or those who have difficulty grasping conceptual material. Baker and Westrup (2000) in sum, the optimal size of a class depends on the instructional goals being pursued. The main advantage smaller classes have over larger one is that they provide students with greater opportunities for interaction with the subject matter, with their teachers and with one another. Hayes (1997) believed that the ideal class of language is 30 (thirty) maximum, hence only such size a teacher can provide enough opportunity for the students to communicate with each other. Harmer (2000) large classes create challenges to both teachers and students, in addition to teaching and learning. When the classroom is overcrowded it is difficult for teachers to interact with the students sitting at the back, therefore it becomes difficult for the teacher to have individual attention to the students. It also effects to organize dynamic and creative learning. Most important, large classes are depressing for inexperienced teachers, because they don't have teaching strategies to tackle the situation.

Literature Review:

The literature review is an essential part of the research process and makes a valuable contribution to almost every functional step. It has value even before the first step; that is when you are merely thinking about a research question that you may want

to find answers to through your research journey. In the initial stages of research, it helps you to establish the theoretical roots of your study clarify your ideas and develop your research methodology. Kumar (2010) p. 60

Kumar (1997): in his doctoral research (Exploring learner strategies in the large ESL classes at the tertiary level a case study) the researcher attempted to explore learners strategies used in large ESL classes at territory level in India and variables that affect their use. The major contention of this study is large classes. The central concern of this study is, therefore, was to examine the strategies that learners use in large ESL classes and explores the variables that influence the use of these strategies to find what the extent to which strategies differ from those identified in the related literature.

The researcher used questionnaire, interviews, dairies and uptake chats for the investigation of this study. The researcher also observed some E. classes and audiotaped lectures. The researcher observed the learner as they came into class. It was seen that many learners had formed themselves into groups. One or two learners came early and reserve seats for others. In this way, they had got into a pattern of sitting in the same place every day. The teacher would merely say that others should sometimes get a chance to sit in the front. It was observed that the teacher started his lesson without any introduction and read aloud and explains the lesson paragraph by paragraph.

Salah and Inamullah (2012) revealed from their study that overcrowded classes could have a direct effect on students' performance. They not only effective the learning environment, but it created problems for teachers also in many ways like discipline, students behavior, poor attention, and assessment.

Halil and Abdullah (2019) revealed in their research that there are many challenges in overcrowded classes, which affects teaching and learning, the researchers suggested that by using modern teaching methods and strategies the teachers can tackle these problems, he suggested motivation plays an important role in effective teaching and learning, having adequate resources like, PPT, audio-visual aids, help them to achieve their desired goal.

Nemrah (2011) stated that teachers had to cope with different groups of students in the overcrowded classroom. They had problems in many areas like language learning, oral expression and not able to heed attention and memory problems in the overcrowded classroom. The teachers are not able to give extra attention to the slow learners.

Khan and Iqbal (2012) the study revealed that teaching was not effective in the overcrowded classroom. Most of the teachers were facing problems in giving instructions, discipline, psychical and assessment problems. The study suggested that the government should make rigorous rules and regulations with concerning an ideal number of students in the classroom and provide enough funds to the education department for providing better facilities in schools.

Purpose of the study:

The purpose of the study was to provide the views of the students on overcrowded classes and its effects on teaching and learning at the higher secondary schools in the South Kashmir

Following were the research objectives of the study:

1. To identify the problems and challenges students faced in overcrowded classes.
2. To assess the effects of overcrowded classes size on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
3. To provide possible remedial measures to overcome the problems and challenges of overcrowded classes at the higher secondary school.

Research questions:

1. What problems and challenges do teachers and students face in overcrowded classroom?
2. To what extent does overcrowded classroom affect the quality of teaching learning and assessment of students learning?
3. What are the possible measures to deal with overcrowded classroom?

Research Methodology

The study was descriptive in nature. It was an attempt to investigate the problems faced by the students in overcrowded classes and suggested some measures to tackle with these problems.

Population

The population of the study included all 10 government Higher Secondary schools. For sample of the study, 32 students were randomly selected in the South region of Kashmir valley.

Sources of Data

The primary data was collected through questionnaires from the students. The secondary data was collected from review of literature, a study of documents and books.

Research Tool

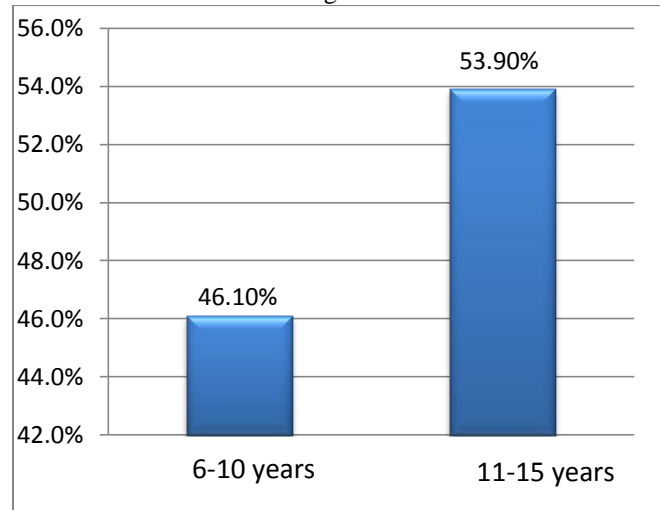
The study developed appropriate tools for the collection and analysis of necessary data. Closed-ended and open-ended questionnaire was framed for students.

