

Identifying The Most Common Challenges Teachers May Encounter in Managing of Teaching Large Classes

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Abstract: ***Background:** It is very difficult to talk about all the problems regarding large size classes. However, there are certain problems which may look small from general point of view but can affect teaching - learning process strictly. Definitely, there are certain problems which are related to all large English classes and cannot be ignored at any time. Dealing with large number of students constitutes a real challenge to every teacher. variety of students with multi - level IQ and learning style, class environment organization, difficulty of setting and crowd control, less attention to students, limited students' learning monitoring and difficulty in engaging all students in activities. It is a very important issue for every instructor to be involved in teaching large number of students especially, in EFL contexts. **Objectives:** To find out the most common challenges teachers may encounter in managing of teaching large classes and to help instructors to be aware of those problems they may face with large number of students in order to take action to overcome at least of the challenges. **Method and Material:** This is qualitative research; the research design is descriptive and the data was analyzed descriptively. In this research, first we searched for the keywords which related to the research topic through the online academic and up to date sources such as (ADRI, Research Gate, and Google Scholars). Out of 32 articles, we reviewed twenty - one of them that mostly explained the challenges of large classes. The articles were published between (1970 - 2010) years. **Results:** Dealing with large classes constitutes a real challenge to every teacher: The major hypothesis is that effective teaching and producing learning is critically constrained by the large size of classes and the students' perception about large classes being negative. The findings indicated that small - group learning are more effective in promoting greater academic achievement, and enhances favorable attitudes toward learning. **Conclusion:** Most researches showed that benefit usually occur when class size is reduced to less than 20 students otherwise problem of acquisition and classroom management arise and learning process will be not occur effectively. There are other variables such as the quality of teachers, students' degree of motivation, and role of the parents may interface and come into play in leaning process.*

Keywords: large class size, EFL class size, Students' expectations, Classroom management

1. Introduction

As instructors are mostly teaching large classes even in EFL (English as foreign language) and dealing with multi -level students in a class, so we should identify those challenges in order to think of such approach to fulfill the need of teaching and learning process in a better way. The aim of investigating the most common challenges teachers may encounter in managing of teaching large classes is to help instructors to be aware of those problems they may face with large number of students in the class and take action to overcome at least of the challenges.

Identification of these problems may enable teachers to change their teaching method by using of clear information, notes, different activities and tasks in their profession. Harmer stated that instructors should adjust their teaching through the effective and appropriate teaching approaches that can be useful and fit to the teaching situation Harmer (2008 as cited in Taylor, 1991).

As teaching process has a direct connection with the number of students in the class therefore, it is essential to explain large class (number of students) and have information about. According to a study carried by Ur (1996), the average perception of a large class is around 50 students; however, she suggested that the exact number does not really matter, what matter is how the teacher see the class size in their own specific situation. Baker and Westrup (2000) said that a large

class can be any number of students, if the teacher feels there are too many students for them to make progress. Teaching a large class refers to instructing a group of students that is significantly larger than the average classroom size. In addition, a large class may consist of dozen students, sometimes over a hundred students, for exceeding the number in standard sized classes.

Large class is a common problem in Afghanistan's education system (schools, universities and language courses), especially in EFL classes of Kabul University of medical sciences. Throughout my teaching profession I have experienced different challenges in teaching large number of students. For instance, classroom management, assessment and giving students feedback, time management, collaboration and group/ pair work, promote students' engagement, too much crowd and noises, long list of calling names enrolled in attendance sheet, huge number of papers and assignments for marking and teacher become exhausted at the end of the class. As Scrivener (1994) argued that one of the restrictions in the way of teachers' innovative techniques is the large number of students in class. Due to this problem, teachers sometimes are not able to perform activities successfully in the classroom.

Research objectives: To find out the most common challenges teachers may encounter in managing of teaching large classes and to help instructors to be aware of those problems they may face in large classes.

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Research questions

- 1) How would be the student's perception and attitude toward large number of students in the class?
- 2) Is there any correlation between student's performance and attitude in learning process due to the large class size?
- 3) What are the instructors' perception and experience regarding teaching in large classes?

2. Method and Material

This qualitative research was conducted through descriptive study design and the data was analyzed descriptively. In this research, we searched for the keywords which related to the research topic through the online scientific and reliable sites such as (google scholars, research gate and ERIC, ADRI).

