Teachers' experiences in overcrowded classrooms in Egyptian public schools

Ghada Mamdouh Ayoub

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TEACHERS’S EXPERIENCES IN OVERCROWDED CLASSROOMS IN EGYPTIAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The American University in Cairo

Graduate School of Education (GSE)

Teachers’ Experience in Overcrowded Classrooms in Egyptian Public Schools

A Thesis Submitted to

The Department of International & Comparative Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts in International and Comparative Education

By Ghada Mamdouh Ayoub

Under the supervision of Dr. Heba El-Deghaidy

May 2019
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Abstract

Overcrowded classrooms are one of the main problems in the Egyptian educational system. It was reported in 2018 that the average number of students per class in the primary stage is 46 students, the preparatory stage 43 students and the general secondary stage 39 students. Hence, the study focuses on teachers’ experience regarding over-crowded classrooms and how its consequences affect the quality of public education in Egypt; it looks into the reasons behind this problem from the teachers’ perspectives. The participants are thirty-seven primary school teachers from four different schools. One of these schools is an experimental language school and the remaining are three governmental public schools. The study adopts a qualitative design by using an open-ended questionnaire. Thematic analysis was selected to analyze the findings; themes such as: Teaching experience is stressful in overcrowded classes, Students’ participation rate, unavailable resources, teaching strategies and disruptive behavior were deduced from the findings of the study. Finally, this study presents some practical implications and recommendations for future research.

Keywords: Overcrowded classrooms, Teachers Experiences, Social cognitive theory.
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1. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present the purpose of this study, background information about the research problem and its context, and state the research question the study is seeking to answer. It also presents the positionality of the researcher towards the topic.

The Egyptian educational system is the largest in the MENA region to which it expanded rapidly since the 1990’s (Matto & Subramanian, 2007). The objective of the policymakers in the early 1990’s was to provide opportunities for all Egyptian citizens to access proper and sufficient education (UNESCO, 2001). However, this is not the case; the Pre-university Education structure in Egypt is facing various challenges for over a decade (Amin, 2014). Examples of this include tight resources of the country that had an undesirable impact on the educational system, poor quality of education provided to the students, accelerated deterioration of the infrastructure and lack of professional development for the teachers to progress (Matto & Subramanian, 2007).

Another challenge was population expansion which created a burden on educational service providers. The current distribution of the population in Egypt creates a challenge for the country to offer lands to construct schools in the governorates nearby the Nile (i.e.: Cairo, Giza, Dakahlia, Gharbia), where there is a high population density (Amin, 2014) and had increased the number of students per class. The outcome of increasing the enrollment rate was unfavorable (Hartman, 2008) as it resulted in overcrowded classrooms and, public schools' facilities becoming overburdened, both of which have negatively affected the schools' infrastructure (Galal, Ismail, Gohar & Foster, 2005). Therefore, the quality of the current public education system is serving the country's need (Waschauer, 2003).

Hence, the matter of overcrowded classrooms is one of the main problems the Egyptian educational system faces and it requires action from the state (Loveluck, 2012). The Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) reported in 2018 that the average number of students per class in the primary stage is 46 students, the preparatory stage 43 students and the general secondary stage 39 students. Accordingly,
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this environment may not create a good opportunity for teachers to be effective in the classroom (Matto & Subramanian, 2007).

Earthman (2002) defines an overcrowded classroom when the number of students inside the classroom exceeds the area the class is designed to accommodate while Ready, Lee and Welner (2004) similarly define it as when the measurement of “the number of students enrolled is compared to the number of students the facilities were designed to serve.” (p.3).

Melendez (2017) highlighted that overcrowded classrooms appears to be a worldwide problem. A comparison was established by Melendez (2017) between different countries based on the number of students in class. For example, the average number of students per class in Pakistan is 70 students as compared to OECD countries, USA, Japan and Korea maintaining an average of 23, 24 and 34 students per class respectively.

The purpose of this study is to investigate teachers’ experience in overcrowded classrooms and the challenges they face under the current circumstances. Melendez (2017) stated that in overcrowded classrooms, teachers fail to implement student-centered pedagogies as students are marginalized thus limiting the students’ opportunity in effective learning. Therefore, it becomes inconvenient for teachers to use innovative praxis and creative pedagogies in overcrowded classrooms because of the lack of time and resources (Leahy, 2006). As such, it is unrealistic to put pressure on teachers to mentor, teach, and provide feedback in a timely manner under such circumstances. Hence, all the theories related to creating optimal learning environment are diminished (Melendez, 2017) and the effectiveness of instructional techniques are affected in large classes and it is difficult to be implement (Carlucci-Nigro, 1998). To elaborate, effective instruction techniques include monitoring the students’ progress, providing feedback and assessing the students’ level of understanding. Thus, it is challenging to meet all the students’ requirements in a classroom that exceeds 25 students; as a result, it affects teachers’ self-efficacy negatively (Melendez, 2017). Moreover, Carlucci-Nigro (1998) stated that an overcrowded classroom might reduce teachers’ expectations about their abilities to meet the students’ needs. Teachers may experience a deep sense of failure if
their students do not comprehend the curriculum being taught. This feeling is magnified when teachers face a more challenging situation, which could affect teachers’ self-efficacy in an unfavorable manner. On the other hand, Bourke (1986) supported the fact that smaller class size affects the teacher satisfaction and morale positively. In addition, the classroom environment may also affect teachers’ self-efficacy (Carlucci-Nigro, 1998).

Teachers in overcrowded classes face physical fatigue since they need to speak very loud to ensure being heard, and also to overcome the noise (Hayes, 1997). Besides, there are physical constrains imposed by the overcrowded classes situation because students are crammed; hence, neither students nor teachers can move around easily inside the class (Hayes, 1997).

Among many problems, overcrowded classrooms is widespread in the Egyptian public schools due to the tight budget of the government (Bolbol, Zalat, Hammam & Elnakeb, 2017). According to the UNICEF report in 2014, the enrollment rate at the primary level has exceeded 90%. This number is stated by the Global Competitiveness Report in 2016 which confirmed that the enrollment rate has reached 98%; besides, the quality of primary education has ranked 133 out of 137. Hence, the numbers suggest that such expansion came at the expense of quality. To elaborate, the increase in the enrollment rate has overburdened the infrastructure of the public schools because the state could not provide new classes to accommodate the rapid growth of the students’ numbers. Consequently, overcrowded classes became an apparent problem that cannot be ignored. Therefore, this study highlights the environment in which the public school teachers work and how teachers are affected by over-crowdedness. The following research question will be answered:

RQ: How do schoolteachers describe their experience in teaching overcrowded classrooms?
2. Literature Review

The aim of this chapter is to review the challenges that the current education system faces in Egypt. It highlights the concept of self-efficacy and touches on relevant literature pertaining to the subject matter. Furthermore, the chapter reviews the definition of overcrowded classrooms using previous studies conducted on the issue and its impact on the teachers' performance.

2.1 The Status Quo of the Egyptian Educational System

Education in Egypt is considered to be the largest in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) having grown rapidly since the 1990's with a reported 16 million student enrollment in the pre-university levels (Matto & Subramanian, 2007). Due to the high investment in the educational sector, the enrollment rates have significantly increased during the Nasser era and his tendency toward a socialist community (Warschauer, 2003). Access to education was free and equal to all Egyptian citizens; additionally, guaranteeing that all university graduates would be employed in the public sector with prestigious financial and social benefits (Loveluck, 2012). According to the Egyptian constitution as was mentioned by Amin (2014), a guarantee of “the right to free and compulsory education to all Egyptian children aged 6 to 15 years” was mandated (p.13). However, the quality of public education deteriorated due to the high population growth, density and limited financial resources available. Accordingly, the system has been struggling to accommodate the increasing number of students (Hartmann, 2008).

