

Using Drama Techniques with Large Classes

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Abstract: Though large classes can often be noisy, they are full of energy and excitement, and the time flies by. However, teachers have to put up with lots of challenges posed by such learning environment. One such difficulty the tutor's inability to know the names of all students, the thing which is essential in order for the tutor to establish a sense of rapport and meet everyone needs. With a careful plan prepared in advance, a large class can be handled much competently. To maintain control over the large class Divide students into groups and allow them the opportunity to teach something to rest of the class. The effect of such procedure is that students can help in giving classes or revise lessons already taught. The situation becomes more motivating, intense and challenging if a peer evaluation element is included.

Keywords: drama, large classes, peer evaluation, challenge, rapport.

1. INTRODUCTION

This study investigates the impact of large classes on the performance of English Language teachers in Sudanese Basic Level Schools in general, and the 8th class in particular. It intends to explain and discuss the problems of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) to large classes and to suggest the introduction of drama as a solution to such large classes.

Teaching a foreign language in a proper way is very important to help students' proficiency in the language. There are so many factors affect teaching / learning any foreign language. One of these factors is the size of the class

A Large class is one of the most common problems of teaching and learning English Language in Sudanese Basic Level School. This problem causes English Language teachers many difficulties, and makes teaching and learning the language very complicated. All teachers, of course, know that language learning is more effective in small classes, especially English Language, as it's not our mother tongue. Unfortunately, classes in most of our schools tend to range between (70) to more than (90) students in each class, and in some schools, more than (100) students are found.

Teachers always find differences between theory and practice of methodology and teaching techniques. And as a result of these differences, every teacher has to avoid the traditional ways of teaching his students. Also, as the teachers are the masters of their classes and know the ability of their students, they can choose the ideal ways to teach them.

Moreover, they can create other suitable ways of controlling, following up, and interacting with their students. Another problem is that teachers of large classes always seem to be buried under an endless piles of homework and exercise books. On the other hand, as a result of the large number of students, they will not be able to correct their students' errors effectively, and will not be able to give them enough chance to ask questions or share in answering questions presented by him.

Many teachers also feel nervous and uncomfortable when they teach large classes. Moreover, it's well noticed that they spend most of their time shouting at the students to keep quiet or to pay attention. Unfortunately, there are no materials or references which can give a solution for this problem, and all references only focus on the techniques that deal with such classes. The solution must be in the ways of lessening the numbers, rather than the techniques of teaching and dealing with large numbers. To discuss this problem, we have first of all to know what the large class is.

2. WHAT IS THE LARGE CLASS?

There is no exact definition for the term a large class. Nolasco & Arther (1988) say that: *“Teachers, who are used to group of (12–14) students, might find a group of (20) be rather threatening. Others may be relieved where they have only 40” P.4.*) If we compare the numbers mentioned in this statement with the numbers in our schools, we will find that there is no less than (50) students in our classes. And as a result, we will notice that some students will be seated much far away from the teacher who always stands or moves near the front centre of the class by the board. K.U. Qian(1992) States:

In large classes, the classroom is necessarily very big so it is not easy to communicate with individual students. The students have comparatively few chances to speech and to answer questions On the other hand, the teacher has few chances to answer Questions and instructs each individually-

This statement means that, the teacher is responsible for every student and he must observe all the students whether in the front of the class or at the back seats. This observation, moreover, refers to the individual differences between the students. The teacher must know that although they are grouped in one class according to their ages, they differ in their mental maturity, physical abilities and in other respects such as, for example, their aptitude for learning and acquiring language.

These differences, of course, are particularly acute in large class, and teacher will find wide range of individual differences between students. So only qualified teacher can be aware of these differences which can be in difficulties in seeing or hearing or other handicaps.

On the other hand, teacher has to take care of good lighting, ventilation and the rows of chairs and desks inside the class. He has to arrange these chairs and desks in a suitable way so as to be able to move in an easy way to check and construct his students. Other problem is that the "following up" in the 5th, 6th, 7th classes which are the first stages in learning English in our Basic Level Schools in general, and the 8th class in particular, is very important because these students are always in need of a great deal of practice. They are also in need of individual following up in handwriting, pronunciation and writing words correctly and accurately. So the class of (70) and above is not an ideal class for learning English, and we never expect a great improvement or good results in such classes. Another thing is that as a result of the heavy burden on the teacher, and his unintentional negligence to some students, they hate and neglect this subject.

3. CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

Large classes, usually, cause unsuitable conditions for teaching and learning language. Thus, the teacher is the first one who must be responsible for creating a suitable and good environment as to enable all the students inside the class to participate and interact with what is presented to them. So teachers in large classes must:

- a) Notice that the light in the classroom is good and enough for everyone whether in front of or at the back of the class.
- b) Make sure that the spaces between desks and chairs are at least (50 – 60) centimeters as to enable the teacher to move easily inside the class to follow up and check the students work.
- c) know that learning students' names, always creates friendly atmosphere, and makes them feel that they are important persons. Nolasco, (1988- P.10) says "It's always very important to find out about your students, and the first step in this process, is learning their names. He also says "knowing the students names, allows you to nominate students with confidence, as well as to identify trouble makers".
- a) keep the class in a good order and discipline, because it's one of the most important factors in the learning process. Jacobson et al, (1981, P.205) say: "... The concept of management is often hard to differentiate from the concept of instruction, and the two are closely related in theory and practice. The good classroom manager is often a good instructor. ". So every teacher must consider the ways of keeping his class in a good order before the beginning of the lesson. Nolasco, (1988- P.21) believes that Maxims like "Be firm but fair", "Have a few reasonable rules and stick to them", "...they are of little practical help to those problems and techniques for establishing and maintaining order.". Other problem of discipline is the problem of keeping his class quiet as to enable every one hear clearly, share in asking and answering questions and participate in the class.
- b) take care of marking exercise books, because if he neglects this work, students will neglect doing their homework.

To make this job easier, Hill and Dobbyn, (1981, P.30) say: "..., self-correcting exercises is very important in large classes, as it enables the teacher to give pupils plenty of reading and writing work, which they need, while using immediate reinforcement and not overburdening himself with correcting work".

4. DRAMA AND GROUP WORK /PAIR WORK

Teacher has to avoid, as can as possible, the lecturing and dominating the time of the period, and instead, he can divided the students into groups or pairs as to give them the chance to participate and share in the different activities inside the class. Dividing students into groups must be according to their levels, that is to say, he must be aware of good and weak ones as to enable them to help each other. Byrne, (1987, P.77) States: "You should normally form the groups yourself, usually in the basis of mixed ability (e.g. good and weak students together) since as a rule learners do help one another."

Hill and Dobbyn also state that "Group work in which pupils work together in groups makes things easier." P29.

Although more than one agree that group work makes things easier, in contrast Taska, (1989, P,13) believes that "if he divides the students into groups and gives them activity to be done, he cannot give every group enough care to correct its mistakes or to know whether the students in a given group are really doing their duty".. This leads us to discuss the advantages and the disadvantages of pair and group work and to compare between them.

The Advantages of Pair/Group Work:

- a) It allows the students to use and practice the language as a whole class, and makes them less shy about making mistakes.
- b) It gives the students the chance to speak English when they work in pairs or groups, because each student makes several sentences, questions or answers.
- c) If the same exercise is done around the class, some students may say only one sentence, and many will say nothing at all.
- d) Some students, when they are (on show) in front of the class, become shy and never say anything, but they do well in group or pair work.
- e) Students help each other, and share ideas. It also gives the chance for passing information to each other, because one of them may know something that others don't know.

5. THE DISADVANTAGE OF PAIR/GROUP WORK

There are many disadvantages in pair and group work which can be included in the following:

- a) Organization is difficult for group and pair work in large classes.
- b) Lazy ones don't share in this of work.
- c) There may be a problem of indiscipline from time to time.
- d) Some students don't ask teacher when they face any difficulty.
- e) Teacher, most of his time, acts as an instructor to keep quiet, instead of a facilitator and a consultant.
- f) There is no chance to correct the students' faults.
- g) Some of the students don't know how to do the activity which they have to do, or asked to do.
- h) To sum up, if we compare the advantages and the disadvantages of this technique we will find that the advantages are greater than the disadvantage.

6. MATERIAL AND METHODS

This part describes the method of collecting data for this study. Data was collected from the teachers of boys and girls schools at Elkalakla Unit-Khartoum Locality. This Locality is characterized by large classes. Questionnaire was used because it enables the researcher to collect large amount of information in a short time. Many steps and ways were done to collect data.

a) Instrument:

The instrument used is a questionnaire consists of (20) items asking the teacher different questions about the years they have been teaching English, the number of students in their classes, the differences between teaching large and small classes, the teaching techniques they use in their classes, the problems of controlling, following up and marking exercise books, the relationship between the teachers and their students....etc.

b) Population of the Study :

The population of the study are the teachers in Elkalakla- Khartoum State. The schools were randomly selected from a large number of the schools which are characterized by the large classes. The questionnaire was distributed among a sample consists of 20 teachers. All the teachers were very interested in answering the questionnaire and giving their opinions

c) Method of Analysis:

Percentage and average are used to describe data.