Research Techniques

Both quantitative and qualitative techniques of research were used in the study. The data was tabulated, analyzed and interpreted by using SPSS software due to the nature of the data.

Analysis and Discussion

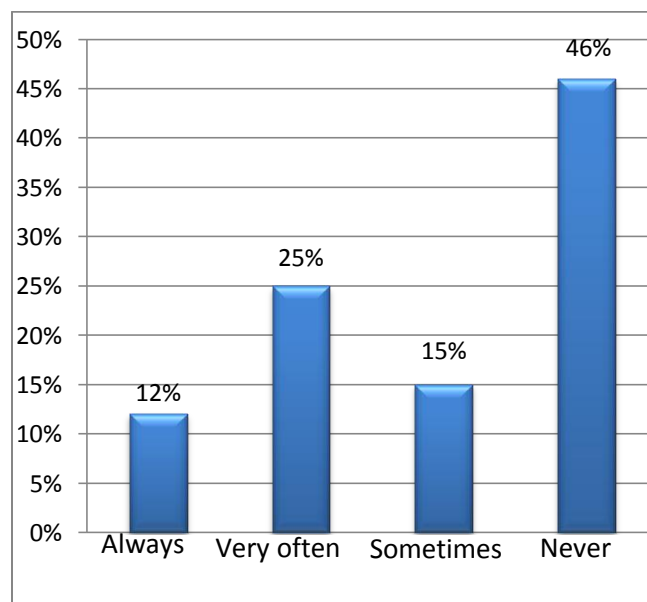
Figure 1



The above graph shows that 53.90% students have been studying English for more than 11-15 years and 46.10% have been studying from 6-10 years. Therefore, it is clear that most of the students are studying English from class one to secondary school.

