

TEACHING ENGLISH EFFECTIVELY IN LARGE CLASSES

Meylina*STMIK-AMIK Jayabaya*Email : meylin1983@gmail.com

Cp : 0812 7519 9672

Abstract

One of the major obstacles which is often perceived in ensuring the quality of education is large classes. Large classes are a reality in many schools and many countries. Generally, it is a direct result of inadequate of funding and insufficient numbers of teachers and classrooms. This paper does not offer a universal solution to all the challenges related to teaching in large classes. It attempts to present a variety of practical methods and practices that could be useful for teachers who need to deal with a large class everyday, especially in teaching English. It addresses issues such as how to prepare and plan lessons specifically adapted for large classes. It shows pointers to manage the class in the best possible way and to see a large classes as a resource, rather than a challenge, to teaching-learning process. It also provides a guidance in creating and managing inclusive classrooms as well as in maintaining positive discipline within them. Overall, it is hoped that the content and methods presented will help teachers to meet the needs of their daily work in facing a large class.

Keywords: large class, method, lesson plan, activities.

A. Introduction

Most of the educators often think that learning occurs in proportion class size. The smaller class, the more students learn. They claimed that having a large class prevented them from doing what they want to do to make learners make progress in developing their language proficiency (Norton:2001). Nevertheless, some foreign researchers such as Ur (2000) and Hess (2001) suggest that richer human resources and greater opportunities for creativity than small classes can be provided through large classes.

Large classes is reality in many countries, including Indonesia. Classes in schools in many parts of Indonesia may contain between 40 to 80 students/class. The writer herself has 28 to 63 students each class. The real condition in most of the private education institution in Indonesia is still far from ideal condition. Running large size classes are still a must for education institutions in Indonesia, especially for private institutions, because of many reasons. For example, the limited number of teachers or lecturers available and the limited funding. Under this restriction, however, the teachers or lecturers have to attempt to ensure that the class will run properly. That is why, it is important then to find a strategy in managing a large class size.

B. Brief review of related theories**B.1. Definition of a Large Class**

Actually, a large class has no "exact size". Usually it is measured in term of the number of the students per teacher (student-teacher ratio). In some countries, 25-30 students per one teacher is considered large, while in other countries it is seen to be normal or even quite small. From a teacher's perspective, though, a class is large whenever it feels large. The writer herself who normally teaches 30 or fewer students, considered a class of more than 50 students as a large class. She sometimes be tempted to give up, thinking that there is no chance of getting so many students to learn. The literature, for example, shows large classes as ranging between 25-30 learners in the United Kingdom (Smith and Warburton, 1997), more than 35 learners in the US (O'Sullivan, 2006), and 60 or more learners in developing countries (Valérian, 1991;Michaelowa, 2001).

However, research shows that class size does not automatically correlate with student learning. Ur (1996) specifically proposes that "the exact number does not really matter: what matters is how you, the teacher, see the class size in your own specific situation". The same thinking is held by Todd (2006) who adds that "what is taught influences teachers' judgments of the size of classes" which later can influence their definition of a large class. Students in large classes can learn just as well as those in small one. What counts is not the size of the class, but the quality of the teaching. Based on the literatures mentioned above, it becomes evidence that the concept of large class size is subjective, largely contextualized and situational based. Therefore, a large class in the Western world can be a small class in Asia. This is because the teaching context differ.

B.2. Challenging Opportunities in a Large Class

Teaching large classes is a challenge for the writer. The writer herself may feel physically weary in large classes. she may unwarily speak louder and move more often or longer distances than she does in small

classes. Psychologically, she feels it intimidating to face a large crowd of students, especially when she does not have much idea who their students are and what their students are expecting from her. Other problems such as monitoring attendance and checking assignments are also constantly worrying her involved in large class teaching.