It was reported by Ginsburg, Megahed, Elmeski and Tanaka (2010) that Egypt has succeeded in providing universal access to primary education regardless of the quality provided. A natural consequence of the excessive demand for education and the limited resources was that the quality of the public education was impaired (Loveluck, 2012). The rapid growth of the population has increased the pressure on the educational sector. Although the primary education enrollment rate has reached 98% according to the 2016-2017 Global Competitiveness Report, the quality of primary education is ranked 134 out of 138 countries showing that students are not receiving a proper quality education. In addition, according to the Education For All report in Egypt (2014), despite the effort exerted by the government to expand the number of basic education buildings, 30% of the
enrolled students in basic education (primary and preparatory stages) were not able to write and read in 2004/2005 (UNESCO, 2014). The quality of education represents a significant challenge in the primary education cycle (UNESCO, 2014). The disadvantages such as the disappearance of playgrounds, activity rooms, labs and fields have destroyed the appeal of schooling. These disadvantages have appeared in order to accommodate the increasing number of students (UNICEF, 2014). Consequently, the dropout rate from schools has also increased (UNICEF, 2014).

The majority of the population according to the 2014 report has reached a population of 91 million living on 7% of the country's land; resulting in a concentration of people on a very narrow strip on each side of the Nile. Consequently, because of the poor distribution of the population, the government was not able to provide land in order to build more schools that could fit the increasing number of students. As a result, the density of the classrooms accelerated and the Ministry of Education (MoE) resorted to increasing the double shift schools. Double shift schooling is a school model that divides the school day into two shifts in order to accommodate the increasing number of students (Bray, 2000). The first group of students attends classes from the early morning till mid-day, while the second group of students attends from mid-day till afternoon with both groups using the same facilities and equipment (Sagyndykova, 2015). Teachers in some educational systems teach both shifts, and in other systems, teachers teach only one shift (Bray, 2000). The problem of overcrowded classrooms is more evident in the governorates located in Lower Egypt because the population in this area is higher. The large number of students is not proportional to the number of seats in the classroom, which has affected teacher creativity and a contributed to failure to adopt student-centered pedagogies such as critical thinking, active learning, comprehensive assessment and effective in-class and out-class activities (Amin, 2014).

In Figure 1, the bar chart indicates that Egypt has the highest average class size compared to other countries. It supports the fact that the average class size is almost 80% more that OECD countries.
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Figure 1


The following section will explain the term of overcrowded classrooms and its impact on teachers.

2.2 Exploring the Concept of Overcrowded Classroom

This section aims to explore the concept of the overcrowded classroom in the literature in order to have a better understanding of its impact, particularly for teachers. Buchanan and Rogers (1990) define a large classroom as a class that exceeds 80 students. In addition, overcrowded classroom was defined by Hussain, Ahmed and Hakim (2017) as a class which is occupied by 30 students or more. Ready et al. (2004) note that schools between 6% and 25% above capacity are considered by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) in the USA to be overcrowded. If the capacity of one classroom exceeds 25% of the school capacity, then it is considered to be “severely overcrowded”. Another study conducted in Pakistan described an overcrowded classroom when the teaching-learning process is affected negatively due to the fact that both students and teachers are stressed. Students are not privileged to have one on one time with their teachers resulting in a deterioration of academic achievement, (Khan & Iqbal, 2012). It was reported that overcrowded classrooms create a barrier to teachers’ interaction with students because it does not aid teachers to use modern teaching methods (Gharab, 2016).
An overcrowded classroom is the outcome of several circumstances that include a decrease in the number of educational buildings (Elyousefy, 2015). The accumulation of the students inside the classroom affects their understanding and assimilation opportunities, leading to the increase of the dropout rate and the spread of private tutoring, not to mention the spread of violence within schools (Warschauer, 2003).

2.3 Overcrowded Classrooms Consequences

The Literature shows that overcrowded classrooms have a negative impact on teachers’ performance (Leahy, 2006). It is impossible to achieve a good quality of education when a large number of students are placed in one classroom Khan and Iqbal (2012). Therefore, the following sections will highlight several factors that affect teachers in overcrowded classes.

2.3.1 Teacher-student interaction.

Overcrowded classrooms do not allow teachers to have one on one time with the students (Leahy, 2006). Meanwhile, Students develop the behavior of not interacting inside the classroom and they tend to wait for teachers to provide most answers to the assigned exercises. As a result, students are reluctant to engage within the classroom. In addition, Sullivan (2012) reported that teachers in larger classes adopted negative interaction with the students due to being overwhelmed. However, Bourke (1986) noted that teachers in smaller classes spent more time in monitoring the students and providing them instant feedback. Moreover, teachers get to understand the students’ and assess their performance better and quicker. In addition, Bourke (1986) elaborated that smaller classes allow students to ask frequent questions about their inquiries. Tayeg (2015) also explained that students have different needs, capabilities and personalities. Thus, teacher-student interaction is an important factor in the teaching-learning process and the literature illustrates that it is negatively affected by overcrowded classes.

2.3.2 Teachers’ instructional strategies.

Epri (2016) noted that overcrowded classrooms can hinder the student-centered approach, and as a result of the over-crowdedness, teachers resort to teacher-centered strategies. Besides, Teachers in overcrowded classes use lecturing technique more frequent (Bourke, 1986). However, Sullivan (2012) added that in smaller classes,
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teachers are able to use a variety of instructional strategies such as grouping techniques and role playing; which enhances students’ understanding of the taught material.

For further elaboration, overcrowded classes create an obstacle for teachers to finish their objectives. Tayeg (2015) explained teachers get distracted in overcrowded classes due to the noise and the constant disruption on the behalf of the students. As a result, the strategy used may be not as effective as intended.

2.3.3 Teachers’ satisfaction.

It was reported by Sullivan (2012) that teachers in overcrowded classrooms spent more time on classroom management instead of teaching. Teachers are surrounded by pressure and stress, feelings of indifference. Muthusamy (2015) highlighted that teachers in overcrowded classes tend to ignore the disruption made by the students. Hence, it supports the argument that teacher’s behavior is affected negatively by overcrowded classes. Teachers also experience exhaustion and burn out; and it results in being indifferent about their performance in the classrooms.

2.4 Benefits of Smaller Classrooms

Several studies explain the benefits of smaller classes. A study from the Tennessee Student/Teacher Achievement Ratio (STAR) project in the US tested the effect of reducing the class size on students’ performance and achievement (Mathis, 2016). The STAR project was a longitudinal observational study which targeted Kindergarten stage, first, second and third grades. The study was conducted in seventy-nine schools, three hundred classrooms and seven thousand students (Sullivan, 2012). Sullivan (2012) described the three different classrooms in the experiment, the first classroom had 13 to 17 students, and one teacher was assigned to them. The second classroom had 22 to 25 students with one teacher. The third classroom had 22 to 25 students with one teacher and an assistant. Researchers collected the results of students’ performance from their standardized tests.