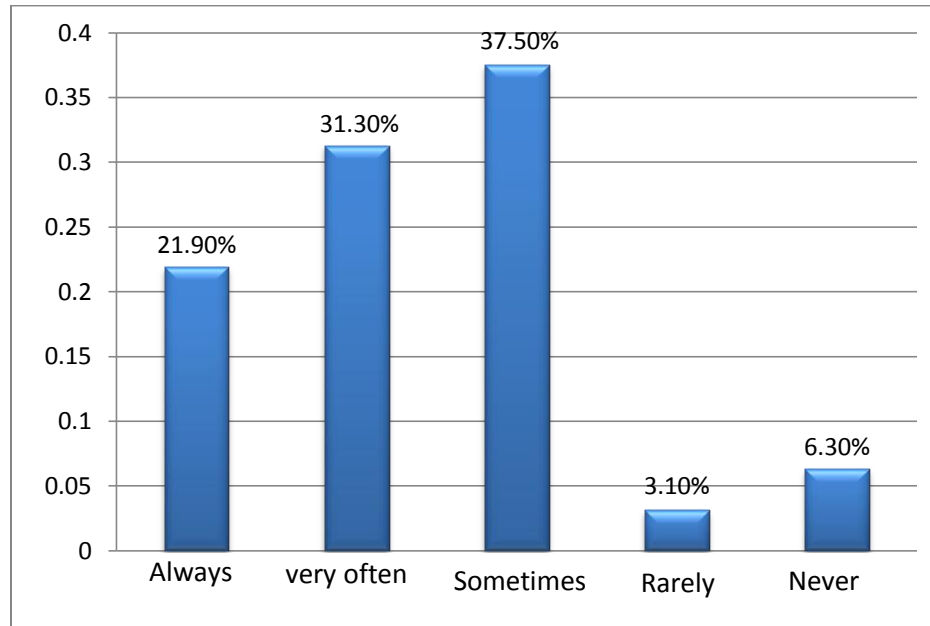
Figure 2

Shows students attitude towards participation in overcrowded classroom



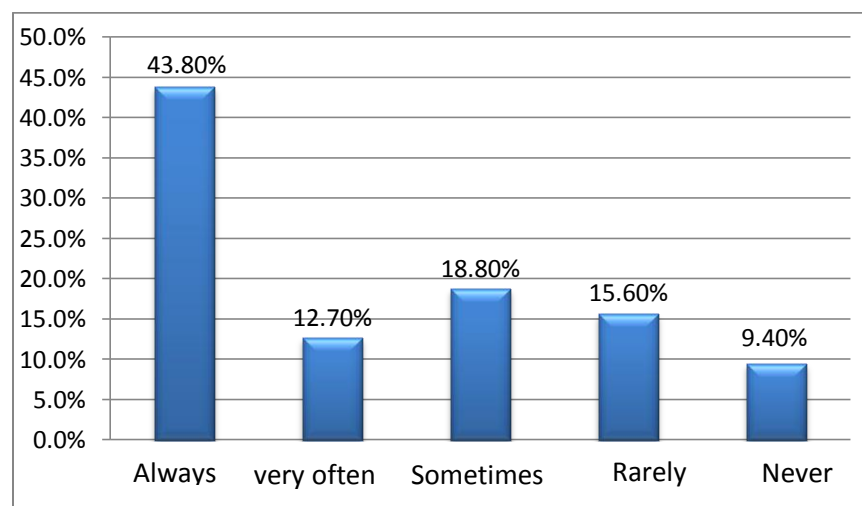
The above item has five options [a. always b. very often c. sometimes d. rarely e. never] only four options were selected by the respondents. The data the graph two reflected that 46% of the respondents were of the view that they never participated in the overcrowded classroom whereas, 25% of the view that very often they participated in the overcrowded classroom. 15% of the view that they sometimes participated in the overcrowded classroom whereas 12% of them viewed that they always participated in the overcrowded classroom, there it clearly indicated that majority of them agreed that they never participated in the overcrowded classroom.

Figure 3
 Distraction in the overcrowded classroom



The above item has five options {always, very often, sometimes, rarely, never} all of these options were opted by the participants. The data reflected in the graph three shows that 37.5% of the participant viewed that they are distracted by overcrowded classroom, 31.3% are expressed that they are very often distracted by the overcrowded classroom, 21.9 % have the same views that they are always distracted by the overcrowded classroom. Only 3.10 % shows that they rarely affected by this, 6.3% are of the view that they never affected by overcrowded classroom. Hence it shows all most all the learners are distracted in an overcrowded classroom

Figure 4
 Showing lack of cooperation among students in overcrowded classrooms

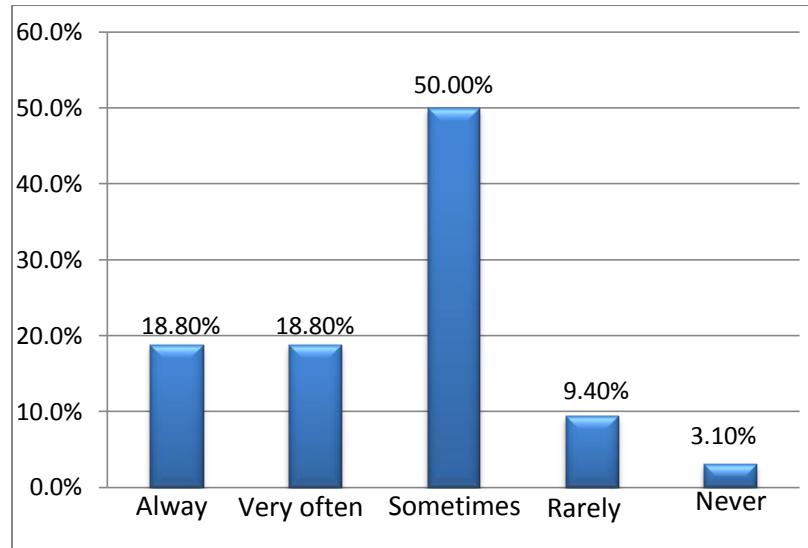


The above item has five options {always, very often, sometimes, rarely and never} all of these options are selected by the participants. 43.80% of participants are viewed that there is always lack of cooperation in overcrowded classroom, 18.80% of participants are viewed that sometimes there is lack of cooperation among students, 15.60% of viewed that very often there is lack of cooperation in overcrowded classroom, 12.70% of the view that rarely there is lack of cooperation among students in overcrowded classroom. Only 9.4% of the view that there is never lack of cooperation among students, therefore it clearly

shows that all most all the participants are viewed that there is lack of cooperation in one way or another way in the overcrowded classroom.

