

Managing Large Classes

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Abstract

This study aims to provide the common challenges and their solutions in large classes. The study investigated the effectiveness of teaching strategies that reduce the negative impact of large classes in classroom management. Large class size is one of the problems in the educational sector that developing nations have been grappling with. The recent debate over the effect of large classes upon childrens' education is in danger of turning into one of standards versus quality and like so many debates before it, disappearing inconclusively in a whisper. The attention of the media may have, for the moment, gone away but large classes have not; teachers still have to teach them and children learn in them. It is therefore important that the effect of class size upon both students and their teachers should continue to be monitored and evaluated.

Keywords: Large, Classes, Common Challenges, Discipline, Time- Management

Introduction

English plays very important roles in many fields of human life. It can be used in education and business to get information, job, and entertainment (Reddy, 2016). Richards (2015) also adds that English may be required for social survival and employment for new immigrants in English-speaking countries, an essential tool for education and business for some learners, the language of travel and related activities of sightseeing for others, and a popular language for the media, entertainment, the internet and other forms of electronic communication. It can be concluded that English holds prominent functions in many aspects of human life. Learning English is essential for today's generation to adapt to global communication, literature, media, and work in the present and future. It is the first foreign language learned as a compulsory subject at school (Panggabean, 2015; Hingne, 2013) to widen the students' understanding of English as a foreign language (Mahu, 2012, p. 374). Thus, English is the first foreign language officially taught as a compulsory subject to students from junior secondary school in Indonesia. Teaching is said to be an art, a skill & a challenge, especially in present times. It has attained even more complex shape when the phenomenon of large classes has taken up as a reality. The most important and efficient instruction by the teacher are the part of classroom management with an emphasis on classroom behavior (Van, 2015; Villena & de Mesa, 2015). The motivation of students to participate in discussions and managing student outputs are the result of effective classroom behavior; it focuses on changing, observing, and maintaining desirable classroom behavior (Ahmad, 2010). In classroom management particularly communication, controlling and dealing with behavior challenges and discipline, it is mandatory that teachers in different levels of education be equipped with skills for professors not to lose their control even in a large class (Harun et al., 2015; Stough, 2016).

It is mandatory for teachers to have the competencies to employ effective strategies for planning, time management, managing classroom environment and most importantly behavioral management of students (Akalin & Sucuoglu, 2015). In literature there is no quantitative definition of what constitutes a large class. Teachers in all disciplines have different perceptions of what they consider a large class to be. It is a relative answer and people's perception of this varies from context to context. What class size is considered as large one is, how the teacher regards the class size in that specific situation, regardless of the exact number of the students in it.

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A “large” class is less defined by form (size) and more defined by function (action); that is, a class is “large” when it becomes challenging to engage students as individual learners (CLTC, 2015). But some scholar like Rohin (2013:2) assumed that a class is relating to the number of the students per teacher not the size of the classroom. Going further they explained that a class is large if it has over 30 students. Therefore, large class can be defined as the one with students more than the teacher prefers to manage and available resources can support.

Common Challenges in Large classes

Large classes present a number of unique challenges that can impede students’ learning and exhaust faculty members teaching the class. The challenge of teaching and learning in larger courses is not a new one. The challenges associated with teaching in large classes can be physical, psychological, and technical. The major challenges of teaching large classes presented can be grouped into four categories: (1) managing the classroom, (2) using pair and group work to encourage active and cooperative learning, (3) teaching with limited resources, and (4) motivating students in heterogeneous classes.

Keeping aside the minor issues, the main challenges can be formulated as under:

1. Discipline concerns
2. Teacher’s exposure against the students of different abilities & different
3. learning speeds.
4. Difficulty in deep access
5. Time management
6. Issues concerning homework.

1. Discipline

Discipline is the soul of every activity of our life & especially in teaching large classes, it tends to acquire a unique disposition. Classroom discipline is the most commonly used concept to refer to classroom management during teaching (Merç&Subaşı, 2015). In fact, maintaining this in large classes is the true test of teachers’ ability to comprehend the mob psychology and his administrative qualities. Discipline starts when the classroom door opens.