Exclusion and inclusion criteria:

We included the articles that related to our topic. Additionally, we were tried to find articles which were published in the reputed journals. The unreliable journals' articles were not included in this study.

After reviewing abstracts of all articles, we selected the ones which related to the challenges of teaching in large classes. Out of 32 articles, we reviewed twenty - one articles that mostly explained the problems of teaching in large classes. Then, we summarized them and used the information in this research. Finally, we selected twenty - one of them which mostly focused on challenges teaching in large classes.

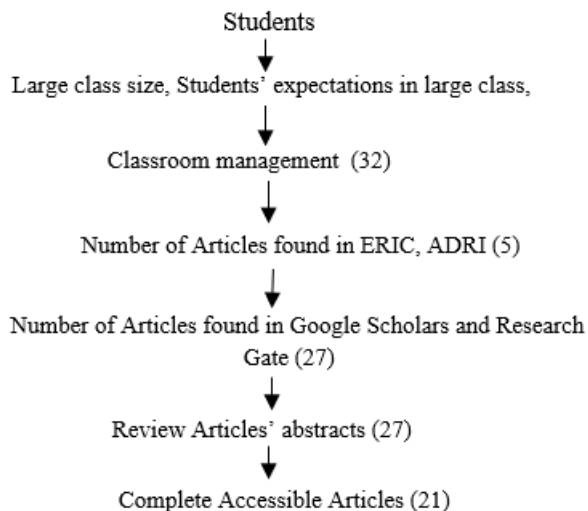


Figure 1: Shows the way of searching and selecting articles for the study.

3. Literature Review

Evaluating or assessing students' experience, need and expectations can lead to improvements in teaching performance and achieving learning outcomes. Carolyn (2010) stated that the major hypothesis is that effective teaching and producing learning is critically constrained by the large size of classes and the students' perception about large classes being negative. There are other scholars who identified challenges and suggested some essential points regarding large class.

Discipline: Carbone (1998) noted that teachers face difficulties in controlling their students who make noise especially when they do activities or finish before the others and then the teachers can't stop them. He added that a disciplined class is an ideal field for a teacher to bring Knowledge. Discipline is only possible if the strength of a class is normal. In a class of 40 students and more, it is impossible to maintain discipline. There might be teachers who are very good at their profession, their preparation is satisfactory, regarding punctuality, knowledge and material but they may fail to control and maintain discipline in those large size classes.

Carbone (1998) said that the class would be noisy and some students who are not interested in class activities or could not understand the task will disturb the others. He also mentioned that when "we apply different kinds of activities in one lesson, it will be difficult to control or to solve all students' problems" (p.36).

Discomfort: Carbone (1998) asserted that teacher may be very competent in their modules but they will never find themselves at ease when facing a large number of students. They feel unhappy and hopeless. It is not because the students are not ready to listen to them, but because overall situation is boring. Teachers cannot keep proper eye contact with the class. Similarly, they cannot speak constantly at a high pitch. They cannot involve their students in learning activities. If they cannot do so, they get nervous, then, teaching - learning process will not be in a natural manner.

We also believe that large size of class makes teacher feel frustrated and tired ultimately making them hopeless to manage the class successfully.

Individual Attention: This is obviously quite difficult to know and follow the progress of all the individuals in large class because there are too many students in a class and they are all so different regarding their learning style and strategy (Carbone, 1998).

We believes that in large size classes individual attention may not exist. Teachers neglect their students as individuals and focus only on groups. The author also added that a class is composed of individuals who belong to different backgrounds having different problems. They need to be given individual attention. It is very difficult to speak and listen to individual students all the time within the period of the lesson as it is fixed previously according to the lesson plan. It also becomes difficult for the teachers to know their students individually. A teacher will always find a lot of embarrassment in identifying the specific need of individual learner in a large size classes (p.38).

Evaluation: It is very difficult for the teachers to carryout proper evaluation in a class of large size. The teachers consider it very difficult to supervise a class and check all the exercises done by each student individually in the classroom during the task. It becomes almost impossible to correct their mistakes. Pair / group work and trio work become impossible. It is troublesome for the teacher to mark too many scripts of home assignments. But all this evaluation is very essential in the teaching system. (Carbone, 1998, p.40)

Teaching - Learning Process: McKeachie (1980) thought that in a class of large sized, the teaching - learning process gets very slow. There are many distractions and disturbances. He further added that the teacher is not audible to the students and because of over - crowding, there is much noise in the class. The students find it easier to talk with each other than to ask the teacher and listening to them. As a result, the class lacks the proper teacher - student relationship and the teaching - learning process gets disrupted.

