

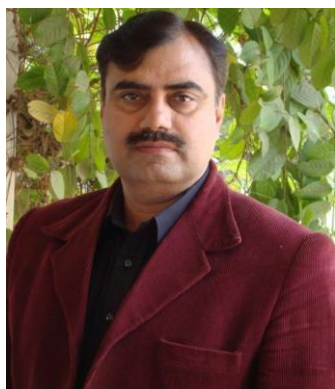
RESEARCH ARTICLE



EXPLORING STRATEGIES FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING OF PAKISTANI STUDENTS IN PUBLIC SECTOR COLLEGES

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ABSTRACT

This study is an attempt to analyze the conventional methods in large classes of public sector colleges of Lahore at the Intermediate level and suggests some alternative approaches and strategies for teachers to manage the situation of large English classes well. A survey research strategy was used for data collection. The researcher used both qualitative and quantitative research approaches for this study. The qualitative data were collected through interviews of English teachers of the colleges of the sample of the study. The quantitative data were collected through a questionnaire comprised of close-ended items retrieved from students of the sample of the study. Three public sector colleges of Lahore were taken through random sampling for the data collection. Six structured interviews of English teachers and 60 questionnaires of Intermediate students were conducted as tools for data collection. The problems which the teachers face while teaching a large class are un-inspiring atmosphere, classroom discipline, lack of resources, uninterested students, lack of individual attention, institutions without A.V. aids, wastage of time, lack of motivation and many others. But on the other hand, teachers use only lecture method to teach English throughout the academic year without bringing any change or variety in their teaching method which makes the learning passive and uninteresting. Teachers need to focus on activity based teaching, collaborative teaching, use of group work or interactive approach for better and effective results in a large language class. The government is intensely required to play a vital role for the reformation and development of the public sector colleges.

Key Words: Teaching strategies Public sector Colleges Language learning

INTRODUCTION

In this study, the researcher attempts to unveil the situation which is being faced while

teaching English language to large classes at the Intermediate level in public sector colleges in Lahore. This study relates to the real context and

existing problems of the overcrowded public sector colleges and tends to diagnose the problems faced by teachers of large classes which become a big hindrance to effective teaching. This study also attempts to embark on analyzing the conventional teaching method in large classes of public sector colleges, suggesting some alternative approaches to the management of large English classes. Many researchers agree that large classes impede the quality of teaching and learning, but there are rare studies which deal with the problems of large size English language classes in the context of our public sector colleges and give some recommendations to improve the situation. Because of the overcrowded classes, teachers do not take pains to use any other teaching method and they do not feel comfortable to move the students for the fear of discipline and wastage of time. They also lack adequate physical resources. The sedentary situation is the result of lack of proper training on the part of the teachers as well as want of adequate attention on the part of the students. According to a review of the British Higher Education System in the early 1990's (DES, 1991, cited in Gibbs & Jenkins,) reported that "the steady increase in the size of student groups has implications for methods of teaching and learning which have yet to be addressed in a systematic way" (p 70).

This study will investigate and analyze the problems of teaching English to large classes in the Public sector colleges of Lahore, and seek strategies to cope with them. Definitely, the knowledge and experience of those dealing with the situation will help to bring improvement and change in the ongoing situation. This study will also pave the way for other English language teachers who deal with large classes especially in public sector colleges and followers to work on smooth lines, using better teaching strategies and techniques for better results.

Review of Literature

This part of the research proposal presents the review of previous research studies regarding the size and problems of large classes along with the use of different teaching strategies. There are divergent opinions and no global definition on how a large the number of students should be in a so called large class. Hayes does not provide any

quantitative definition of what constitutes a large class, as perceptions of this varies from context to context (as cited in Xu,). Ward & Jenkins describe that there are institutions where we find a group of hundreds of students. Mostly, first year students of Intermediate level often report feeling overwhelmed, daunted and shocked by class sizes of 100 students or more (as cited in Herbert et al). Kumar (1992) considers large English classes as consisting between 35 and 100 students (as cited in Marcus). Large classes in the United Kingdom are ranging between 25-30 learners (Smith & Warburton), in the United States more than 35 learners (O'Sullivan), and in developing countries 60 or more learners (Valérien; Michaelowa). However, most English teachers generally agree that a language class with 50-60 or more students is large enough.