The results of the Tennessee STAR project were as follows, students who were enrolled in the first category (13 to 17) achieved better performance than the larger classes with better test scores (Krueger & Whitemore, 2001). The study also indicated that the child behavior in larger classrooms is negatively affected as they were not
engaged in classroom activities and they became more disruptive (Sullivan, 2012). However, children in smaller classes tend to be active and they are more engaged (Mathis, 2016). In addition, it was reported that teachers had more instructional time. Less time was spent on classroom management, while the success of students in smaller classroom contributed to the teachers’ positive self-perception (Krueger & Whitemore, 2001). Moreover, there was a long-term follow up on the participants of the study; those who were taught in smaller classes in elementary stage were more likely to join college at the age of twenty. The results of the STAR project were positive, the economic profit of the program exceeded its cost, college attendance probability got higher and students’ academic progress was evident.

Mathis (2016) stated that Erik Hanushek conducted a meta-analysis of 277 studies about classroom reduction where he concluded that classroom reduction is not as effective as other studies claim. He claimed that the reduction of class size over the years did not contribute to enhancing students’ performance. He argued that reducing class size meant that more unqualified teachers would be hired with an increase in the number of classrooms, negatively affecting the students’ performance. In addition, Hanushek argued that the classroom reduction cost is expensive. Mathis refuted the statement by stating that Hanushek analyzed weak studies that were not reliable (Mathis, 2016).

2.5 Social Cognitive Theory

The Social Cognitive theory (SCT) established in the 1970’s by the psychologist Albert Bandura. He used the framework of behaviorism and social learning theories in order to create the social cognitive theory (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). Knowledge acquisition according to this theory depends mainly on the influence of social background that the individuals belong to. The cognitive portion is responsible for the human motivation, action and attitude (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998).

The Social Cognitive theory states that the behavior of the humans can change according to inner sense of ability and control to take a certain action. According to the social cognitive theory human actions and motivation are regulated by forethought. Several factors contribute and influence the social cognitive theory. Observational learning is considered to be a core concept of the social cognitive theory. Bandura (1977)
TEACHERS’S EXPERIENCES IN OVERCROWDED CLASSROOMS IN EGYPTIAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

explained that learning occurs through observing the others without the need for imitation; this is known as observational learning. Gibson (2004) elaborated that there are four variables that affect the process of observational learning. These variables are: attention, retention, behavior production and motivation.

First, attention is required for knowledge acquisition. Lesson must be attractive to grab the students’ attention, second, learners must be able to retain and remember the modeled behavior. Third, it is crucial that learners have the ability to produce the same behavior. Fourth, if the learning process is successful, learners will be motivated to adopt similar behavior.

Gibson (2004) concluded "Observational learning through modeling can influence behavior acquisition, inhibition, facilitation, and creativity" (p. 197). The social cognitive theory stresses the importance of observational learning for younger ages (Carroll & Bandura, 1985). Hence, the researcher believes that overcrowded classes do not facilitate such approach as teachers are forced to use only lecturing methods to accommodate with the large numbers of students (Bourke, 1986). The instructional strategies used by teachers are limited and as a result it affects the quality of education.

To summarize, Chapter two highlighted the Egyptian context and the problem of overcrowded classrooms, identified the concept of overcrowded classrooms and its effect on the teachers and students. Hence, the literature strengthens the following notion: Overcrowded classrooms put teachers in a great disadvantage. Teachers are a crucial influence on Education’s quality and achievement and accordingly, it is important to report their experiences and perceptions to enhance the quality of education. The following chapter focuses on the research methodology.
3. Methodology

This chapter addresses the research design of the study, explains the instruments and participants in detail, and highlights the data collection process that is used to provide an explanation of the research context.

3.1 Research Design

This is a qualitative study that is designed to gain insights into the experiences of teachers in overcrowded classrooms. Qualitative methods are used by researchers in order to gain deeper understanding into a certain phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). They provide the language used by participants, who help us better understand the problem and they offer a variety of perspectives on the issue (Creswell, 2012). Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault (2015) say that “the qualitative methodology refers in the broadest sense to research that produces descriptive data- people’s own written or spoken words and observable behavior” (p. 19). Moreover, qualitative methods help in understanding the reality of the experiences that people go through and provide deep insights into a specific issue (Taylor et al., 2015). For this reason, this study adopts a qualitative design to examine the experiences of teachers who work in overcrowded classrooms and to gather their insights, experiences and perspectives regarding the issue. The qualitative approach looks for detailed descriptions about their personal experiences especially when it comes to classroom management and creation of balance to meet the various needs of the students.

3.2 Instrument

An open-ended qualitative questionnaire was chosen in order to collect the data in an attempt to answer the research question “How do school teachers describe their teaching experience in overcrowded classrooms?” Navarro Sada, Maldonado, (2007) stated that questionnaires which use open-ended questions assists the researcher to gather more detailed and in-depth answers. When the participants have the freedom to answer the questions, they become comfortable and have the ability to describe their experience in detail. Consequently, this study aims at collecting the experiences of teachers in overcrowded classes and providing insights about how they deal with these extreme
situations and whether this affects their performance or not. Six open-ended questions were adopted from Muthusamy (2015) to gather the data. Muthusamy’s research aims at examining teachers’ experiences with overcrowded classes. The study was conducted in South Africa where the average number of students per class is 75 students (Muthusamy, 2015). Hence, this tool is appropriate for answering the research question (See Appendix A).

3.3 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is an approach in qualitative studies that aims at ensuring the quality of the findings (Shenton, 2004). It is a parallel to validity and reliability in quantitative research. Qualitative and quantitative research are different in their nature, thus, reliability and validity do not fit the language of a qualitative study (Krefting, 1990). To elaborate, the qualitative approach looks at the usefulness of the data and whether the future research can generate other hypotheses to investigate them (Nowell et al); unlike the quantitative research which looks at the usefulness of the instrument (Krefting,1990).

Nowell et al (2017) explained “Trustworthiness is one way researchers can persuade themselves and readers that their research findings are worthy of attention” (p. 3). Lincoln and Guba in 1985 identified four criteria of trustworthiness in qualitative research; Credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Nowell et al, 2017). As such, in order to ensure the trustworthiness of the finding, the researcher needs to test for its credibility. It is defined as, accurate descriptions or interpretations of human experiences that people who also share that experience would immediately become familiar with (Krefting, 1990). This is achieved by prolonged engagement in the field (Nowell et al, 2017). Krefting (1990) stated that “An important strategy is to spend an extended period of time with informants (Lincoln and Guba [1985] termed this prolonged engagement), which allows the researcher to check perspectives and allows the informants to become accustomed to the researcher” (p.217). Hence, before distributing the open-ended questionnaire, the researcher had a meeting with the teachers to introduce herself, give a brief idea about the topic and had informal conversations about the obstacles they meet in their jobs as teachers. This dialogue allowed the participants to
open up as they listed the problems which they face (Shenton, 2004). As a result, it could assist in the credibility of the study.

The researcher met with a group of teachers in another area in Cairo and included them in the study as a pilot study. The participants were studying the PED diploma which stands for Professional Educator Diploma at the American University in Cairo. The aim of this diploma is to provide teachers with professional development, innovative praxis and practical strategies. The sample consisted of 30 teachers who worked at public governmental schools in Helwan Governorate. The sample faced similar circumstances and situations as the original group, as they had more than 80 students per class; however, only the location of the schools was different. Results of the pilot study were similar to the ones identified in the schools the researcher included in this study which confirms the transferability and the credibility of the findings. The study added thick description of the research context and participants which contributes to the transferability of the results.