Teaching through Lecture Method only: In large size classes teachers are forced to depend on lecture method only. McKeachie (1980) noted that large classes are most likely to use lecture methods and less likely to use discussion than small classes. Consequently, this leads to the question of how learning outcomes achieved by courses taught with the lecture method only in large class settings compared with outcomes achieved in smaller classes. Thus, the discussion method is more likely to be employed. Moreover, he says that in fact, lecture method is not appropriate for teaching English, based on his extensive beliefs, the balance of evidence showed that we should use lectures to teach information. We should not rely on them to promote thought, change attitudes, or behavioral skills if you can help them (p.58).

By teaching through lecture method, teachers or rather their skills thus become the medium for transmitting knowledge orally and the student receives and accumulates it. The diagram, then, becomes enlarged and proceeds. McKeachie asserted that in the lecture method the teacher needs to make sure that the decoding of information by the student is correct and the decoded message is learned. The feeding of information by the teacher is based on the assumption that it is valid. Lecture method need to be modified and in certain situations substituted with alternative methodologies. So, we can conclude that the lecture method cannot be found suitable all the time in almost all the English language activities and lessons (p.62).

Managing large classes: Teaching in classes of large size may not be a big problem if appropriate strategies are taken to teach properly. In such cases the students can easily be taught in the form of groups. But teaching English in a class of large size is really a difficult task. The following tools and strategies can help the English language teachers to teach in large classes and to at least overcome to the stated problems.

Managing Pair and Group Work: Carbone (1998) pointed out that pair - work is an activity in which two students work together. When the number of students accede two it is, then, called a group - work. These two types are very important while teaching a large class. For example, teacher through these techniques can maximize participation, make clear instructions, and give feedback (p.62).

Harmer (2007) sated that pair (and group work) will help to provoke quite students into talking. When they are with one or perhaps two or three other students, they are not under so much pressure as they are if asked to speak in front of the whole class.

In some activities, managing pair and group work is needed more, but teacher, in some cases, may find difficulties.

Harmer (2007) added that even when chairs and desks in the classroom cannot be moved, there are ways of doing this, for example, first rows turn to second rows, third rows to face fourth rows (p.129).

Managing Discipline: Discipline is very important in every class. Managing discipline in a large class is not the same as in a small one, rather it demands some clear rules.

Harmer (2007) asserted that there should be certain behavior rules that are created by teacher and learners together which state clear basic rules of conduct that learners understand. For example, some of them have to work quietly, others may talk, but not loudly and students who have finished the lesson tasks can read a book to keep them busy. Teacher in a large class has to use the environment and experiences outside the classroom. According to Harmer (2007), it offers a new, different space when students get noisy or bored, and helps to reduce overcrowding.

Similarly, teacher should collaborate with the students and build up a good learning atmosphere in large classes. According to Brown (2000), in the large class working together is needed, many students value the safe learning atmosphere in large classes. Therefore, teachers of large classes should take advantage of this, and build up a collaborative and lively learning atmosphere.

Teacher should benefit from the advantage of the size of the large classes. Larsen - freeman (1972) argues that when we consider a large class as a better opportunity for the teacher, we take only the positive aspects of such a class. Teaching practice and experience of many who have ever been teaching in large classes showed that it is not only possible to build up a good learning atmosphere in large classes, but also feasible to take advantage of the large class size. Larsen - freeman (1972) believed that a teacher should communicate, discuss and share regularly the classroom management techniques with other teachers who are involved in large class teaching.

Managing Students' Anonymity: Harmer (2007) argued that the teacher must know the names of at least some of their students by using different ways as creating a more personal environment by letting students know them in appropriate ways. He further added that the teacher can try to find ways to be accessible to students on a personal level using different strategies; arrive earlier before the class time and chat with students who are already there, greet students as they come in, stay a few minutes after class to answer individual questions, consider lecturing or leading discussion from different points of the classroom to give students the feeling of being in the midst of the action rather than simply being an observer, etc.

When the teacher asks questions, they can start on a personal level, asking students to share their own experiences with a concept, and then move to the more abstract.