No doubt, there could be problems which are commonly perceived with the teaching of English in large classes. The problems associated with teaching in large classes can be physical, psychological and technical. There are researchers and writers who agree that large size class definitely affects the quality of language teaching and causes so many problems. Malik's study shows that "The large number of students in class is perceived by English Teachers as a major constraint (90.29%) in the effective teaching of English with students (69.75%) agreeing that the large class size constrains their efficient learning of the language (p.73). Xu is of the view regarding discipline in large classes that many teachers are worried by the physical constraints imposed by large number of students in confined classrooms.

They feel unable to promote teacher student interaction, since there is no room to move about freely and frequently than they do in small classes and they mostly have to teach standing at one place. Some teachers also feel that teaching in large classes is physically and mentally very wearing. Moreover, he points out that teachers are often worried by the disciplinary issues of large classes. They feel they are unable to control what is happening. Very often, they lose their concentration when the classes become too noisy.

Many teachers show concern that they are neglecting the needs of their students as individuals

and are unable to listen to them individually. Xu indicates in his study that psychologically some teachers feel it intimidating to face a large crowd of students, especially when they do not have much idea who their students are and what their students are expecting from them. To the teachers in large classes, students are not people but mere faces. According to Xu (2001), other problems such as monitoring attendance and checking assignments are also constantly worrying many teachers involved in a large class teaching. He stresses that teachers feel a responsibility for checking all of their students' work, and are worried if they cannot do so. If they do they cannot even justify and maintain standard. When we study different writers through the following headings given below we see that the overall situation and picture of teaching English in public sector colleges does not seem very satisfactory. Malik very clearly describes this situation in her study that teachers and students are not satisfied with the present standard of teaching of English. Both English language teachers and students are of the view that poor methods of teaching English, a faulty examination system encourages rote learning without comprehension, difficult literary texts and large size classes are major factors that constrain effective teaching and learning English. Malik sums up by saying that poor and outdated teaching methods are a major restriction to the effective teaching of English language to large classes in the colleges of Lahore. Her findings of the study show that the teaching of literary text through teaching translations into Urdu is the most frequent activity that dominates the English class in the present context. She further reveals through her study that the role of the student for the major time in the English class is a passive one. Xia describes both positive and negative aspects of teacher-centered teaching. In teacher-centered teaching students are able to get a good language model from the teacher which may improve their listening skill only. On the other hand, teacher-centered classes have its disadvantages as well. Students working in a whole group get little chance to practice or to talk at all which mars their speaking and reading skills. So, the need is for a transition to more effective communicative task based methods of teaching English.

(Michaelowa, Hanushek, as cited in Benbow and Oliver that one of the biggest problems in developing countries, faced by large classrooms, is the quality and quantity of appropriate learning resources and classroom equipment; such as benches, textbooks, blackboards, chalks, and other teaching and learning supplies. The availability of such resources and equipment can improve the achievement scores by 2-3%. Xu is of the view in his study that technically teachers have to be capable of using microphones and over head projectors to make their students listen and see clearly. "Most English language facilities in Pakistan lack audio-visual aids, which are proven to be conducive to language learning" (Warsi, 55). Malik's findings indicate that Pakistani college students have very limited resources and learning opportunities in colleges to learn English which is a compulsory subject at Intermediate level. Moreover, she states that in Pakistani public sector colleges teaching methods must be effective within local realistic limitations. Some major constraints determined in the study are the large number of students in college classes and the weak language proficiency of students in English at entry into class.

Research Methodology

This section describes the study design and data collection procedures that were given consideration in order to describe the problems in large English language classes and presenting effective teaching strategies for teachers to cope with the situation in the context of public sector institutions for boys of Lahore. Colleges for boys are specifically selected as the academic atmosphere along with discipline and other interfering factors are more important.

Research Question

What strategies should be developed for English language teaching to large classes at the intermediate level in public sector colleges of Lahore?

Aim

The aim of this study was to investigate and analyze the problems of teaching English to large classes in the public sector colleges of Lahore, and sought some teaching activities or strategies to cope with them.

Research Approach

The researcher used both qualitative and quantitative research approaches for this study. The qualitative data were collected in the form of interviews from English teachers of the colleges proposed for the study. The quantitative data were collected through a questionnaire comprised close-ended items received from the students. For the results of close-ended items of the questionnaires, quantitative approach was adopted.