3.4 Participants

The study follows a ‘purposive’ sampling method, which is “the deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities the participant possesses” (Etikan & Alkassim, 2016, p. 2). Purposive sampling is used when the researcher determines the appropriate information identified from interviews. Accordingly, the participants were chosen non-randomly (Etikan & Alkassim, 2015). Purposive sampling aims at choosing participants who possess certain characteristics that will aid the researcher to collect relevant data (Creswell, 2012). Hence, the study purposively targeted teachers who faced the problem of an overcrowded classroom. This was done by searching for public schools in Cairo that face the problem of overcrowded classrooms, and teachers who work in such overcrowded schools were asked to volunteer in the study. Appendix (B) provides further details about the Participants.

Thirty-seven primary stage teachers participated in the study by filling out the questionnaire. Thirty-one teachers were from public governmental schools. The remaining were from a governmental experimental language school. It is important to note that both types of schools follow the national curriculum; however, the public governmental schools use Arabic language as the method of instruction while the
TEACHERS’S EXPERIENCES IN OVERCROWDED CLASSROOMS IN EGYPTIAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Experimental language schools use English as the method of instruction (Mohamed, 2019). Also, in the experimental language schools, students are taught a second foreign language such as French or German. But both types of schools belong to the governmental sector (AlMeshad, 2012). In addition, public schools are free of charge unlike the experimental language schools (Samir, 2018); both schools are funded and supervised by MoE. Finally, Samir (2018) explained that the middle class choose experimental language schools as it provides advanced level of language education; thus, it provides better quality of education.

The average number of years of experience for the participants was 23 years. Sixty percent of the participants have more than 20 years of experience in teaching while almost 10% have less than 10 years of experience as indicated in the bar chart below.

![Teachers experience](image)

*Figure 2. Teachers’ years of experience.*

Almost 50% of the participants are specialized in teaching Arabic as a subject, 15% teach Mathematics and the rest teach other various subjects such as Science, English, Religion, Arts, Computer Science, and other subjects. It came to the researcher’s attention that 8% of the educators teach more than one subject such as Arabic and Mathematics, and, in other cases, Arabic and religion.
3.5 Research Context

The study was conducted in three public governmental schools and one experimental language school in Cairo, since the problem of overcrowded classes is centered in this region. It was reported by the UNESCO (2001) that the students in the Egyptian public schools have reached over 80 students per class. Moreover, CAPMAS (2018) reported that the number of Primary Schools is 18,263, and the number of classes is 239,029 and the total number of students enrolled in the primary stage is 11,074,835. Hence, these statistics indicate that the number of students exceeds the number of classes.

Moreover, from observation and informal conversations with teachers who worked at public and experimental schools in Egypt, teachers have suffered from the increasing number of students inside the classroom, which has affected their performance and time management inside the classroom. Primary school teachers were asked to fill out the open-ended questionnaire.

3.5.1 Conditions of the visited schools.

The Directorate of Education at Cairo Governorate has determined the locations of the schools that the researcher should visit. The employees at the Directorate of Education suggested the names of the schools that exceeded 80 students per class. Hence,
the researcher selected the schools based on the employees’ recommendations. During the schools visit, it was apparent to the researcher that the infrastructure of all four schools is extremely poor, buildings are inadequate to provide the students with a proper educational experience, and the quality of the teaching tools such as black boards, computers in the labs are deteriorated. The researcher also noticed several safety risks. For instance, the stairs are broken, fire extinguishers are not found, and there are cracks on the walls and on the ceilings of the corridors. Moreover, the classrooms are not equipped with any technological facilities; they contain only black and white boards, chairs, and desks. There are also cracks on the walls of the classes; the windows are broken in some classes, which could harm the students. It seems that the classrooms and the school buildings need major maintenance and renovation. Furthermore, the desks and seats are made of wood which makes them neither comfortable nor safe for the students to sit on. Table 1 provides a brief about the visited schools.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Name</th>
<th>Type of school</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Number of students per class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School A</td>
<td>Governmental</td>
<td>5th Settlement (New Cairo)</td>
<td>80-100/class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public School</td>
<td>5th Settlement (New Cairo)</td>
<td>80-100/class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School B</td>
<td>Governmental</td>
<td>5th Settlement (New Cairo)</td>
<td>80-100/class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public School</td>
<td>5th Settlement (New Cairo)</td>
<td>80-100/class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School C</td>
<td>Governmental</td>
<td>3rd Settlement (New Cairo)</td>
<td>80-100/class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public School</td>
<td>3rd Settlement (New Cairo)</td>
<td>80-100/class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School D</td>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>Nasr City (Cairo)</td>
<td>40-50/class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Language School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

School (A) is located in the 5th settlement, New Cairo. Both the school and the size of classrooms are big; however, the number of seats is not enough to accommodate the number of students per class. To elaborate, the seats designed for two students are
used by five students. In addition, the playground was massive; however, the school possesses primitive equipment for teaching and learning. Technological facilities such as computer labs or smart boards do not exist, only black and white boards in addition to uncomfortable seats. The school is poorly funded and the big space is wasted.

As for (B) and (C), the other two public governmental schools, the size of the classrooms are not big enough to fit 90 students per class. The estimated classroom area is 48 square meter. The classrooms were designed to fit 20-25 students per class. The researcher was informed by one of the teachers who taught in school (C) that the number of students in 2001 was 18 students per class. However, in 2018, the number of students reached 90 as a result of the rapid enrollment rate which has reached 98% according to the Global Competitiveness Report in 2016. The playground was not as big as school (A)’s, but it was still unsafe for the students to play on. School (D), which is the experimental language school, also had the same issues, although this school category is supposed to be higher since it provides more advanced level of language education (Samir, 2018). One of the teachers informed the researcher that the desk which accommodates only two students is used by 5 students at the same time.

In many occasions, not only did students sit on the teacher’s desk, but they sat on the floor as well. The classes are crammed with students which results in ventilation problems as many of the participants mentioned. The computer labs are equipped with insufficient, damaged, and obsolete computers. The bathrooms’ condition was not better than the classrooms and the infrastructure, as they were non-functional. To elaborate, the water taps are leaking, the bathroom seats are not clean, and the windows were also broken. Furthermore, the playgrounds of all the schools are made out of asphalt which is unsafe for primary students to play on.

The researcher had the opportunity to meet the teachers in the teachers’ room and could not overlook the small size of the teachers’ rooms. The students’ desks were used as chairs since the school does not provide them with proper chairs or big desks to use. The schools lack appropriate teachers’ space office. The lack of appropriate space affected teachers’ ability to grade the assignments and prepare for the class properly.
A challenge which was stressed by the participants was the diversity of the students’ socio-economic background. To elaborate, most of the students’ parents are from modest academic backgrounds such as doormen, custodians and janitors working in the 5th settlement at New Cairo. These parents only enroll their children at school because they find it a reasonable substitute for an affordable nursery without providing any academic support to their children, which has a negative impact on the students’ performance and behavior in school, and, accordingly, puts pressure on the teachers.