The observations of the researcher in these schools were:

1. In some schools there are very experienced teachers while in others there are untrained ones.
2. Female teachers who work in boy's schools – as a result of the shortage of male teachers, face many problems in large classes. Asking them about their experience in boy's schools, most of them said that they suffer a lot of the boys and their troubles, especially the boys in the 8th class.

7. ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

The statistical analysis of the questionnaire which was distributed at Elkalakla Locality in Khartoum reflects the following results. See the following table:

Table (1): Percentage of Score of the Teachers' Questionnaire

Questions	Percentage		
1- Teaching experience	0-10 60%	11-20 30%	more than 20 10%
2- Crowded classes.	45%		
3- Teaching small classes.	70%	30%	
4- Negative effect of large classes.	100%		
5- Presentation.	60%	pairwork 40%	
6- Giving homework.	90%	10%	
7- Giving homework.	weekly 40%	daily 30%	monthly 10%
8- Homework assignment.	30-50% 40%	10-20 30%	other times 20%
9- Students participation.	10-30%		
10- Participation of back seat students.	10-30%		
11- Knowing students name.	80%		
12- Range of knowing the names.	20%		
13- Formal relationship.	10-30%		
14- teacher-student interaction.	formal 50%	friendly 30%	impersonal 20%
15- Using direct questions.	50%		
16- Chairs inside the class.	100%		
17- Movement inside the class.	uneasy 80%	easy 20%	
18- Standing in front of the class.	in front 70%	move around 20%	in the middle 10%
19- Class management.	able 80%	unable 20%	
20- Talking aloud.	aloud 54.2%	shouting 45.8%	

1. The answers of question one show that 60% of the respondents have been teaching English in the range between (0-10) years, 30% of them in the range between (11 – 20) years and 10% of them more than 20 years.

This table indicates that those teachers are experienced teachers, and the information given can be taken in consideration.

2. The answers of question two show that the highest percentage (45%) of the number of students in each class, range between (70-90) student.

This result shows that there are "large classes" which is the origin of the problem which this research tries to investigate. This result also contrasted with Rob Nolasco (1988, P.4) when he stated: "Teachers may be relieved when they have only 40 students in the classrooms."

3. The answers of question three show that the majority the teachers (70%) had the experience of teaching small class, and only (30%) had no experience in teaching less than 50 students.

According to this result we can say that the majority of the respondents can recognize the differences between teaching large and small classes.

4. The answers of question four show the differences between teaching large and small classes. All the teachers agreed that large classes affect both students and teachers negatively. This agrees with the hypothesis of this study which states that large class affect the performance of both teacher and student negatively.

5. The answers of question five show that 60% of the respondents use presentation and lecturing techniques, while 40% use pair/group work.

In discussing this result, it's noticed that although it's more effective to use the technique of dividing students into pairs and groups, but as a result of the crowdedness of the classes most of the teachers (60%) use the technique of presentation and lecturing.

6. The answers of question indicate that the majority of the teachers (90%) give their students homework, while only 10% don't do that.

This means despite the large numbers of students, most of the teachers give homework.

7. The answers of question indicate that the highest percentage (40%) of teachers give homework weekly, 30% give it daily, 10% give it monthly, and 20% give it in other times.

This shows that, although there are many students in each class, teachers give students homework, because they know that it is very important for the students.

8. The answers of question eight indicate that 40% of the teachers assign 30 – 50% of the homework, 30% of them assign 10 – 20% of it, 20% of them assign 60 – 80 of it and only 10 of them assign 100% of the homework.

This result shows that although all the teachers give their students homework, but they are not able to mark their books because the number of students in each class. Moreover, as all of them know that it's very important to mark the books as to correct the mistakes, they cannot mark 100% of the homework. This also agrees with my hypothesis which states that large classes affect the performance of both teacher and student negatively.

9. The answers of question nine show that the percentage of the students who participate in the class, range between 10 – 30%. This result shows that the participation of students in large classes of is weak, and this is – of course – resulted of the difficulty of following up and the help given by the teacher to each student as a result of the numbers of students in each class.