Figure.5

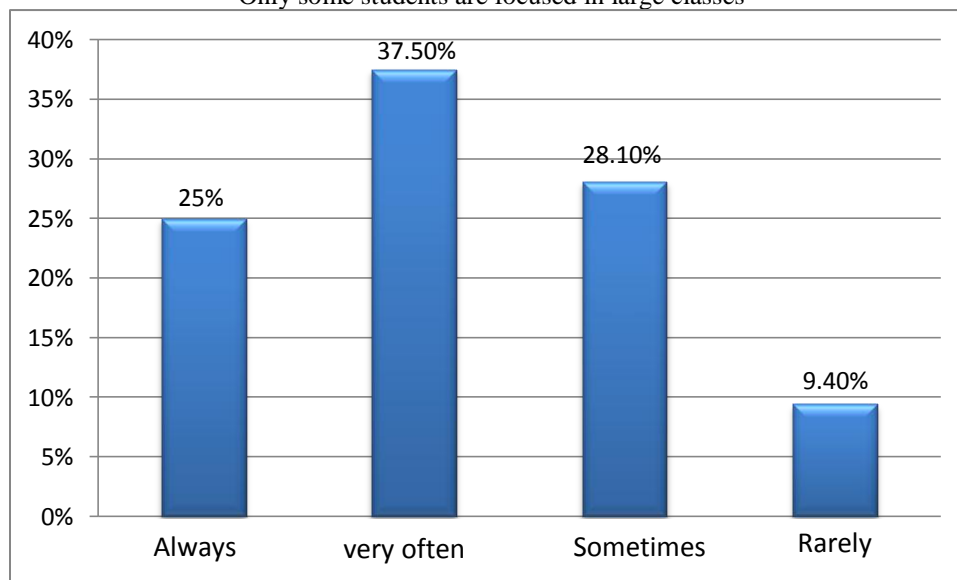
Large class size limit the number of assignments given to students



The above item has five options {always, very often, sometimes, rarely, never} all of these options selected by the participants 18.80% of participants viewed that large class size limit the number of assignments given to students always 18.80% of found that very often the class size limit the class assignments, 50% of participants suggested that sometimes large classroom size limit the class assignments 9.40% of suggested rarely there are assignment issues in large classroom only 3.10% of suggested that there are no issues of assignments in large classroom. Therefore, it showed that most of the participants suggested there are assignment issues in a large classroom.

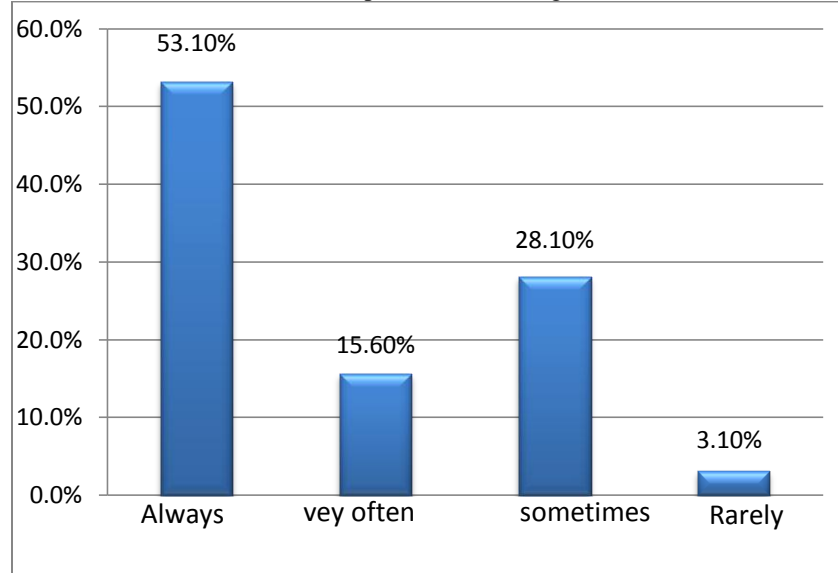
Figure 6

Only some students are focused in large classes



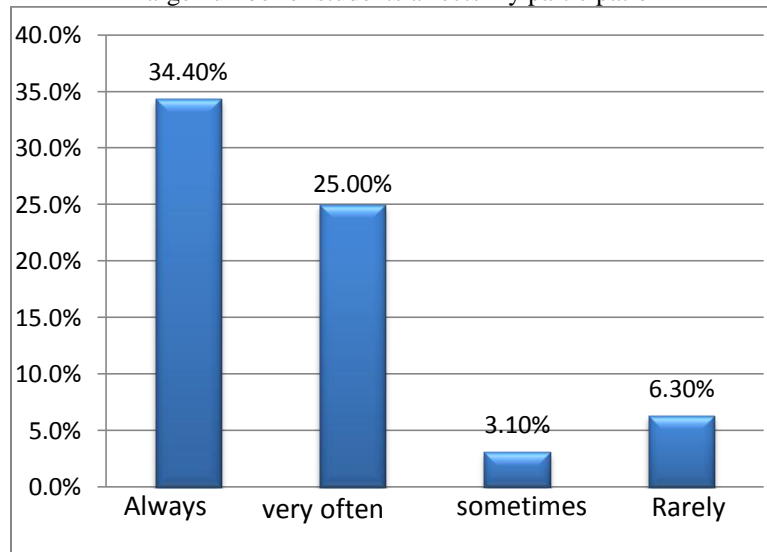
This item has five options [always, very often, sometimes, and rarely] only four options were selected by the participants 25% of suggested that only some students are focused in large classroom 37.50% of suggested that very often only some students are focused in large classroom, 28.10 of suggested that sometimes some students are focused in large classroom. Only 9.40% of suggested that rarely some students are focused in a large classroom.