To get an achievement in the learning process, management strategy is a way that is applied by the teacher in the classroom with various aspects and goals. The management strategy is to redirect the student back to the lesson to not interrupt all students learning according to Eisenman, Edwards and Cushman (2015). By this definition, to achieve objectives, management strategy focuses on the process of learning goal setting, policy development and planning. It involves almost all live activities inside the class. Keeping a calm, tranquil & conducive environment intact is the linchpin of teaching & learning activity. We may allow our students to talk but can’t allow them to make noise. Sanctioning them to talk follows the rule that language classes without interpersonal communication are graveyard.

Suggestions:

We should establish a code of conduct for our classes right from the onset agreed. both by the teachers & learners. This code of conduct must clearly state the funda- mental rules. The issues of punctuality, regularity & the atmosphere inside the classrooms can be fairly addressed through this. We, the teachers must set these examples by leading from the front i.e., be the role models.

Regarding the code of conduct, the teachers should make its outlines drawn in their classrooms individually, but it should also be taken up seriously by the administration. Charts should be displayed on various rush Points in the campus, like university cafeteria, photocopying section, corridor and outside the building entries. Main features of the code of conduct should be written on them to hammer the memory of students with these principles again. The idea of a class monitor chosen from the students will also be much beneficial to maintain discipline. As an incentive we may announce an award of one mark for each student who shows best discipline during a semester. In this way we can, not only maintain discipline, but we can also contribute to produce a healthy & organized society that has a high regard for the system. Identification of the causes of indiscipline & identification of disturbance spreading elements can help to restore discipline.

2. Exposure & Access Problem

It’s a fact that in large classes it becomes difficult for a teacher to attend to every student individually. Consequently, quality of teaching is affected due to a large number of students of mixed abilities & learning speeds. In these conditions teachers find themselves exposed to unwelcome and more challenging situations.

Neither it is easy to find an access to his students individually, nor it is convenient to keep up a uniform teaching speed. As for the challenges of teacher's exposure against the students of varying abilities learning speeds is concerned, the role of forming students' groups assert its significance more than ever. This particular challenge hinders teacher's access to his students. Teachers cannot attend their students individually & they even can't keep up a uniform pace of teaching.

Suggestions:

Formation of students' groups is one of the best options available as an answer to this challenge. Two types of groups may be formed according to the suitability to the situation. First, we may form a group of students of multiple talents; slow & fast learners together complete the formation and we may also form the groups of single or equal talents or abilities. Type one will help the students of lesser ability under the supervision of the students of greater ability & with comparatively faster learning speed. By this way the idea of additional coaching for slow learners inside the classroom can be materialized. Teacher can perform supervision over the groups and can attend students individually, when it is required. This way his deep access is ensured in a shorter time.

And I believe that fellow students' guidance & help is more meaningful for some slow learners. Type two, it would be more helpful for basic learners at school level. In this way we can tackle the students of different caliber & our penetration into the class a individual level can somewhat be ensured.

In addition to groups, pair can also be formed to maintain a learning harmony among the students of a large class. The pairs may be of different types i.e., weak and strong Students' pair, strong n strong students' pair etc. Provision of related materials other than the prescribe books can also help resolve this Issue in an amicable way. Idea of asking nominated questions rather than open questions can also be very helpful in giving attention at individual level & accessing deep in large class. We should take notes of the names of those who feel it difficult to keep pace with the fast learners, and we should ask questions by names, like Saad, Ali n so on. But be careful. We must ask the question first and then we should take the name of student from whom we require the answer. Because if we take the name first, the rest of the students may divert their attention from the question, thinking it's not for him.