Managing Class Activities: Carbone (1998) pointed out that lectures as a rule have little educational value. If the teacher is teaching a small class and she/he is good, they may be able to make many of their students participate into activity; get them asking and answering questions, discussing issues,

challenging conclusions. However, with large classes, no matter how good the teacher is, they probably will not be able to persuade most students to open their mouths in front of 50 and more classmates; it seems too risky for them. If the teacher hopes to move away from statue students to active students, the teacher has to select different approach (p.38).

According to Larsen - freeman (1972), the so called "In - class exercise" is the technique the teacher need for a large class. As the teacher lectures on a body of material or go through a problem solution, instead of just posing questions to the class as a whole and enduring the ensuing time - wasting silences, occasionally assign a task and give the students anywhere from 30 seconds to 5 minutes to come up with a response.

Furthermore, Brown (2000) added that with individual, pairs, groups, or think - pair - share approach the teacher should from time to time call on groups or individuals to present what they came up with. He mentioned that if teacher never does this, students will have little incentive to work on the exercises when the teacher assigns them and many will not.

Group exercises have the added benefit of giving students an opportunity to meet and work with one another, a good first step toward building a sense of community. He can benefit by periodically asking the students to sit in different locations and work with students they have not been with before. The principal benefit of these exercises is that they get students acting and reflecting, the only two ways by which human beings learn. The teacher doesn't have to spend a great deal of time on active learning exercises in class; one or two lasting no more than 5 - 10 minutes in a 50 - minute lecture can provide enough stimulation to keep the class with them for the entire period (p.122).

Managing Teaching Method: According to Stanly and Porter (2002) teachers should remember the characteristics of some of the worst lectures that they had as students. These might include; reading from the text or taking material straight from the assigned text only, 50 minutes of non - stop lecturing, outdated or incorrect information presented, etc. If they have subjects or topics unavailable to the students in textbooks or other sources, they can distribute an outline and go through it on a transparency while they lecture.

These authors further added that they also can give students practice in remembering lecture material by asking questions from time to time or providing quizzes at the end of the lecture.

They should try to provide hints or cues during the course of the lecture that students may use to remember important points. Moreover, they can use examples and images when explaining concepts and principles. Whereas, they should avoid non - stop lecturing; teachers have to divide lectures into short segments and to be enthusiastic and expressive when lecturing. In addition, visual aids help a great deal. Teachers should mix up films, overheads, computer graphics, and even guest lecturers (p.156).

Carbone (1998) stated that teachers must encourage active participation by students during the course of the lecture such

as, working on problems, answering multiple choice questions which are inserted periodically. They may tell students when they have responded correctly. If they ignore student responses, they will tend to extinguish them altogether. Before beginning the lecture, teacher tells the students how it will be organized. A brief outline on the board at the beginning of class is an excellent means of helping students gear their thoughts to the topic for the day. At the end of the class, they probably summarize the important points which were covered during the lecture and give the students some idea of what to look forward to for the next time (p.129).

Advantages of Large Classes: Despite of these obstacles, large classes also present opportunities for enriched discussion and a wider range of viewpoints enhancing the educational environment. Regarding large classes, Hess (2001) stated that in a large class there are always enough students for interaction and some of the students can be rich sources of information. Skillful and proficient students can help lower-level ones. Ur (1996) mentioned that because the teacher is less able to attend to every individual, the students must develop strategies for helping themselves and their classmates through peer - teaching and collaboration, so students and the teacher create an atmosphere of cooperation.

4. Results

The findings revealed answers to the three research questions. Students prefer smaller class size. Assessing students' experience, need and expectations can lead to improvements in teaching performance and achieving learning outcomes. Carolyne (2010) stated that the major hypothesis is that effective teaching and producing learning is critically controlled by the large size of classes and the students' perception about large classes being negative. A comparative analysis conducted by Stanne & Donovan (1999) revealed that small - group learning are more effective in promoting greater academic achievement, and enhances favorable attitudes toward learning. Based on their interactions with the students enrolled in their Foundation, they expressed their dissatisfaction towards large classes. They often get distracted with noise, and do not get opportunity to approach the lecturers for help. According to Goodykoontz (2008), though some students felt accustomed to large classes, they still prefer smaller classes would be more effective.