Research Methodology and Tools for Data Collection

A Survey Research Strategy was used for the collection of information. For this study, structured interviews from 6 English teachers of the 3 public sector colleges of Lahore and a close-ended questionnaire from 60 students of the same colleges were conducted. Twenty students from each college filled the questionnaire through survey to collect data to carry out this research. Five-point Likert Scale was used for the students' questionnaire.

According to Milne "Questionnaires provide standardized information in an objective way from a large portion of a group"(75). The close-ended questionnaire used for this study was intended to provide quantitative information. This was distributed among students of large classes of the given colleges. It would be feasible to get data on a larger scale through questionnaires. Along with questionnaire, structured and open-ended interviews of English teachers had been taken and recorded for obtaining teachers' responses regarding large classes. Interviews with different college teachers would provide in depth analysis into their views about the problem of handling large classes. As Welington has illustrated that it is through interviews that "we can probe interviewees' thoughts, values, prejudices, perceptions, views, feelings and perspectives" (p. 71).

For this study, questionnaires and interviews were used as tools to collect truthful information. The researcher designed a questionnaire for the students of the sample of the population and conducted structured interviews of English teachers from the sample of the population of the study. Keeping in view the audience, the researcher considered both these tools appropriate to collect truthful information. Then the collected

data were transcribed and analyzed statistically through Microsoft Excel.

Population of the Study

All the 12 public sector colleges (Boys) of Lahore city comprise the whole population of the study. The number of colleges was confirmed from the office of the Directorate of Public Instructions Colleges, Punjab, Lahore.

Sample of the Study

The following 3 major colleges were taken as sample through stratified random sampling of the study for data collection, as each of them is the true representative of the authentic and reliable opinion from each side of the population of its specific area of Lahore. These colleges were taken as a sample of the study because their teachers and students have the same background and represent the true population. Furthermore, in boy's colleges the issues of discipline with reference to large classes assume a new dimension. These colleges are:

1. Government Islamia College, Railway Road, Lahore.
2. Government M.A.O. College, Lahore
3. Government College of Science, Wahdat Road, Lahore.

Two interviews from the teachers of English departments of each of the above-mentioned colleges, and 20 questionnaires from the students of Intermediate classes (level 11-12) from each college of the sample of the study were conducted for the collection of truthful information. There will be total 6 structured interviews of teachers and total 60 questionnaires of Intermediate students. After that, the collected data of the teachers' interviews were transcribed and analyzed qualitatively.

Data Analysis and Discussion

This part of the research consists of discussion of research questions of the study in the light of the data collected from students and teachers of public sector colleges of Lahore related to their use of effective strategies of teaching English to large classes at the Intermediate level. In order to describe the facts, it is necessary to discuss and contextualize the analyzed data of teachers' interviews and students' questionnaires with research questions which may lead the researcher to conclude the findings of this study.

Effects of Large classes on Teaching and Learning

All the teachers and students accept that their teaching and learning is affected respectively due to large size of class. It is obvious that a large class not only adversely affects the pedagogical process, but also the environment. Besides, a large number of students also confess that they do not learn more and better in a large class. The sheer size of class definitely hampers the learning of the students as well. In the light of the responses of the teachers, it is evident that they face disciplinary problems due to a large number of students which makes management of the class very difficult. Their most of the time is wasted to control students and taking roll calls. Even they cannot pay individual attention to the students. Teachers cannot move properly in the classroom and at the same time they have to speak very loudly in the class, because it is very difficult for the students sitting at the back benches to give proper attention, and understand the lecture in a proper way. At the same time, it has also been observed that a large class affects the mental and physical aspects of the students which impede their learning.

Overall Situation of Teaching English in Public Sector Colleges

As data show that generally the situation of teaching English in all the public sector colleges of Lahore is monotonous and uninteresting. It has also been observed that in all the colleges lecture method is the only technique used to teach English throughout the academic year. Their focus is just to cover the syllabus which makes the teaching and learning process dull, boring and ineffective for both, the teachers and students. Teachers confess that they are unable to provide satisfactory academic results, but they are able to control the discipline of the class by showing harshness to students. Moreover, in these public sector colleges, teachers have to take some disciplinary measures in order to control large classes, as a result, the classes are commonly teacher-centered where only teachers react and make the students just passive learners. Students have no participation in any activity and thus lose their motivation and show no interest in learning language.