3.6 Data Collection Process

During the data collection process, the researcher obtained consent from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the American University in Cairo to get the initial approval for data collection. In addition, a consent was obtained from the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) to collect the data from public schools. Afterwards, the open-ended questionnaire was investigated and approved by the Directorate of Education at Cairo Governorate. The identity of the participants and their answers are confidential. The data is securely kept on my personal laptop with a password. Afterwards the researcher asked the schools’ security to meet the principle of each school in order to get an approval to collect data. Then the researcher presented the CAPMAS approvals and the official documents to the school principle in each school. Second, a meeting with the teachers who participate in the study was conducted, and the open-ended questionnaire was distributed among teachers for them to answer the questions. The criterion of selection is three different primary public schools and one experimental language school with overcrowded classrooms. Data was likewise collected on hardcopies rather using surveymonkey.com or any online survey so as to avoid having teachers who are reluctant to answer the open-ended questions. Then, the researcher copied the answers on an excel sheet.

3.7 Data Analysis Procedure

The first stage of the data analysis was interpreting the open-ended questionnaire findings. The researcher labeled the hardcopies of the outcome to facilitate organization and the data collection process. Second, the answers of the open-ended questionnaire were translated from Arabic to English since data collection was conducted in Arabic.
Third, the answers were organized on an excel sheet as they were collected manually. The names of the teachers were coded in order to ensure confidentiality according to IRB approval (see Appendix B).

Thematic analysis was selected to examine the collected data. Thematic analysis is a tool of organizing the data in defined patterns/themes (Braun & Clark, 2006). Its purpose is to identify, interpret, and report the various aspects that were found in the data (Braun & Clark, 2006). Thematic analysis is crucial when the aim of the study is to explore and examine the effect of different variables upon each other. Additionally, thematic analysis is recommended when the researcher is using more than one instrument (Alhojailan, 2012). It also allows the researcher replicating another study to compare between the results, connect between various concepts, locate the commonalities between the studies, and determine any differences found (Alhojailan, 2012). Accordingly, the answers of the participants were first revised carefully through reading them several times. Maguire and Delahunt (2017) explain that it is crucial for the researcher to read the transcripts carefully. Afterwards, initial coding of the answers was generated. Coding is defined as “descriptive labels that are applied to segments of the transcripts” (Green et al., 2007, p. 548). Categorization of the data into patterns was also applied so as to display the themes accurately. It is crucial to use coding and categorizing for the sake of exploring the connections between the variables in the study (Alhojailan, 2012). Afterwards, the researcher defined and interpreted five themes within the results. This was done by using Microsoft Excel.

To summarize, this is a qualitative study that uses an open-ended questionnaire to collect the data. This chapter has introduced a detailed description about the instrument, research context, participants, data collection process and data analysis procedure. The following chapter will introduce the findings of this study.
4. Results

This chapter introduces the results of the data collection process which was conducted by the researcher at four different governmental schools in the 5th Settlement and Nasr city districts in Cairo governorate. In an attempt to answer the research question [RQ1: How do schoolteachers describe their experience in teaching overcrowded classrooms?]. The average number of students per class is 75 students where almost 65% of the classes have more than 80 students per class (in some cases more than 100 students per class), and less than 20% of the classes have 45 to 50 students or less per class as indicated in the bar chart below.

![Number of students per class](image)

*Figure 4. Number of students per class*

4.1 Open-ended Questionnaire Results

The researcher used six open-ended questions (See Appendix A) in order to gain deep understanding of the teacher’s experience. Out of these questions and based on the analysis of the participants’ responses, the researcher has identified the following themes.

4.1.1 Theme one: teachers’ experience inside an overcrowded classroom is stressful.
The first question was “Describe your teaching experience in an overcrowded classroom”. All 37 participants agreed that teaching in governmental or semi-governmental institutions is unpleasant. Their replies vary from the worst experience ever to difficult and tough task to very noisy students. T 26 reported “Unworthy and stressful experience, it is inefficient for the students learning and academic achievement”. Although they mostly have the same opinion, their answers slightly vary when it comes to the reasons behind this stressful experience.

**Lack of classroom management.**

Eight teachers have clearly indicated that successful strategies cannot achieve the targeted objectives due to the overcrowded classrooms, especially in classes over 80 students. For example, T7 who is a Math teacher stated that “the teaching experience is exhausting, and strategies are not applied properly due to over-crowdedness and not being able to control the students in the classroom”. They also said it is not easy to monitor all the students equally at the same time, and teachers do not have control over the students on many occasions. The researcher came across words like harsh, stressful, exhaustive, inefficient, and unworthy.

An interesting claim made by one of the participants’ T 30 who is a science teacher wrote “Difficult experience, unavailable resources especially in the laboratory because it is not well equipped, students’ capacity to understand is too low, and it is difficult to exhibit the experiment in front of the students”. T 17 who is also a Math teacher added “Hard to explain and control students especially in the early stages of education till 3rd primary”.

**Individual and social differences.**

Another teacher (T 15) who reported that he teaches both Arabic and Mathematics stated the following “Difficult experience due to overcrowded classrooms and variances in students learning capacity and social difference which requires a lot of effort to control this huge number”.

Two teachers expressed that the social and mental differences between the students play a major role in making the teaching experience a harder one, especially if there are 85-90 students in each class. They stated that not only do the teachers have to
manage an overcrowded classroom, which is in itself a tough challenge, they also need to meet the individual needs of each and every student, and monitor their progress taking into consideration their differences. As participant T 9 mentioned, “Teaching is exhaustive and it is difficult to ensure that all the students are on the same level of competence due to over-crowdedness”.

Unsupportive parents.

Four of the participants believe that the reason behind the students’ negative behavior inside the classroom is due to the parent’s ignorance and limited academic education, which overburdens the teachers. In addition, students tend to underperform in class and require extra assistance from the teacher as a result of the parents’ modest academic background. Besides, teachers stated that parents do not monitor their children or assist them. This was clear in T 14’s statement where he expressed this point by saying, “Very stressful, and we suffer due to over-crowdedness and the ignorance of the parents”. In addition, T 31 who is an Arts teacher capitalized on this subject matter by saying, “Terrible experience, the parents’ purpose is to send their children to school to avoid taking care of them.”.

Contrary to the researcher’s expectation, the six participants who teach in the governmental experimental school who had only 45-50 students per class also have the same feedback as those in the public school who manage a classroom of over 80 students. Accordingly, T 25 who teaches English added “It is not as simple as 20 students because controlling the class and then explaining is not easy where it required calmness, patience, tolerance and intelligence.”. T 26 who is an Arabic teacher emphasized “Unworthy, stressful, inefficient for the students in the class”. However, two out of 37 participants wrote that managing an overcrowded classroom is the sole responsibility of the teacher and depends entirely on the teachers’ personality and experience. T 22 who is teaching science stated “Teaching in these classes needs extra effort; however, the teachers’ ability to attract the students’ attention and the teachers’ personality is significant”.

4.1.2. Theme two: teaching strategies used in an overcrowded classroom.

The second question in the open-ended questionnaire was ‘What teaching strategies do you use? Do your strategies often work?’. Teachers in both the
governmental schools and the experimental language school had the same answers regarding the strategies they use inside an overcrowded classroom. They stated they use the following strategies: storytelling, discussion, cooperative learning, role playing, brainstorming, dividing students into groups, active learning, problem solving, songs, lecturing, and visual aids. The majority mentioned that the strategies they follow are usually ineffective, as overcrowded classes affect the efficiency of the strategy to achieve its desired objectives. On the other hand, others refrained from answering how effectively their strategy works. However, the researcher came across some interesting feedback from some of the participants. For example, T 27 who is an Arabic and Religion teacher reported, “The strategy works when the teacher has a strong personality to attract students’ attention.” On the other hand, T 17 who is teaching Math stated that “no strategy is used”. In addition, T18 repeated the same answer, that no strategies are used due to the fact that students are crammed inside the class: “due to over-crowdedness, it is hard to apply any strategy”.