The problems above, have stayed the same as those noted in many literatures. Hayes (1997) summarized some problems in teaching large classes. They are: (1) *Discomfort*: Many teachers worry about the physical constraints imposed by large numbers in confined classrooms. They feel unable to promote student interaction, since there is no room to move about. Some teachers also feel that teaching in large classes is physically very wearing. (2) *Control*: Some teachers feel worried by the discipline aspects of large classes. They feel they are unable to control what is happening, and that the classes become too noisy. (3) *Individual attention*: Many good teachers are concerned that they are neglecting the needs of their students as individuals. (4) *Evaluation*: Teachers feel a responsibility for checking all of their students' work. And (5) *Learning effectiveness*: All teachers want their students to learn. They are understandably worried if they do not know who is learning what. Meanwhile, based on the result of teacher respondents to a questionnaire of the Lancaster-Leeds research group by LoCastro (see Norton: 2001) generated this list of problems related to class size and language learning, organized into three categories:

Pedagogical

- more difficulties in carrying out speaking, reading, and writing tasks
- difficulties in monitoring work and giving feedback
- problems with individualizing work
- difficulties in setting up communicative tasks
- tendency to avoid activities that are demanding to implement

Management-Related

- correction of large numbers of essays virtually impossible
- pair and group work often cumbersome to execute
- noise level high, affecting neighboring classes
- difficulties in attending to all students during class time
- discipline problems more acute

Affective

- difficulties in learning students' names
- impossibility of establishing good rapport with students
- concerns for weaker students who may get lost
- crowd phenomenon: students' not listening to teacher and other students
- problems in assessing students' interests and moods

Actually, large classes can also offer many opportunities for us to improve our teaching and to make it more enjoyable and rewarding. In a large class setting, we have the opportunity to (UNESCO, 2006):

1. Improve our organizational and managerial skills as we work to creatively organize our classroom into a comfortable, welcoming learning environment and to manage the many students within it.
2. Improve our interpersonal skills as we try different ways to get to know each student as an individual through their work in class or their lives outside of it. They will also equally enjoy getting to know us.
3. Improve our teaching and presentation skills. Constantly, lecturing to a large class – or even a small one – can become boring and bothersome. The value of a large class is that it contains a diversity of students and learning styles, and we can use many different, active, and fun ways of teaching. The cumulative knowledge, experiences, skills, and interests of our students, furthermore, can be valuable starting points for planning lessons and activities so that learning becomes meaningful for our students.
4. Improve our evaluation skills as we devise a variety of ways to tell whether our students have really learned the material, instead of relying only on short answer exams, which may seem necessary for large classes. For instance, we can give our students in-class and out-of-class assignments that ask them what they have learned and what questions they have about what they have learned. Rather than following our students' failures, we can also track their successes, which are also our successes in teaching.
5. Our students can also benefit from being in large classes. When there are many students in a class, they can share many different ideas and interesting life experiences. This stimulates the students and enlivens those parts of our lessons where students can discuss and learn from each other. During project work, students can learn to share responsibility and help each other, as well as to listen, to have patience, and to express themselves within a diverse group of people – skills that will be valuable for them throughout their lives. This also brings variety and speeds up the work.

C. Discussion**C.1. A Well-Managed Learning Environment in Large Classes****C.1.1. The Classroom Environment**

Since the environment affects how well our students can learn, it is very important to have control over the classroom in which we teach. Our ability to create a well-managed environment can promote learning as a community to reduce the feeling of crowdedness and misbehaviour. In this case, Hayes (1997) suggested that arrangement of the class in groups serves most of these purposes best. Some teachers worry about being able to see and be seen by all of the students, as well as their ability to see the board. He also stated that the noise from the pair or group activities is often cited as a reason for large classes being difficult to control. This is the challenge for a lecturer of keeping the noise level to the minimum. To catch the students' attention, lecturers should have their own attention-getting signals (a clap of the hands, for example) rather than shouting.