Figure 7
 There are discipline issues in large classes



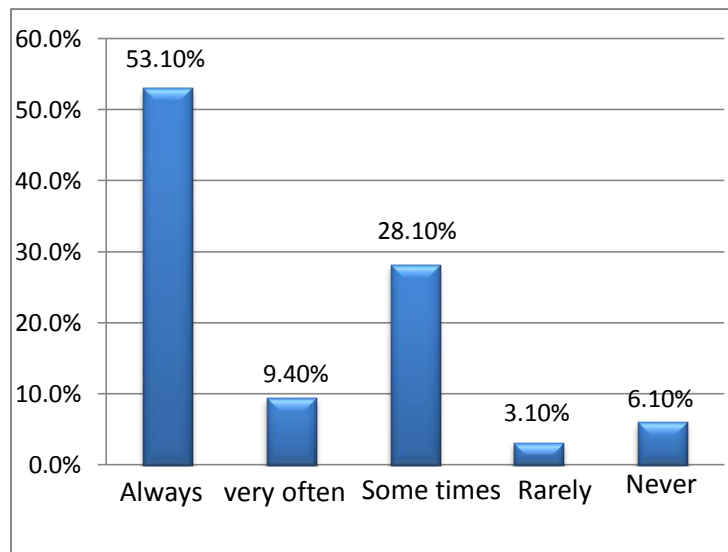
The above item has five options [always, very often, sometimes, and rarely] only four options were selected by the participants 53.10% of suggested that there are always discipline issues in large classroom 15.60% of suggested that very often there are discipline issues in large classroom, 28.10% of suggested that sometimes there are discipline issues in large classroom, only 3.10% of suggested that rarely there are discipline issues in large classroom. Therefore it showed that a majority of participants agreed there are discipline issues in a large classroom.

Figure 8
 Large number of students affects my participation



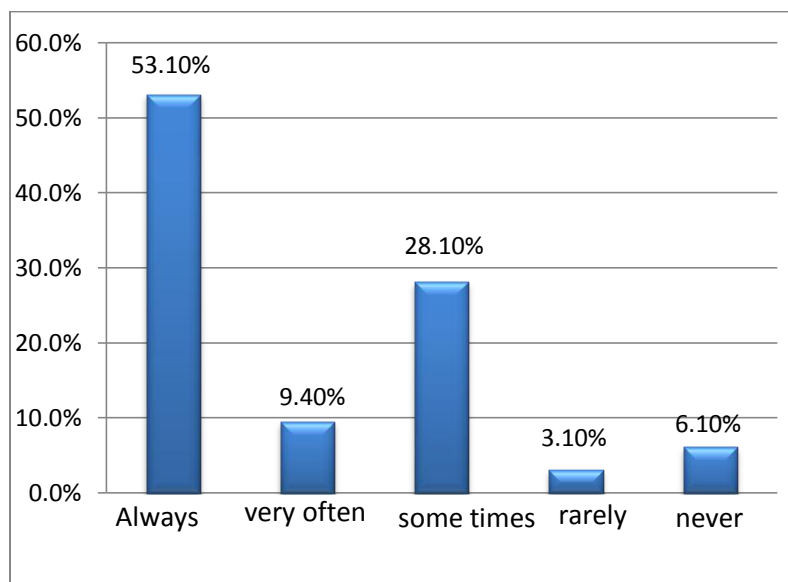
The above item has five options [a. always b. very often c. sometimes d. rarely e. never] only four of the options were selected by the participants. The data reflected in graph four indicated that 53.1% of the respondents were of the view that overcrowded class affects slow learners in terms of proficiency level. 25% of them agreed that very often overcrowded class affects slow learners while as, 3.10% of the view that sometimes large class effects slow learners. 6.3% of the respondents agreed that rarely they effected in terms of proficiency level. Hence, it clearly indicated that the majority of respondents agreed that overcrowded classroom effects slow learners.

Figure 9
 Only some students were focused in overcrowded classroom



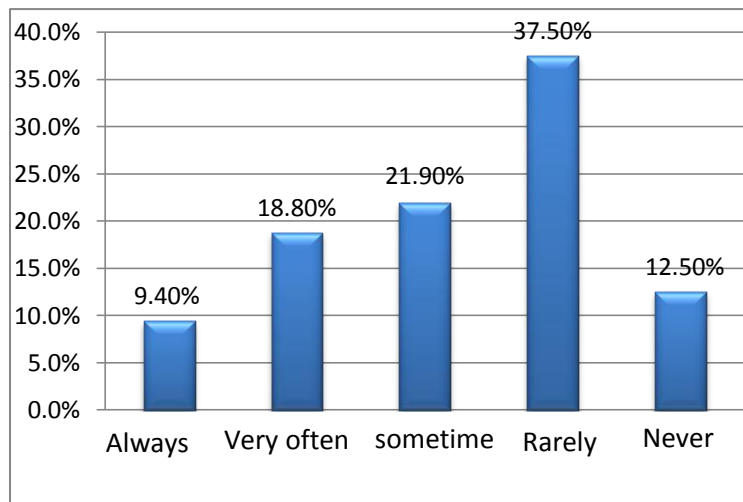
The above item has five options [a. always b. very often c. sometimes d. rarely e. never] all of these options were selected by the respondents. The data in the graph five indicated that 53.10% of the respondents were of the view that only some students were focused on the overcrowded classroom, where as 9.4% of the view that very often only students are focused. 28.10% of the respondents agreed that sometimes selected students are focused on the overcrowded classroom. 3.10% of the respondents were of the view that rarely some students are focused, whereas 6.10% of respondents agreed that only some are never focused in the overcrowded classroom. Therefore it clearly indicated that majority of the respondents agreed that only some students are focused in an overcrowded classroom.