3. Time Management.

Time management factor has lot to do with the management of large classes, because we have to entertain a large number of students in a limited time. This countdown starts with our entry, rather a bit before that. Here the role of punctuality is indispensable not only on the teacher's part but also on the student's part. It's a common observation that if teachers approach their classes late, so do their students. And for large classes especially, the teachers must come to their classes a bit earlier so that the large number of students must not waste time sitting in their classes. Entry deadlines must also be drawn for the students to avoid distortion in the learning & Teaching process. Entries beyond these deadlines without any valid & genuine excuse Must be discouraged strictly by not allowing the students to enter the classes. It would be better to deprive them from one learning session than to deprive them always from the larger parts of leaning by allowing them to enter, late, always.

When students make late entries, they not only make their own loss but also the whole teaching & learning atmosphere, especially when they start greeting, the rest of the people inside the room are morally & religiously bound to reply, resulting in a total breakdown of ideas & communication. This issue needs to be settled in code of conduct, reached after a unanimous decision between the teacher and his students. It would be rather ideal for a late entry to silently slip into & take his seat. As we know that large classes are a mixture of abilities & various learning speeds, making teacher's exposure wider & lemmatizing his access to the students at individual levels, therefore the teacher should withdraw himself / herself from the scene a bit earlier than the normal conditions to let the groups or pairs idea working inside the classroom and hence bridging the gap between different abilities & learning speeds.

4. Homework

The role of homework is much more profound than anticipated generally. Most of the times First of all let me answer a question, why homework?

The answer will try to bring forward the significance of it & then I'll move toward suggestions. Gentlemen! Homework is an expectation from the students, from the parents & from the institutions as well. It's denial widens the chasm between the high & low achievers.

It reinforces and helps learners retain information provided in the class.

It also increases students' general understanding of the language.

It also develops & polishes study habits and independent learning.

It compels learners to consult additional materials like dictionary & other references.

It sparks a research habit in the learners.

It consolidates class work & provides continuity between lessons.

Homework may be used to shift time-consuming tasks out of the classrooms. This ultimately, helps in covering up the prescribed syllabus on time.

It bridges the gap between the institution & home.

And its role as an assessment tool is well established & recognized. The execution of homework in large classes is a titanic challenge, especially when the numbers are far more than the moments & minutes we get in the classrooms. Many times we come across the opinions that how could a large class, for example, with 60, 70 students be given homework and & most disgusting points is how to check that when it's in such a large number.

Suggestions:

1. The first thing to be decided here is to what type of homework for what level of ability & learning speed. Because in large classes we have a mixture of abilities.

Therefore, it would be a better choice to assign a weaker student with a type of homework that consolidates his class work, and a stronger student should be given a type of homework that helps expand his knowledge & bring his brain into action & put him/ her in a test.

2. The first step is to make sure that all the students have done it or not. For this ensure ask the students to open up the pages of homework on chair's arm. The teacher should make a round of the class to see the work done.

3. Now comes the stage of checking & correcting it. Teachers should write the correct answers on the white board & ask the students to tally their answers with that. If they have done it correct already, they should tick it, otherwise cross it & insert the correction. This sort of check is handier for objective type homework. Students with more than average errors in their homework can be referred to their respective groups. Here the role of students' groups comes to the limelight, again.

4. If we have some longer & exhaustive assignments as homework, the teacher should take his time & return them back after a day or two. It should contain comments, encouraging the job done. This type of subjective homework, if given on the weekends is more beneficial.

Differentiated instruction

With increasing class sizes of diverse students, instructional options for those who teach large classes in higher education are limited. While whole-class instruction is an integral part of many classrooms and often the instructional practice of choice, this teacher-centered strategy is less effective in promoting a greater level of growth and academic success with college students. For elevating student engagement and learning initial instruction is a promising approach, these slight differences of effective teaching in higher education are occasionally taught (McCarty, Crow, Mims, Potthoff, & Harvey, 2016). Differentiation may very well be the difference between academic success and failure for many students, (Dosch & Zidon, 2014). Effective differentiation requires more specific instructional strategies so Instructors need adequate training and professional development in differentiated instructional methods. The practicality of using differentiation for some instructors can be quite problematic, especially in large classes of students with a broad range of interests and knowledge.