C.1.2. The Physical Environment

To encourage active learning and student involvement, seats are arranged so students can see each other as well as the teacher. Ideally, a class is held in a bright, clean, well-equipped room that accommodates every student comfortably and allows them to move around and work well either individually or in groups. Unfortunately, very few classrooms are ideal settings for learning and, especially in large classes, space is usually limited. Often hot, crowded, and noisy, small classrooms overflowing with many students offer a poor learning setting for us and our students. We will need all of our ingenuity and planning skills to create a classroom that is a comfortable place in which to learn. But our hard work will be worthwhile, since it will make our job easier and more rewarding. To maximize learning space available, below are some areas associated with the classroom's physical environment that we might consider as we plan on how to accommodate all of our students and reduce feelings of crowdedness, confusion, and frustration that often plague large classes. All we need are to (UNESCO, 2006):

1. *Remove unnecessary furniture*
2. *Provide a space for students to enter and exit the classroom*
3. *Use space outside the classroom*
4. *Decorate the room with student's work*
5. *Know the most comfortable atmosphere for the students*

In large classes, creating the sense of community and its positive psycho-social environment can motivate our students to learn, get them involved, and help them to learn to their fullest, even under seemingly crowded conditions. Below are some suggestions to create a positive psycho-social environment in our classroom community:

1. *Make a large class seem much smaller*
Moves towards a student who has asked a question can reduce physical and social distance. This personal approach is the key to make a large class feel small.
2. *Know our student's name*
Learn as many students' names as we can. It is the first step in creating a comfortable classroom that will encourage student participation. It also shows students that you are interested in them as individuals. Fortunately, there are many simple ways for learning and getting to know them stated by UNESCO (2006), they are:
 - a. Make a seating chart. Ask students to sit in the same seats for several weeks and try to memorize four or five names at each meeting.
 - b. Take a photograph or have students draw pictures. Pass the photograph around and have students write their names at the bottom of the photograph. If photographs are impossible, have them to draw their partner and show something unique about their partner.
 - c. Use name cards and Tags. Name cards can be placed in front of them during the class or name tags to wear during the first few weeks of school.
 - d. Use introductions in groups for each meeting.
 - e. Actively take attendance
 - f. Actively call students by their names
3. *Conduct interactive activities to know each other*
4. *Be personal to our students*
5. *Allow students to express themselves*
6. *Encourage questions and comments*
7. *Be available to students before and after class*
8. *Establish a few reasonable rules for student behaviour*

C.2. Teaching English Effectively in Large Classes

C.2.1. Planning Lessons in Teaching Large Classes

An English language teachers need to plan what they want to do in the classroom. A good lesson plan will help us to relieve our own fears about teaching many students. We will know in advance what to do, why, and how. Farrell (in Richards and Renandya, 2004) stated that a lesson planning is defined as a daily decisions a teacher makes for the successful outcome of a lesson. Following are some of the most important elements in lesson planning that can help us to manage the learning of many students proposed by UNESCO (2006), they are:

1. *Be comfortable with what you are teaching*
Read up on topics that we will be covering so that we are ready in preparing them and can maintain a steady focus during our teaching. We also need to predict the possible questions arise from the students. To anticipate it, we can review the course materials, assignments, and informations from other teacher who has experience in teaching these topics.
2. *Be clear about the reason in teaching the topic*
Explain clearly to the students what you want them to learn from a specific lesson. We also can prepare a large piece of poster paper at the start of the class in order to catch a common understanding of the lesson to be learned.
3. *Structure our lesson logically*
Some lessons and their content are best presented chronologically.
4. *Plan a variety learning activities*
In planning your lesson, identify activities in which all of the students can participate in an orderly manner, and select one or, better yet, two teaching methods for each class session: lectures, small group discussions, independent work, role-playing, demonstrations, etc. Decide how you will: (a) prepare the class instruction, (b) present the new concepts, (c) have students apply what they have learned through activities (for example, through discussions, in-class writing activities, or collaborative work
5. *Identify resource and materials*
The resources may be the physical resources (poster or books) and the human resources (experts at singing, dancing or local handycraft)
6. *Recruit teaching assistance in advance*
The "teaching assistants" can be valuable assets to the large class because they will allow you to work with individual students, to manage activities effectively, and to observe the overall class.
7. *Develop and follow a formal lesson plan*
Good lesson plans achieve at least two objectives. First, they outline what the teacher hopes will occur during a class and, possibly more important, they convey to students that their teacher has thought about the session and its activities. Some of the ways you can plan your lessons well are by using a simple lesson planning outline, daily lesson planning format, or a lesson planning matrix as shown below:

Topic	Objectives	Teaching Methods	Classroom Management	Main Activities	Resources	Feedback/Assesments	Reflection

8. *Budget your time carefully*
Teaching a large class takes a great deal of time and energy. If you feel rushed or overwhelmed, your students will feel it too. Set up weekly work schedules for yourself so that you are prepared for what needs to be done, so that you have time to deal with the complexities of teaching such classes.