10. The answers of question ten indicate that the percentage of the students of the back – seat who participate in the class, range between 10 – 30% of them. This result shows that, although there is a participation from the back seat students, but this is very weak, only 10 – 30%. In our classes, it is noticed that the weakest students used to sit at the back seats. Taska (1989, P.23) states: "it's obvious that the students at lower level where class size tends to be large, rarely have the opportunity to participate".

11. The answers of question eleven show that most of the teachers know their students names. It's well known that the first step to create friendly atmosphere inside the class, is to know the students' names. This table shows that despite the crowdedness of the classes in these schools, most of respondents know their students' names.

12. The answers of question twelve show that the highest percentage of the teachers (40%), know their students' names in the range between 10 – 30% only.

Although the previous table shows that 80% of the teachers know their students' names, but, for the researcher surprise, this table indicates the remembering of these names is very weak, (only 10 – 30%).

13. The answers of question thirteen show that 50% of the teacher have formal relationship with their students, 30% have friendly relationship, and 20% have impersonal relationship.

It's well observed in this result, that the majority of teachers (50%) have formal relationship. This may be due to the fact that, teachers have to be firm inside the class, otherwise, he will not be able to control his class.

14. The answers of question fourteen indicate that there is teacher – student interaction among all the respondents and their students. This result shows that in spite of the crowdedness of the classes, there is teacher – student interaction.

This result contrasted with researcher hypothesis which says that, as a result of the crowdedness of the large classes, there is a lack of teacher – student interaction.

15. The answers of question fifteen show the nature of the teacher student interaction in the class. The answers explain that the highest percentage 30% of the teachers direct questions to their students and students answer them. After that comes the discussion, then marking their exercise then finally comes the questions which are directed from the students to the teacher.

Anyhow, this result explains that there is many ways of interacting with students, and there is no lack of interaction.

16. The answers of question sixteen indicate that most of chairs and desks are arranged very close to each other. 10 – 20 centimeters.

It's shown from this result that there are difficulty in arranging chairs and desks in a proper way, because of the crowdedness of the class which affect the performance of the teacher inside the class as it will be shown in the answers of the following question.

17. The answers of question seventeen show that most of the teachers find difficulty in moving inside the class while only 20% can move easily. And this is because the way of arranging desks and chairs very close to each other, 10–20 cm. This difficulty affects the teacher's movement in order to follow up, check, help or mark exercise books. Another thing is that chairs, in a short time, become in a bad situation and can be broken by the bad use of the students.

18. The answers of question eighteen indicate that most of the teachers (70%) prefer to stand in front of the class, and no one moves or stands the corner. 20% of them move around, the rest of them (10%) stand in the middle of the class.

If we notice this result, it will be clear that most of the teachers prefer to stand in front of the class, and as the result of the crowdedness of the class, there will be many rows of desks and chairs, so the students at the back seats will be deprived from sharing in the activities, or of being followed up by the teacher.

19. The answers of question nineteen indicate that 80% of the teachers are able to control and manage their classes, while only 20% are not able to do that.

20. The answers of question twenty show that the highest percentage, (54.2%) of the teachers talk aloud so as to enable the students to hear them clearly. 20.8% shouting to make them keep quiet, 16.7% shouting to make them pay attention and 8.3% are indifferent to what they do.

If we examine these answers, we will find that most of the teachers spend some of the period's time shouting at the students to keep quiet or to pay attention. Some of them are forced to speak in a loud voice as to make the students at the back seats hear their voice. This effort explained from them may lead the teachers to be aggressive and very nervous in treating the students.

8. CONCLUSION

The study analysis confirms that the hypothesis is statistically justified. It's well noticed through the questionnaire that:

1. Large classes affect both teachers and students negatively.
2. Teachers are aware of this problem.

This paper concludes with these major findings:

- 1- Large classes are very noisy and uncomfortable for both teachers and students. So teachers keep shouting and speaking in a loud voice so as to enable students to hear them clearly. Some are indifferent to what the students are doing, because they are not able to control them.
- 2- Students, sometimes, cannot understand anything of what teacher says or asks them to do.
- 3- The large class environment is not suitable for teaching and learning English.

The researcher suggest that the following areas should be investigated:

- 1- Research in teaching large classes need to be reviewed so as to find the best techniques for teaching these classes.
- 2- Studies on teacher training and the use of educational technology are to be developed to help teachers to cope with this problem.

These points are recommended to be thought of:

1. More attention must be given to solve the problem of teaching English to large classes.
2. Appropriate methodology of handling large classes must be thought of as to help teachers in dealing with such a problem.

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