Teacher's respond to these challenges

Large classes create a challenging teaching and learning environment, but not an insurmountable environment. Faculty across globe are engaging students in large classes through innovative and creative pedagogical approaches. There are a number of strategies like organization, climate, active Learning, using technology that can be used to meet the challenges of large classes. Organization is essential when it comes to managing a large number of students. Carefully planning all aspects of the course, and providing a clear structure to students, along with well-defined expectations, can among other things help reduce paper work and save time. Focusing on climate and the engagement of active learning principles are also important factors, since an inclusive, interactive and welcoming environment can positively impact engagement, help address anonymity concerns as well as group diversity. Another thing to consider is using technology in the classroom. Technology, when integrated appropriately both in and outside of the classroom, can help address any number of concerns.

Opportunity in large class teaching

Teaching large classes is a challenge, but it can also offer many opportunities for you to improve your teaching and to make it more enjoyable and rewarding for you and your students. Hess (2001) points out that in a large class there are always enough students for interaction, and there is a rich variety of human resources, the students must develop strategies for helping themselves and their classmates through peer-teaching and collaboration, thus fostering an atmosphere of cooperation. Teachers have the opportunity to improve their organizational, managerial, interpersonal, evaluation, teaching and presentation skills.

Few possible solutions for large class management

- **Planning:** Plan ahead and Prepare thoroughly-- everything you are going to do and how you are going to do it; what topic to be taught, the learning objectives, teaching methods, classroom arrangement, main activities, resources, and assessment methods, What are the feedback stages?. Planning must be very detailed. Develop a formal lesson plan as a way to organize your teaching in a large class setting. Assess strengths and constraints in your context and once aware, be realistic.
- **Establish classroom rules and set routines.** One should state clear basic rules of conduct that learners understand. If they understand classroom rules and routines in particular and work within those rules and routines, it will help avoid wasting time. Set a late work policy with specific deadlines and consequences.
- **Engage students and develop a sense of belonging;** Do everything possible to get to know your students. Have your students introduce themselves to everyone in an interactive manner. You introduce yourself, as well. A positive relationship with your students builds a willingness on their part to actively participate in class.
- **Pull students in:** Build in assessments that check for learning during instruction to engage your students. Prepare assignments that really assess whether your students are learning what you are teaching. Give prompt feedback on assignments and exams.
- **Mix it up.** Mix active learning elements in traditional lecture formats; Plan a variety of activities that appeal to students with different learning styles and interests. Use visual media, handouts, skeleton lecture notes and problem-based activities to facilitate active learning. Challenge yourself and your students by adding new activities to avoid the rut of using the same technique every day.
- **Remember technology is your friend:** Use technology to assist students Provide online support (e.g. course FAQs; discussion forums on the web; self-review quizzes; links to key support sites). Use free tools (e.g., Piazza, Peer Wise, Teammates etc.) to increase student interaction, initiate discussions, and find what students are learning.
- **Manage and support staff teams, including tutors;** Introduce tutors in the first lecture to the class to let students know that you are all part of a cohesive teaching team. regular professional development of tutors (e.g., strategies for involving students in class discussions; ideas for identifying at-risk students; tips on providing feedback); meet tutor team regularly to ensure consistent and clear communication.

Conclusion

As a conclusion, we can say that class size has an important role in the teaching and learning process. So, it is important to find out various methods and use effective strategies that can lessen the effects of large classes and elevate the teaching and learning level to its highest standard. So, the effectiveness of any techniques may vary from one context to another as it depends on different aspects such as students, teachers and facilities available in the school.

Before starting our teaching, we should be careful about the class size. So that not a single student should be overlooked. It is the main duty of a teacher to pay attention on each student's learning process individually. If the class size is large, we should implement such strategies so that each student's learning process should be observed by the teacher carefully.

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