Figure 9
 Large classes are teacher centered



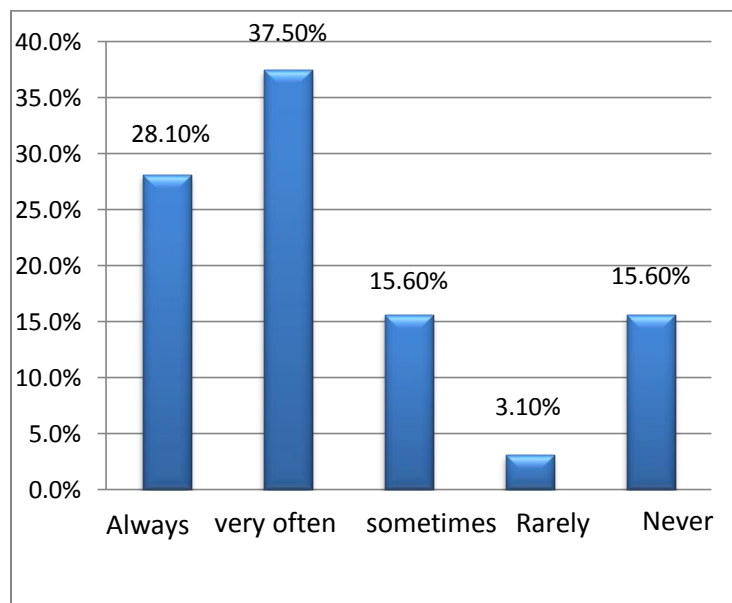
The above item has five options [a. always b. very often c. sometimes d. rarely e. never] all of these options were selected by the respondents. The data reflected in graph 9 indicated that 53.10% of the respondents were of the view that overcrowded classes are teacher-centered, whereas 28.10% were of the view that sometimes overcrowded classes are teacher-centered. 9.40% of the respondents viewed that very often overcrowded classes are teacher-centered where as 3.10% of the view that rarely and 6.10% are of the view that overcrowded classroom is teacher-centered.

Figure 10
 You hear properly to your teacher in large classes



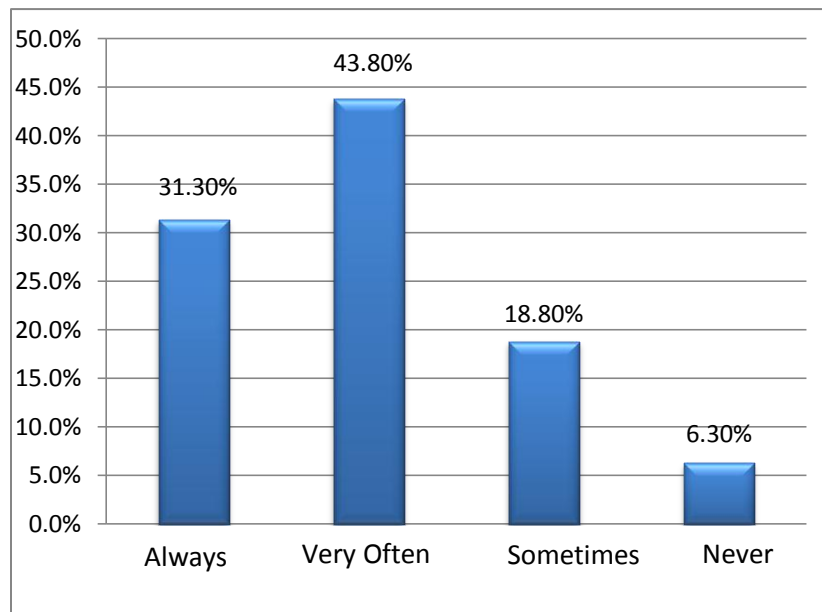
The above item has five options [a. always b. very often c. sometimes d. rarely e. never] all these options were selected by the respondents. The data in figure 10 displayed that 9.4% of the respondents were of the view that they always hear their teacher properly while 18.8% of the view that they very often hear their teacher properly. 21.90% of the respondents were of the view that they sometimes hear their teacher properly, 37.5% of the respondents viewed that they rarely hear their teacher in overcrowded classroom properly while as, 12.50% agreed they never hear their teacher properly in the overcrowded classroom.

