

The Effects of Large Classes on English Language Teaching

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ABSTRACT

Large classes are one of the issues that have been dealt with in the educational sector. Limited academic staff, educational marketing and massification of higher education have all contributed to a global shift in university class sizes. This conceptual paper aims to explore the effects of large size classes on English language teaching. The paper examines the challenges regarding teaching and learning in large classes by reviewing some of the empirical evidence against large class teaching. Giving effective feedback, marking load, lack of class discipline and monitoring, timely evaluation and noise were among the main problems that hindered teaching and learning in large classes. In terms of engaging students in activities and learning, all students could not participate in the activities as well as teachers could not pay attention to every individual student. Lack of materials such as textbooks, chairs, tables, and to name a few were other constraints in large classes.

Keywords- Large classes, English language teaching, effective feedback and evaluation.

I. INTRODUCTION

For most English language teachers, large classes are the norm. Teachers throughout the world, particularly in developing countries, are confronted with classes that are larger than the size that they believe fosters good teaching and learning. And, in many cases, class sizes are increasing. Class sizes have doubled in many schools and universities over the previous few years as a result of the growing numbers of students and the necessity for educational institutions to be profitable. Many teachers believe that teaching a small group of students is easier, less time-consuming and enjoyable than teaching a large group of students. Unfortunately, many ESL large classes are offered due to lack of teachers, space and budgets. Bahanshal (2013) states that teaching to a large size class has been debated for a long time among researchers. English teachers also agree that the large size of classes is the main obstacle for effective English language teaching. Even before the 1950s, it was concerned that the learning outcomes of students

declined because of large size classes. Thus, in a language class students' participation contributes significantly to the success of lectures. Therefore, a small number of students should be taught because the interaction can take place between students and teacher and among the students easily (Le, 2002). The topic is still a field of exploration for many researchers.

Jimakorn and Singhasiri (2006) stated that McLeod was the first to do research in 1989. He gathered data from 113 tertiary level instructors from Japan, Nigeria, and other African countries using a questionnaire. Individual learner issues, physical constraints, quality of marking, learning and teaching, and classroom interaction were among the issues that teachers can face while teaching in large courses. The findings revealed that 43.3 percent of the subjects said they had challenges with effective teaching, which is concerned with the teaching and learning process. Teaching in large-size classes required effort responded by 33% of them. Affective factor was another facet that 23.7% of the subjects were concerned with. Another

aspect that 23.7 percent of the participants were concerned about was the affective factor.

Moreover, Jimakorn, and Singhasiri (2006) conducted research on investigating 75 tertiary level lecturers' beliefs towards teaching English in large classes in Thailand. The results show that tertiary level lecturers think that teaching English may be possible in large classes but many constraints should be considered. Averett and McLennan (2006) explain that parents and educators identify small classes as a required quality of a successful school system, and the initiatives of small class size reduction have been implemented widely. A large class can be defined as "a class comprising of 30 students is considered a normal class and if it exceeds that number, then such a class could be classified as a large class. For language learning, a class with more than 20 students might be perceived as a large class" (Hadi & Arante, 2015). In addition, Arias and Walker (2004) and Fischer and Grant (1983) assert that smaller classrooms in public schools and universities are necessary for all courses and have a favorable impact on students' performance and achievement. According to other scientists like Horning (2007), class size has an impact on the learning-teaching process. Smaller classrooms, she says, are better, particularly in writing and reading programs. In this connection, this paper aims to explore the effects of large size classes on English language teaching.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Issues in Teaching of English in Large Classes

Xu (2011) Stated that there are three commonly perceived problems associated with teaching in large classes, namely physical, psychological and technical. Xu further points out these problems in detail: the teachers may feel physically weary when they teach in large classes. They may speak louder and move more often or walk long distance than they accomplish in small classes and so on. Psychologically, some teachers feel it daunting to face a large number of students, and they do not know about their students who they are and what they are expecting from their teachers. The other problems that can cause worrying many teachers are monitoring attendance and checking assignments who are involved in large class teaching.

Hadi and Arante (2015) additionally advocate that a report published by British Council (2015) shows a number of challenges in teaching English in large classes. These are a) it's difficult to keep good discipline going in a large class; b) you have to provide for children of different ages and different abilities who learn different things at different speeds and in different ways; c) you can't easily give each child the individual attention they need, and d) you may not have enough books or teaching and learning aids. The issues that teachers face in the teaching of English in large classes are as follows.

2.1.1 Evaluation and Providing Individual Feedback

According to Bloxham and Boyd (2007), feedback is the most important aspect of the assessment through which achievement can be raised. Carless (2007) stated that feedback activity can be a challenge in teaching large classes. Giving feedback to every individual student in large classes would be a difficult job for teachers. Many good answers go unrecognized in a large group as teachers are constrained with heavy workloads. Finally, this will push the teachers to think giving feedback is both impractical and too time-consuming. As a result, it becomes incompatible with the demands of schooling. Thus, teachers faced challenges in producing better working, giving responses and feedback to a student individually. Teachers are also unable to mark and grade fairly because they feel burdened due to performing heavy work as well as they will not be able to assess students distinguishing characteristics and ignoring plagiarism.