C.2.2. The Effective English Teaching in Large Classes

One major challenge in teaching English in large classes is how to communicate with, arouse and hold the interest of many students at once so that they are motivated to learn, will listen to you, and will learn the knowledge and skills you are trying to teach. Jhonson (2007) added some challenges appear in teaching large classes, they are:(a) making the lecture very interesting, (b) find ways to incorporate active learning, and (c)

managing the logistics of papers, exams, grades, etc. In addition, Hasan (2000) proposed several ways to maintain students' interest in English lesson. *First*, avoid 50 minutes non-stop lecturing by divide our lecture into short segments. *Second*, distribute an outline the topics unavailable in textbook. *Third*, provide hints or cues to make students easier remember the important points. *Fourth*, try to be enthusiastic and expressive when lecturing. And *fifth*, at the end of the class, summarize the important points during the lecture and some ideas to look forward.

Integrate technology in teaching and learning is also a helpful way to catch students' attention. Hanover Research (2001) proposed that the using technology in and out of the classroom can be adopt to help better learning environments. It can break up the lecture and hold student's attention. It also creates an environment where more students are able and willing to participate in class, thereby encouraging active learning. These technologies generally fall into two categories; those that enhance the in-class experience through visual aids, such as PowerPoint presentations, videos, and image from the internet and those that create electronic tools and forums for the students and faculty to use outside the classroom. Richards and Rodgers (2001) added that visual aids help a great deal through mix up films, overheads, computer graphics, and even guest lecturer.

In large classes, however, since students learn in many different ways and their active participation improve their learning, a variety of strategies for teaching and active learning should be used. Here are some active activities suggested by Bonwell (1995), the technique is called in-class activities. They are; (1) Short in-class writing assignments, such as "minute papers" or "minute pictures" for younger students, with selected students reading their papers aloud or presenting their pictures to the class to stimulate discussion. (2) Oral summaries of the previous lecture, readings, etc. that are prepared and presented by students. (3) Asking students about what they understood to start class discussion. (4) Surveys, questionnaires, formative (ungraded) quizzes to assess understanding. (5) Reports on how the lecture's topic can be used in real life. (6) Students write exam questions related to lecture materials. (7) Student analysis of a problem, poem, photograph, etc. (8) Solving of a problem by students, followed by evaluating each other's work. (9) Demonstrations illustrating a concept from the lecture.

There are many other active learning strategies that you can use in large classes. Not all of your students need to participate in all of these activities, especially those that require individual answers; in large classes, there might not be enough time. However, all of your students should be given the chance to participate in many of them. Drummond (2005) explained the challenge lies in selecting the type of activity to match the purpose or objective you have in mind for your lesson:

Round. Each student has a 2- or 3-minute opportunity to express his or her point of view on a given topic, or passes, while others listen. For older students, the topic can be a controversial or thought-provoking issue, such as "Education is valuable for my daily life." For younger students, choose a simple topic, such as "What I Like About School." This activity will elicit a range of viewpoints that you can consider in delivering your lessons, as well as building a sense of "safe participation" and confidence among your students.

Brainstorm. Ask students to individually think about an issue or a problem and to list its possible causes, such as "Why is water becoming scarce?" or "How can we improve our school?" Assign individuals into groups, and ask them to share their ideas and compile a list of possibilities. Stress that people working together can create more than an individual alone.

Simulations and Games. Ask students to role-play a situation; for instance, "What would happen if you were confronted by a bully? What would they do?" By creating situations that are momentarily real, your students can practice coping with stressful, unfamiliar, or complex situations. Also encourage games that place students in a new role, one that other students may be facing, in order to encourage empathy. For example, blindfold students and ask them to identify their friends just by listening to their voices or touching their faces.