Figure 11
 Students attitude towards learning are negatively affected in large classes



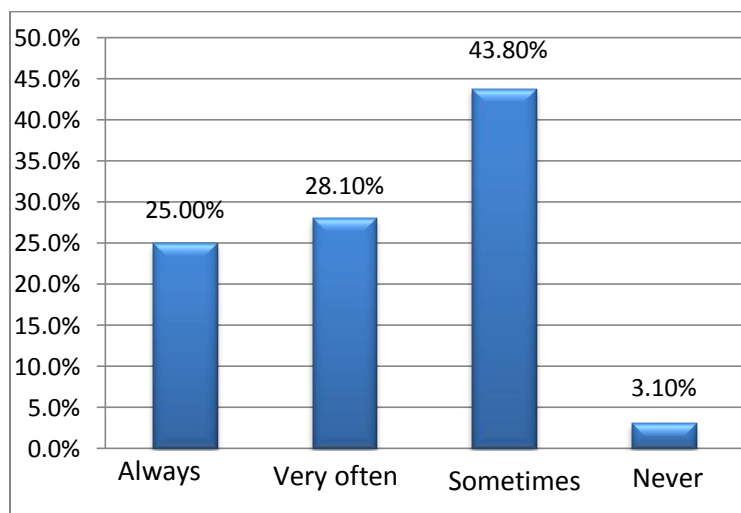
The above item has five options[a. always b. very often c. sometimes d. rarely e. never] the data in figure 11 revealed that 28.10% of the respondents were of the view that overcrowded class always affected students learning negatively, 37.50% of the respondents viewed that very often overcrowded classroom affects students learning attitude negatively. Whereas 15.60% of them considered overcrowded classroom sometimes affects students learning negatively, 3.10% regarded that rarely overcrowded class affects students learning and 15.60% of them viewed that overcrowded classroom never effects students learning negatively.

Figure No.12
 Small size classes allow more time for teachers to spend on teaching



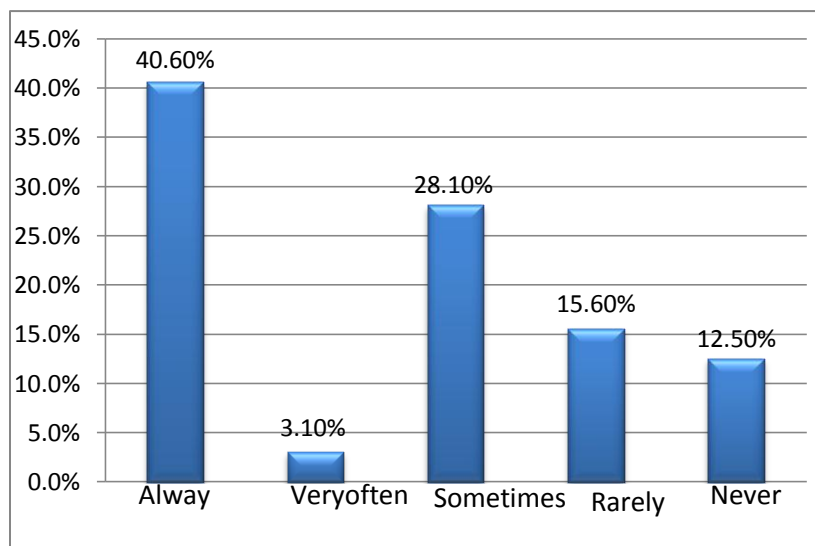
The above item has five options [a. always b. very often c. sometimes d. rarely e. never] only four options were selected by the respondents. The data in figure 12 indicated that 31.30% respondents were of the view that small size classroom always allows teachers to spend more time on teaching and learning, 43.80% viewed that teachers can spend more time on teaching in small size classroom. Whereas 18.80% of them considered that teachers rarely spend more time on teaching in small size classes, 6.30% of them agreed that teacher never spend more time in small size classes. Therefore the data clearly displayed in small size classroom teachers spend more time on teaching than an overcrowded classroom.

Figure No.13
 Teachers are large classes hardly give immediate feedback to students