Moreover, Zher, Hussein and Saat (2016) stated that assessment in large classes always raises a challenge for teachers in case of inconsistency in marking and grading as well as the increased chance of diverse student backgrounds and the practicality of providing sufficient and prompt feedback to individual students. Another problem that a teacher has faced is how to correct written work. After giving a test to a large number of students, he/she has to correct all the papers. It should be thought that the teacher does not teach only in one class, consequently, he/she might give three or four tests every semester. Along with the above activities, a teacher should be spending time preparing lessons and doing things with his/her family. To sum up, correcting so many papers means that assessment and giving specific feedback would be limited or may not take place (Le, 2002).

2.1.2 Controlling Issues (Discipline)

Bahanshal (2013) indicates that the problem that language teachers always say about and hinder the learning process in large classes is identifying and controlling students who cause distraction of their classmates from focusing on the lesson. Some common comments about large class teaching heard by teachers are: the communication does not take place; the class is out of control and it is difficult to pay individual attention. Similarly, it is difficult to arrange effective group activities. Lazear (2003) assumed that some of the students who disturb and misbehave in the large class can block the learning of that moment and demolish the capability of others to learn. In other words, English Language teachers criticize that their students do not pay attention to the teachers and they know that they are not going to be evaluated by the teachers due to time consumption. The teachers often face problems in classroom control (Al-Husseini, 2009).

Moreover, Nguyen, Warren, and Fehring (2014) findings of observations confirm that some teachers were not able to control a large classroom. In

two out of eight classes observed, some teachers in classroom organization were limited. They faced problems in forming students into pairs or groups when they wanted to accomplish communicative activities. The teachers tried to imply some activities in terms of some entertainment and communication, but due to a large number of students and the teachers' limited ability in classroom control and organization, these activities took much time that was not effective in the limited time of teaching.

2.1.3 Classroom Noise

According to Bahanshal (2013), the noise of some students is also one of the problematic issues in the teaching of English in large classes. Hence, it produces disturbance as well as prevents their students from learning. Thus, AL-Jarf (2006) stated that large class sizes hinder small group activities and instruction that is given to every individual, due to the noise level and lack of space in the classroom. Some other researchers have also found that classroom noise is a result of students' boredom, vague instructions to activities presented in class and teachers' low voice. Hadi and Arante (2015) findings maintain that from interviews with the EFL teacher, there were a number of issues while teaching in large classes. First, the teacher could not control the noisy students. When they observed the class, some students were making noise and they were not attentive to the teacher's explanation. The teacher got their attention frequently and for a while, they would stop but later they were making noise again. The other students would be disturbed by doing so. Based on the teacher's information it would happen in every period.

2.1.4 Students engagement

Le (2002) explains that the first problem teachers encounter is the large number of students where teachers cannot give attention to every one of them. The questions which are asked in the class can be answered by more intelligent and less shy students. The interaction is always restricted to the students in front of the rows. Thus, the teacher cannot pay attention to all students equally. If a teacher wants every student to answer his questions it will take too much time and the lesson will not be finished in this limited time as well. The uninvolved students will get bored and they would be busy with something else and only a few students would improve their English, on the contrary, many weak students would make little progress. Bahanshal (2013) stated that on the contrary, teachers can pay great attention to their students in small classes and the activities can be applied effectively. Therefore, we can say based on this abundant evidence that English teachers come across some challenges when teaching large classes as well as they encounter difficulties in knowing all students in the class. Some students especially the weak ones would not be concentrated due to less time for individuals and presenting effective activities.

2.1.5 The Availability of learning Resources for All the Students.

Bahanshal (2013) additionally argues that we can say that in large classes English teaching can be hindered with lack of resources and learning materials. A specific number of students that teachers cannot handle and resources are not enough to facilitate the teaching and learning process and that poses insurmountable problems for both teachers and students. In other words, resource constraint came up as a major issue. The teachers felt the available resources did not match the large numbers of learners. Constraints included limited physical space for movement and interaction, few desks and a limited number of instructional materials such as textbooks. This happened more so in rural and peri-urban schools where up to 8 learners sat squashed on small benches and one textbook was being shared by up to 6-10 learners in many countries. In such instances, children could not write with ease and there were also mentioned dangers of easy spread of infectious diseases such as flu and cough. The large classes were also felt to be cumbersome in terms of time needed for preparation and implementation of lessons where resources were scarce for example, the teachers spent more time writing material on the chalkboard (Nakabugo et al., 2008).

III. CONCLUSION

To sum up, there are many challenges in teaching English in large classes. Many teachers teaching English in large classes encountered issues to give effective feedback and evaluation on time. It is difficult to assess the whole progress of students learning because of the large number of students. The second issue was lack of class discipline. Although, teachers made rule in English class but the rule did not work as the class had a large number of students. The next issue was noise that some students were making in the class and the teacher could not control where it hindered other students from learning the lesson. Another issue was engaging students in the lesson in large classes. All students could not participate in the lesson as well as teachers could not pay attention to every individual student. Availability of sources was also one of the issues of teaching English in large classes. There was a lack of learning materials i.e., textbooks, chairs, tables, etc. It is found that teaching large classes is one of the main problems among others in English language teaching all over the world.

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