Unfortunately, 3% of the participants gave up on teaching strategies as they stated that no teaching strategy of any type is effective inside a classroom of that size. They find it impossible to handle such huge numbers of students and no teaching strategy seems to work under such pressure.

From the bar chart below, it is clear that the majority of the participants use discussion as the preferred teaching strategy from the bar chart below followed by brainstorming, cooperative teaching, dividing students to groups, and role playing.
4.1.3 Theme three: discipline problems in an overcrowded classroom.

The third question in the open-ended questionnaire was “Describe discipline problems you have faced in your classroom”. Teachers stressed that disciplinary problems faced under such conditions include: being talkative, continuously move, being distracted and not paying attention to the lesson taught. Problems faced by the teachers which are directly linked to over-crowdedness are student’s unwillingness to learn due to the unclarity of the objectives and the individual demands of students. However, there are many problems that have evolved due to different socio-economic backgrounds. One of the major problems is aggression towards to each other. Another challenge is the use of abusive language as one of the teachers stated that students have “extreme aggression amongst themselves”. T 22 elaborated “Students insult each other usually while the teacher is busy with other students or physical abuse among students”. Hence, bullying is a dominant behavior among the students as the teachers stated. Students insult each other when the teacher is writing on the board or busy doing something inside the classroom. T 31 stated “Students’ behavior is unethical due to over-crowdedness”, T 37 who is an Arabic teacher added “Students fight each other and they break their seats”. T 16 is also an Arabic teacher and he explained “Teasing among students, tearing books and scratching it, due to overcrowded classroom and limited seats.”.

Another major disciplinary problem written by many participants was the absence of parents’ involvement with their children. Some teachers stated that parents tend to be uneducated and they are unwilling to help their children which puts burden on the teachers. T 28 emphasized “Individual differences between students, parental involvement is scarce, disobedience of students, aggression between students.”.

Adding to the previous challenges, a common disciplinary problem is stealing and lying. Some of the teachers linked this disciplinary problem to the parents’ responsibility where they believe that the parent’s ignorance has resulted in developing of such behavior to the extent that students do not only steal from each other but they also steal their teacher’s belongings. T 15 illustrated “Lying, stealing, carelessness, and misbehavior due
TEACHERS’S EXPERIENCES IN OVERCROWDED CLASSROOMS IN EGYPTIAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

to parents’ ignorance.”. T 12 stated “Social conditions are difficult for the student, their parents come from low academic and this leads to negative behavior from the students.”

4.1.4 Theme four: participation inside the classroom.

The fourth question in the open-ended questionnaire was “Are learners actively involved and enthusiastic about your lesson?” Almost 59% of the teachers stated that students are not actively involved inside the classroom due to the unpleasant environment inside the class. The rest stated that students are actively involved inside the classroom as indicated in the pie chart below.

Teachers believe that students do not actively participate for several reasons. On the one hand, they claim that overcrowdedness in addition to space and time constraints affect the students’ ability to participate. On the other hand, participants believe that students’ involvement depends entirely on the students’ preference, as some do not come for the sole purpose of learning but for playing, and being violent which was mentioned by the survey participants. “The majority of the students are unwilling to participate, for example, in some classes only 35 out of 103 students are willing to participate,” T10 stated. T 7 who is a Math teacher added “Less of the students participate in the class; however, the majority cannot contribute due to time limitation since there is no time to answer each and every student”.

T 19 elaborated “Some of the students come to the school for the purpose of playing, being violent.”

As for the remaining 41% of teachers who claimed that the students are willing to participate believe the reason for the students’ motivation to be actively involved is dependent on the material and the educator teaching techniques. “It depends on the type of activity which encourages the students to participate however few of the students participate” T 18 stated. T22 explained “During the scientific experiments students seem to concentrate and they all stand on the tables to observe it. However, the situation is stressful for me”. T 32 who is teaching Arabic added “Sometimes students’ engagement is based on the teachers’ ability to present the material.”
4.1.5 Theme five: stressed or calm.

The fifth question in the open-ended questionnaire was “Are you stressed or calm in the classroom? Explain?” As shown in the pie chart below, 44% of the teachers answered that they are nervous and extremely stressed inside the classroom, while 20% stated that they are calm. Additionally, 17% mentioned that they try to stay calm, 15% said that it depends on the situation, and 5% answered that they are disrupted.

Figure 6. Students participation rate

Figure 7. Teachers’ Status inside the class
Teacher 14 who is an Arabic teacher stated the following “I’m stressed due to the curriculum pressure, over-crowdedness, and shortage of teachers, and I always run out of time”.

Moreover, T 5 who is a Math teacher added “I’m very stressed due to talkativeness and not being able to control this huge number especially that they are young”. T 19 commented that “Very stressed due to over-crowdedness, limited space, disobedience of students and not being responsive to the lesson explained.”. T12 who is teaching Math stated “It depends on the situation; I try to be calm but I am not” while T 23 who is an Arabic teacher too reported “Due to the immense workload in the class and other substitution classes (periods) I get stressed”. Finally, T 25 elaborated “I am calm however the situation inside the classroom may require getting stressed”.

4.1.6 Theme six: available resources.

The sixth question of the open-ended questionnaire was “Are resources available to every single learner? If not, how do you manage this?”. 89% stated that the resources are either limited or unavailable, while the remaining 11% stated that there are enough resources as indicated in the pie chart below. The researcher found that the resources heavily depend on the subject being taught. Therefore, for subjects such as Science, where experiments are required, more resources are needed compared to Arabic or other subjects which do not require the same amount of resources. Some teachers mentioned that the only way to have sufficient resources is through paying out of their own pocket.

![Resource availability chart](image)

**Figure 8.** Resources availability at the schools.

T 32 who is an Arabic teacher stated the following “Unavailable resources, I manage by using the least possible resources” while T 28 and T 37 reported “Not
available and I try to provide resources from my own pocket money”. T 30 stated “Resources are available to teacher only and unavailable for the student due to the limited spaces” while T 21 added “Limited resources due to shortage in the school’s budget, also the parent’s financial position is limited”. In addition, T 11 who is an English teacher said “limited number of seats available due to over-crowdedness, and Music and artistic activities are not practiced efficiently”

In summary, chapter four represented a detailed description of the responses. The researcher expected that the participants will only report problems related to teaching, lack of resources and managing an overcrowded class. However, the researcher was astonished to find responses such as: abusive words between the students, students steal from their teachers and even the teachers get bullied). Besides, the participants reported that the schools were designed to accommodate 18 students per class in 2001. However, these schools are accumulated with 80 students per class. Thus, its drastic change that requires attention from the state to fix this problem. The following chapter highlights the findings’ discussion and the conclusion of the study.
5. Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter discusses the interpretation of the results that were presented in Chapter 4. Connections are drawn between the results of this study and the previous researches that were introduced in Chapter 2. At the end of this Chapter, the limitations of the study are highlighted and recommendations for future research are presented.