Problem Solving and Demonstrations. Encourage students, individually or in groups, to explain how they arrived at a solution to a problem. You can also ask them to demonstrate how something works; for instance, how does a thermometer work or why do the tires of a bicycle move.

Peer Teaching or Learning Cells. Randomly select students to read about a specific topic and then teach the essence of the material to an assigned partner or group or the entire class.

Poster Sessions. Groups of three to five students each complete a poster display that conveys the group's work in (a) identifying and clarifying a problem or controversial issue, (b) locating appropriate information and resources concerning their issue, and (c) reporting on the evidence they find. For young students, have them draw a poster on an important topic, such as "My Dream School" and, if they are able, ask them to write about it in one corner of the poster. This will help them to integrate and improve upon their artistic and writing skills.

C.2.3. Feedback, Assignment, and Exams

Feedback helps students to see how well they are doing and whether they understand the material you are teaching them. Consequently, the more feedback you give them, the better, because it will not only help them, but also you. For instance, ask students about what they think about the pace of your lectures and activities: Are you going too fast? How do the lectures relate to the main activities, including any readings? Are your students understanding your examples and how are they being used to illustrate major points? Besides talking with your students, in-class writing exercises and group activities, as described in the last section, can provide this information. Furthermore, assignments are one of the major means by which we help students to learn important concepts. They are also the means to begin assessing our students' achievements so that we can give them constructive feedback. While the number of students in a large class can make it difficult to review many individual papers, projects, or exams, this should not deter you in giving students relevant assignments, particularly written ones.

Perhaps the most popular way to measure learning achievement is the examination. In large classes, teachers and students, alike, fear them. Students fear taking and failing them, and teachers fear grading them. Examinations can be either objective (such as multiple-choice exams), subjective (such as essay exams), or a combination of both. In some cases, however, they may not really tell you if your students have truly learned and can apply what you have taught them.

Other examples of exams is suggested by *Student Ratings of Teacher Effectiveness*, you can try the following:

Add short essay questions; control the length of responses by providing students with a limited amount of space for answers (an "answer" box). With such a small space, your students must get to the point. Grading 60 four-line answers is much easier than grading 60 full-page or even half-page answers.

Ask students to answer questions using diagrams, flow charts, or pictures. These are short and easy to grade, but can be very informative about student analytical skills.

For some multiple-choice questions, ask the student to choose the correct answer and then provide a one- or two-line explanation of how they got that answer.

Give group examinations. The same grade can be assigned to all members of the group, based on the "group product" they produce. For individuals, ask group members to anonymously grade each other, and then assign the average of the group's grade to each student.

As a writing exercise, have students generate their own examination questions and answers based on your class lectures and activities. These items can be used on actual tests, and students may understand them better than ones that you develop.

D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

D.1. Conclusion

It can be seen that a large class is a relative concept. Problems and difficulties of teaching associated with large classes can also be found in smaller classes. Teachers need to view large classes from a different perspective and recognize that despite a lot of disadvantages they can also provide many opportunities for teaching and learning. Class size is not the determining factor of teaching efficiency. It is clear that teaching a large class requires hard work, effective planning both in terms of logistical arrangements and provision of learning activities, instead of relying on straight lecturers, which according to empirical evidence are not highly effective. Teachers need to enhance their innovative awareness and capabilities for developing effective ways for dealing with large classes based on the characteristics of large classes.

D.2. Suggestion

No one will consider that teaching a large classes is an easy thing to do. Nevertheless, there are also many ways to solve all the challenges appear. An evaluation of the effectiveness in teaching English to large classess will require empirical studies. Future studies should investigate the effectiveness of additional active and collaborative teaching methods in the large class environment. Future studies should also incorporate measures of learning outcomes in addition to examination scores. Measuring improvement in higher level comprehension, critical thinking, and problem solving skills could provide more insight into the value of the teaching methods. Based on enrollment projections, large classes are going to become a way of life for most faculty at least during the short term. Therefore, further investigation of large class issues is paramount.

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