The scholars' viewpoints somehow suggested some problems that can be felt and seen in any educational places especially in developing countries. The most significant discussions regarding large class size by most of scholars are follows:

- 1) Limited individual attention: With a large class, it becomes difficult to provide individual attention to each student. This can be result in some students feeling ignored and not receiving the support they need to succeed academically in learning process.
- 2) Classroom management: Maintaining discipline and order in a large class can be challenging. It becomes more difficult to control noise levels, prevent from disturbances, and ensure that students are actively engaged in the learning process.
- 3) Assessment and feedback: Marking and providing timely feedback on assignments, tests, and exams for a large number of students can be overwhelming and time

- consuming. It may lead to delayed feedback, which can negatively impact students' performance and motivation.

- 4) Addressing various learning needs: Large classes often consist of students with different learning needs and styles, abilities, and backgrounds. Meeting the individual needs of each student can be challenging, especially when resources and time are limited.
- 5) Interpersonal relationships: Building relationships with students can be more challenging in large classes. It becomes harder to establish a personal connection, understand their individual needs, and provide personalized guidance and support.
- 6) Limited resources: Lack of resources can have a negative impact on the quality of education provided to students. Large classes may strictly affect the available resources, including classroom space and environment, equipment, textbooks, and teaching materials.
- 7) Time management: Planning and managing lessons, assignments, and assessments for a large number of students can be time - consuming. This can result in teachers feeling overwhelmed and unable to dedicate enough time to individual students or specific areas of the curriculum.
- 8) Communication and feedback: Providing effective communication and feedback to students and sometimes for parents can be challenging in large classes. It becomes harder to maintain regular communication and ensure that everyone is kept informed about the students' progress and any concerns in educational setting.
- 9) Encourage students' engagement: Keeping students engaged and motivated in large classes can be more difficult. It becomes challenging to create interactive and participatory learning experiences, which are essential for effective learning outcomes.
- 10) Collaboration and group work: Organizing and managing group work/ pair work or collaborative activities can be more complex in large classes. It becomes challenging to ensure equal participation opportunity, observing students' progress, and provide feedback to each group.
- 11) Individualized instruction: Providing individualized instruction, especially for struggling students or high achievers, can be more difficult in large classes. It becomes hard to adapt teaching methods and materials to meet each student's unique needs and pace of learning.
- 12) Teacher exhaustion: Managing a large class can be physically and emotionally demanding, leading to teacher tension. The constant pressure, heavy workload, and limited resources can harmfully affect a teacher's well - being and job satisfaction.

5. Discussion

As I studied the researchers' ideas on challenges of teaching in a large class, there were similarities among their view points. They mostly point out somehow same problems that teachers may encounter in learning process especially in the last decades that the education of all over the worlds are changed by the use of new technology and they are in favor

of such approach to full fill their academic need effectively in order to achieve a positive result in their life.

We compare our findings to the existing literature and other teachers' experiences. Studying students' experience is quite challenging and can be used as a quality indicator in addition to the standard quality in higher education. Evaluating or assessing students' experience, need and expectations can lead to improvements in teaching performance and achieving learning outcomes. Goodkootz (2008) and Hannula (2002) asserted that the teachers' attitude and their teaching style, type of assessments are among the factors influencing students' attitude in learning process.

We believe that large classes require discipline and organization to function smoothly. Establishment of firm rules of behavior, post them for everyone to see and accept by them without fail. The more structured the teacher can make the environment, the better they can communicate with their students. Overall, the larger the number of students, the more diverse and challenging it will be to teach. I want to suggest all instructors to choose appropriate teaching method based on the subject's principles and mood of the learning environment.

6. Conclusion

Consequently, based on many researches, it is difficult to set a definition for large class, because in some countries a class 30 students is not considered problematic while such a class would be challenging for teachers of other countries. Result of some researchers (see these links: Class size: What Research Says and What it Means for State Policy, How important is class size?) showed that benefit usually occur when class size is reduced to less than 20 students otherwise problem of acquisition and classroom management arise and learning process will be not occur effectively.

While it is hard to draw definitive conclusions about student achievement based on the class size alone, since other variables such as the quality of teachers, students' degree of motivation, and role of the parents may interface and come into play. Teachers often complain, not without reason, about teaching large classes. These unlucky teachers not only suffer from the pedagogical shortcoming of large classes but also from the stress these classes produce.

It is obvious that if teachers were given the choice to teach, they would prefer to teach in a well - equipped classroom, limited students who all have books and materials. This is the situation in many classes over the world. We agree there are ways to make learning better, more fun, and easier for both the teacher and the students which is possible by the choice of appropriate teaching method and less number of students in class. Therefore, further research is need to be done on the issue of appropriate method for teaching large number of students.

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