Through the researcher’s investigation and field notes, it is clear that the challenge of overcrowded classroom is still unaddressed by the MoE in Egypt. According to the literature reviewed in chapter 2, it was reported that the number of students inside the classroom is 46 students (CAPMAS, 2018). However, the numbers in reality are much higher. More than 75% of the schools visited by the researcher had more than 80 students per class, and, in some cases, more than 100 students. The average number of students per class, based on the researcher’s study, is 63% more than what CAPMAS stated in 2018. Some schools in Nasr City have reached 170 students inside the classroom. This was confirmed by one of the employees who work at the Educational Administration of Nasr City, which indicates a significant overcrowded-classes problem. The researcher has identified several cases where teachers teach more than one subject in order to fill the shortage of teachers. For example, a teacher indicated that he is responsible for teaching both Mathematics and Arabic which are completely irrelevant subjects that require different skill sets.

The researcher’s findings and field notes on the visited schools aligns with what was mentioned in section (2.1) by the Education for All report in 2015. The expansion in the students’ number came at the expense of quality. For instance, the labs, activity rooms, and libraries have disappeared in order to accommodate the increasing number of students. This was confirmed by the science teachers who the researcher met. One of the teachers also reported that the number of the students in 2001 was 18 students per class in one of the visited schools. However, in 2018, it reached over 90 students per class. In addition, the findings are supported by Ibrahim’s (2016) study which addressed the unsafe infrastructure of public schools in Egypt. Ibrahim (2016) stressed that windows are broken, stairs need maintenances and school buildings were insufficient. These disadvantages were noticed by the researcher during the data collection. This indicates
the significant challenge that faces the quality of primary education in Egypt. These disadvantages have negatively impacted the quality of primary education.

The problem exists internationally as well. Marias (2016) writes that in South Africa, the number of students per class exceeds 40. The desks which are meant to fit two learners are used by four learners. Marias (2016) states different examples from South Africa to explain the problem of overcrowded classrooms. He maintains that one school has 1,300 students but only 24 teachers, which overburdens the teachers. Another school has 165 learners in grade three, 140 learners in grade two. He provided an example in another school which has 78 learners in grade two, 57 learners in grade three and 70 learners in grade four. These numbers align with the data collected by the researcher at the Egyptian public schools. Khan and Iqbal (2012) stresses that overcrowded classrooms are prevailing in Pakistan. The number of students exceeds 70 per class and the authors repeated that overcrowded classrooms diminish any opportunity for enhancing the quality of education.

5.1 Discussion to the findings to RQ: How do schoolteachers describe their experience in teaching overcrowded classrooms?

5.1.1 Theme one: stressful teaching experience.

An open ended questionnaire was used by the researcher to conduct the data of the first research question. Even though the participants had a vast number of years of experience, where they had 23 years of experience on average, they describe the teaching experience as extremely negative and harsh in an overcrowded classroom. The teaching experience is a challenging task to the teachers. The responses show that teachers are stressed and depressed. As the literature reveals in section (2.3), the stressful situation’s consequences are dangerous; as first, it affects the academic performance of the students because it is not possible to meet the individual needs of each student. Time is not enough to monitor the students, meet their requirements, and assist them in performing their class work activities. Mathis (2016) confirmed in his study the importance of individual interaction between teachers and their students as it enhances the students’ understanding and academic achievement. Hence, in an overcrowded classroom, teachers do not have
time for individual interaction, giving proper attention to grading papers, or consulting with parents (Khan & Iqbal, 2012).

Second, teachers do not want to continue in this career path and most of them have negative comments about it. This was explained in the literature where they are demotivated and discouraged to teach. They are overburdened with the workload. Some teachers stated that they do not have a break; they work continuously from 7:30 a.m. till 2:00 p.m. which is pressurizing. It is also an indication that there is a shortage in teachers, because they must also fill in the gap when a teacher is absent. The participants as well indicated that when they fill the gap of the absent teacher, it adds pressure on the teachers especially since time is tight and they have a lot of duties during their shift.

The findings of this research align with Muthusamy’s research who investigates the effect of overcrowded classrooms on teachers. Both studies have the same comments from teachers. Muthusamy (2015) stresses that teachers are facing the same problems, such as disruptive behavior from the students and pressurizing workload. They experience emotional and psychological challenges since they cannot control the classroom. In addition, teachers do not have enough space in the class since the students are crammed and the desks are not enough. Those answers match with what Khan and Iqbal (2012) have mentioned in their investigation. They also stated that the classrooms are packed with students, and, as a result, there is no space for them. They even mentioned that they allow their students to sit on their desks since there is no room for them.

Mathis (2016) confirms that the situation is causing teachers to get frustrated and emotionally devastated, and hence, it supports the researcher’s argument that these conditions affect teacher’s self-efficacy negatively. Tayeg (2015) adds in his study that overcrowded classrooms create a stressful impersonal relationship between the teacher and the students. Teachers feel uncomfortable, and, as a result, it limits their teaching methods (Tayeg, 2015).

5.1.2 Theme two: teaching strategies used in an overcrowded classroom.

Egyptian teachers stated that they try to handle overcrowded classrooms by using different teaching strategies such as cooperative learning, story-telling, discussion, dividing the students into groups, so as to cope with this challenging situation. The
researcher has observed during the data collection, while having a conversation with the teachers to explain for them the open-ended questions, that teachers memorize the teaching strategies, and when the researcher asked them how they apply them, they refrained from answering the question or stated that they are hard to be applied in such conditions. This emphasizes the fact that teachers only state the strategies without knowing how to apply them. It is an indication that overcrowded classes influence using effective teaching strategies negatively, as these strategies cannot be applied. These findings align with Tayeg (2015) who reports that teachers advocate smaller classes because they have the opportunity to use effective methods of instruction. Meanwhile, Smylie (1988) states that overcrowded classrooms add difficulty to classroom management, Bourke (1986) stresses that class size has a direct effect on teaching practices and if very large, it hinders students’ achievement. In addition, the findings are supported by Carlucci-Nigro (1998) who stresses that large classrooms also affect the instructional strategies of teachers who work under such conditions.

Muthusamy’s (2015) study agrees with the responses taken from the Egyptian teachers. The author states that teachers try to vary the teaching strategies and, they use group work activities and rewards to reinforce positive behavior. She states that teachers do their best to manage the situation. However, the question that still remains is how efficient these strategies are in meeting the objectives of the teachers, students, and, ultimately, the educational system. The findings indicate that these strategies do not help in meeting the lesson objectives or achieving a successful teaching-learning experience.

5.1.3 Theme three: disruptive behavior.

The responses of this study are consistent with Muthusamy’s (2015) study in terms of the disruptive behavior of the students. Teachers in the Egyptian schools stated that students use abusive words with each other, and they steal even from their teachers. Muthusamy (2015) reports that teachers face violence, theft, sexual behavior, and sexual harassment. Disruption and noisiness during the lessons are common. Moreover, students use vulgar language and hit each other.

It is also reported by Muthusamy (2015) that the participants continued teaching under such circumstances and they ignored the noise as if they did not care. This behavior
adopted by them is a natural outcome of the stress that they face under such circumstances. Teachers also reported that they gave up and did not wish to continue in this career path. They are not happy, and they do not enjoy what they are doing. They seem demotivated, discouraged, and they consider leaving the profession. These findings align with the answers of the Egyptian teachers. They did not want to continue in the career path and they used to give me a piece of advice to not waste my time and effort in pursuing such career. They reported that they are exhausted, hopeless and even financially they are not rewarded. These responses are supported by Harris and Plank (2001) who argue that the teaching is neither an attractive nor a prestigious career. (Sullivan, 2012) stated “Too many teachers leave education because of low pay, overwhelming workloads, and a lack of respect for the profession” (p.2). Hence, the literature aligns with the responses of the teachers.