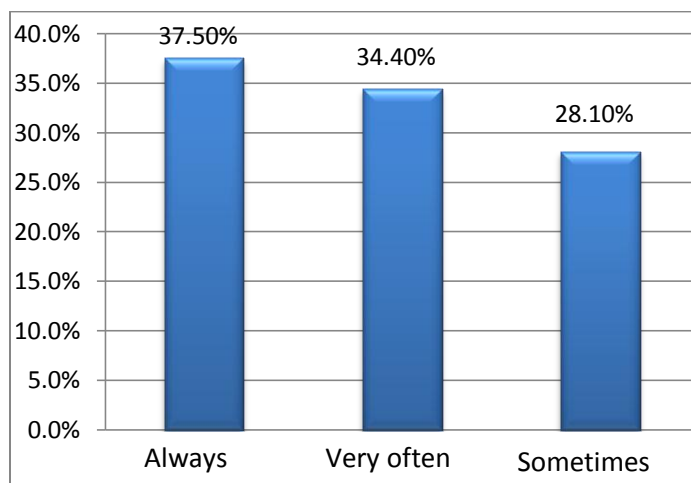
The above item has five options [a. always b. very often c. sometimes d. rarely e. never] only four options were chosen by the respondents. The data showed in figure 13 indicated that 25% of the respondents always agreed that teachers hardly provide immediate feedback to the students. 28.10% of them considered that most of the time teacher did not provide feedback to the students. Although 43.80% of them viewed that sometimes the teachers did not provide immediate feedback, 3.10% of them agreed that the teacher never avoid providing immediate feedback to the students.

Figure No.14
 Overcrowded classes affect students' achievements



The above item has five options [a. always b. very often c. sometimes d. rarely e. never] all of these options were selected by the respondents. The data displayed in figure 14 indicated that 40.60% were of the view that the overcrowded classroom always affected students' achievements. 3.10 of them viewed that very often it affected students' achievements. Whereas 28.10% of them agreed that sometimes it affected students' outcomes, 15.60% of them viewed that it rarely affected students achievements, 12.50% of them responded that it never affected students achievements, therefore the data clearly indicated that most of the participants agreed that overcrowded classroom affected students achievements.

Figure No.15
 Language teachers face difficulties in evaluating students' homework in the overcrowded classes



The above item has five items [a. always b. very often c. sometimes d. rarely e. never] only there options were selected by the respondents. The data displayed in figure 16 indicated that 37.50% of the participants were of the view that teachers face difficulties in evaluating students homework in overcrowded classroom, 34.40% of them responded that very often it is difficult for the teacher to evaluate students homework in overcrowded classroom, whereas 28.10% of them responded that sometimes it has been difficult for teachers to assess students homework in overcrowded classroom. This data clearly indicated that all the respondents agreed that it is time-consuming and difficult to evaluate students' homework overcrowded classroom.

SNO	Themes/statement	Responses
1	Problems you face in large classes	Noise, indiscipline Feel shy to express anything to teacher Lack of concentration Shyness in asking anything Distraction Disturbance because of late comers Lack of cooperation Feel boring and tiring Not understand properly Don't listen properly Don't recognize what teacher writes on board Can't read due to noise No feedback from teacher Zero participation Afraid to ask anything to teacher
2	Suggestions for managing large classes	Reduction in class size Develop harmony in the large classes Divide them groups Use of microphone Giving moral lessons Teacher-students friendly classes
3	Teaching methods teachers use in large classes	Lecture method Discussion

The above table shows that all the questions were responded by the students. The table displays the responses when the students were asked about the problem they face in large classes, six students responded that noise and indiscipline are the major problems they face in large classes. Another six students responded that they experience lack of concentration in large classes. Seven students expressed that they feel shy to ask anything or express anything to the teachers. Some of the students feel that they get distracted from the lectures in the large classes. While another five students responded that they feel bored and tired, lack of cooperation is also a problem according to some students.

When the students were asked to provide suggestions to manage large classes most of the students opted that large classes must be divided into sections and groups. Microphones should be used inside the classrooms for students sitting in the last rows. Some of the students suggested that teacher student-friendly environment can also play a great role in managing large classes.

Upon asking the students about the methods used by the teachers inside large classrooms, most of the students responded that teachers use lecture method and a few students agreed that discussion method is also opted by the teachers while teaching in large classrooms.

Conclusion:

The following conclusions were drawn from the study.

- All the higher secondary schools were overcrowded with a population ranging from 70-130 students per class.
- Almost all the students were facing problems due to inadequate space between the rows and having no access to have eye contact with the teacher.
- The proper seating arrangement of the students is the main problem observed by the teachers.
- It was found there are discipline issues in the overcrowded classes.
- It was found that majority of the teachers were facing disruption due to the crowded classroom, and they were not able to control them.
- Most of the teachers were facing problem in paying individual attention in the overcrowded classroom and slow learners were affected badly
- Majority of the students were facing difficulties to perform various curricular and co-curricular activities in the classroom and was not able to participate in the overcrowded classroom

Suggestions

The following recommendations were made on the basis of findings:

- The number of students in each class should be limited to 45-55 students.
- The government should provide sufficient budget to the education department for providing better facilities in schools.
- Proper training programmes should be organized for the teachers in order to teach them how to manage the overcrowded classroom.
- Overcrowded classes should be divided into sections and it would reduce the workload on teachers.
- Teachers should use projectors in the overcrowded classes; it would be beneficial for all the students.

Teachers should divide his/her class into groups and assigned work to every group. He should provide them opportunities for discussion in the overcrowded classroom.

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