### 5.1.4 Theme four: participation rate.

Overcrowded classrooms were proven to affect the participation rate inside the classroom negatively. Participation inside the class is crucial, and it is a strong element in the teaching-learning process. Of all participants, 59% stated that students are not active inside the class. The results indicate that students are unable to interact properly inside the class as a result of the huge numbers. The results also suggest that students are discouraged and uninterested, as it is hard to participate or to get involved. It can be deduced that overcrowded classes directly affect students’ engagement inside the class. The results are supported with previous studies. Mathis (2016) mentions that reducing the classroom size affects students’ engagement positively. Persistence of the students is much higher and they are motivated to learn and participate inside classes of a smaller size. Mojavezi and Tamiz (2012) state that students are likely to be motivated to engage inside the classroom when they feel that their teachers are supportive. Bourke (1986) confirms that smaller classes provide more time for questions and requests to clarify what is explained is frequent. However, the results of the study indicate that teachers in overcrowded classrooms are overwhelmed. Hence, they cannot provide the support the students need to participate and engage during the class.
5.1.5 Theme five: lack of resources.

The findings of this research indicate that there is a major problem at the public and experimental schools in terms of the availability of resources. Of all teachers, 89% reported that resources are not available. Science teachers stressed that the labs lack the needed resources to conduct the scientific experiments, which is crucial to the learning experience. They expressed their frustration because the teaching-learning experience is hindered. They also reported they buy the materials needed from their pocket money which is not convenient since the wages are too low. Moreover, it is an indication that the funds in the public schools are minimal. Hence, this is consistent with the study carried by (Khan & Iqbal, 2012). Muthusamy (2015) claimed that science teachers are facing the same problem due to the insufficient resources. Most of the students come from low-income households which makes it hard for them to buy the materials needed in the lesson. “There are not enough resources especially when you need to conduct experiments for natural science. When technology projects are done, learners are unable to purchase materials and school is unable to provide materials for learners. “This makes teaching very difficult” (Muthusamy, 2015, p. 52). This quote from the teachers in South Africa aligns with the Egyptian teachers’ quotations in section (4.2).

Furthermore, from my field notes taken during data collection, it is noted that the classes are only equipped with black and white boards. I checked the computer labs and the computers are non-functional. This reflects the financial problems that these public schools suffer from.

5.1.6 Classroom size reduction debates.

The findings of the research question indicate the importance of classroom size reduction to achieve a non-stressful teaching experience and better quality of education. However, some researchers claim that reducing the class size is not the ultimate solution for better education and better teaching experience. Harris and Plank (2001) claim that classroom size reduction could be costly for several reasons. First, teachers’ quality will be affected because more classrooms mean more teachers (Harris & Plank, 2001). Hence, the capacity to hire and mentor more teachers is limited. As a result, unqualified teachers will be hired to fill the gap. Besides, the increasing number of teachers will require more
salaries. Harris and Plank mentioned the following “The most important factor in student learning is who is teaching the class, not how many students are in the room” (p.2). However, this claim is weak for several reasons, through the findings of this research, it has been proven that public school teachers are aware of all the effective teachings strategies that could be used inside the classroom, but overcrowded classrooms prevent teachers from implementing these strategies. Besides, classroom reduction will have a long-term positive effect on students’ academic achievement and career (Whitehurst & Chingos, 2011). This argument is also supported by the STAR project results which were mentioned in section (2.3.1). Students in smaller classes were proven to score higher in tests and continue in the college path. It is also reported by Chingos (2013) that classroom reduction affects the classroom environment positively. The author confirms that test scores are higher due to individualization of instruction and better classroom management on the behalf of the teacher.

In addition, classroom size reduction will benefit the low-income families and minorities who cannot afford to pay the fees of private schools (Mathis, 2016). This population is subjected to large classroom sizes because of their financial conditions (Mathis, 2016). Hence, those students at the public schools need to receive better quality of education and have smaller class size.

5.2 Conclusion

In conclusion, based on the responses provided from the open-ended questionnaire which should answer how teachers describe their experience in an overcrowded classroom. Overcrowded classrooms is one of the major issues that affect the primary public educational system in Egypt and it requires intervention from the state. Furthermore, the teaching experience in such circumstances is stressful due to several factors; for example, the limited financial resources, the modest academic background of the parents and the individual differences between the students.

In addition, it is clear that there are other factors that affect teachers negatively such as low remuneration, the teachers’ limitation in influencing the educational system, and the feeling they receive that their voice is not heard to take a decision that may help them in controlling the school, and not providing teachers with sufficient resources.
5.3 Limitations of the Study

The researcher had to get many governmental approvals in addition to security approvals to have access to teachers who work at public schools which took almost 42 days. This process consumed a lot of time, and, as a result, the researcher was collecting data during exams period. Accordingly, teachers were not cooperative, because they were busy either proctoring or correcting a huge number of papers. That is why when I asked teachers to help me fill the survey, they were reluctant. Also, before the exams, teachers leave the school early as there are no duties. Therefore, it was very challenging to meet them, and those who were still at the school wanted to leave as early as possible. Additionally, some teachers were skeptic about the nature of the questionnaire and they thought that they were being investigated or monitored by other authorities in the ministry of education. As a result, the researcher showed them the AUC ID and approvals to prove that the research is only for educational purposes.

Arabic studies about the Egyptian context were hard to find due to the fact that many studies are not uploaded online. In addition, lots of restrictions are applied if any researcher wants to get access to the hard copies at the governmental universities and libraries. Hence, studies dealing with overcrowded classrooms in Egypt are limited.

Due to security restrictions at the schools, it affected the sample size that the researcher aimed to obtain. Unfortunately, approvals that were given on the behalf of the MoE identified specific locations for the researcher to visit.

5.4 Future Recommendations

I would suggest that the future researchers should follow up on the students’ grades in order to have a better understanding of their achievement and get confirmation on whether overcrowded classrooms affect students’ performance inside the class or not.

The timing of conducting the research is crucial since the data was collected during the exams period, and, as a result, teachers were not as cooperative as expected. It is recommended to conduct interviews so as to have a better understanding of the teachers’ point of view. It is important to conduct class visits during the teaching process to gain a deeper understanding of the situation and to observe the teaching strategies used inside an overcrowded class.
I would also add that the MoE should provide professional trainings and workshops for public school teachers to enable them to work under such circumstances.
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References


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Schools for skills: a new learning agenda for Egypt, OECD report, 2015

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Appendix (A): Open ended Questionnaire

1- How do you describe your teaching experience in an overcrowded classroom?

2- What teaching strategies do you use? How often do your strategies work?

3- Describe discipline problems you have faced in your classroom.

4- Are learners actively involved and enthusiastic about your lesson?
TEACHERS’S EXPERIENCES IN OVERCROWDED CLASSROOMS IN EGYPTIAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

5- Are you stressed or calm in the classroom? Explain

6- Are resources available to every single learner? If not, how do you manage this?
Appendix B

Participants Information

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TEACHERS’S EXPERIENCES IN OVERCROWDED CLASSROOMS IN EGYPTIAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS
# Teachers’ Experiences in Overcrowded Classrooms in Egyptian Public Schools

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