The data also point out a very important fact that the teachers are not provided with audio

visual aids to make their teaching interesting and effective in public sector colleges. They only have black boards as teaching English aids in their colleges. The researcher also came to know that a large number of teachers agree that they need training to teach and manage such large classes. They also need to learn the use of audio visual aids and there must be lectures, seminars and workshops for teachers to tell them how to manage large classes and how to utilize these technological aids and arrange activities to teach English effectively. But unluckily, the fact is that all these things are not being practiced.

Use of Effective Strategies by English Teachers to Manage a Large Class

It is clear that majority of the teachers acknowledge that they should try to involve their students in the class through various activities like certain discussions, drills, role play, asking short questions, arranging quiz competitions and making groups of students which may improve the speaking and reading skills of students. Pulverness describes that in a large English class variety of tasks is a very effective way of engaging students with different levels of attainment and at the same time a way of maintaining their involvement. He describes through an example that it is not always necessary to set up differential tasks. For example, another kind of variety may be achieved through a process of repetition. Students can be asked to write outline notes as basis for summaries of different texts or different sections of the same text, and then, without referring back to the original text, to use their notes to report what they have read to a partner, then to other partners of the class, and so on. At each successive stage, the partner's questions and suggestions for clarification should enable students to revise and refine their oral summaries, so that they can eventually produce their own more reliable written materials.

But, in public sector colleges the focus is mainly on only listening skill and reading is done just to cram and cover the syllabus whether they understand the given task or not. However, most of the teachers agree that only teacher-centered classes are dominant in their colleges, but at the same time they do not deny the importance of students-centered teaching. They further opine that

inclination to any of the extreme may mar the effective learning in the class. It should neither be a teacher-centered class nor be a students-centered class. A few teachers argue that preference should be given to students-centered classes, so that they can involve students in activity based teaching and at the same time, they can observe the learning behaviors and responses of the students, and further they can assess their learning through activity based teaching. It seems that they are nearly favoring interactive approach and want to implement this approach to teach English in large classes but their opinions seem less practical and more verbal. In interactive approach, teaching seems teacher-centered and teacher-dominated, but teacher deliberately grants occasional opportunities to students to interact and speak either with each other or with the teacher in the classroom. On the other hand, the central role of the teacher almost disappears and students play a vital role in the learning process through their active participation (Coleman as cited in Xia). Moreover, these teaching methods provide students with emancipation from the constraints of teacher centered class, and allows them learn independently with the realization of their own ability. It can further be said that this method is a source of innovation which replaces the commonly used lecture method especially for large classes.

Recommendations and Conclusion

This part consists of recommendations for the expected improvement of the situation along with conclusions on the basis of data analysis and discussion of this study.

Recommendations

The government should open new colleges according to the ratio of ever increasing population of the city. At least, the existing condition of the building and classrooms of the public sector colleges should also be improved.

More trained English language teachers should be appointed to lessen the burden on teachers and improve the teaching quality. Teachers' training workshops should be arranged to equip the teachers with various teaching strategies and methodologies. So that they should know how to manage the class and show good results by adopting various methods of language teaching in

large classes. However, teachers should ensure the needs of students and plan these strategies accordingly.

English language teachers should promote communicative approach for language teaching by adopting activity based teaching especially in large classes. Teachers should encourage students to communicate in the class with peers and teachers as more as possible to develop their confidence and language skills.

Use of group work is another option that language teachers should exercise in their classes to meet the needs of the students and reduce the problems of discipline control, individual attention, assessment etc. They should make sure what sort of strategies or activities should be adopted according to the situation in large language classes which may prove very beneficial.

Teachers should have awareness of group dynamics. They should be skilled enough and know how to make and manage groups keeping in view the intelligence level of students, assigning leadership role, change in groups and leaders, giving chance to all by rotating the groups, distribution of work to each group member etc.

Collaborative learning is another way which should be developed in the students by the teachers to form study groups even after the class. The class teachers should provide activities and students are expected to complete the tasks with peers. Such tasks should be given to compel them to work together.

If it is possible for the Government and if its resources allow the provision of the modern tools of technology like multimedia, audio visual aids etc. to Public Sector Colleges to improve and promote the standard of language teaching. It can motivate and enhance the interest of the learners as well to meet the needs of modern era.

CONCLUSION

The study confirms that large classes that comprise of more than 50 students in public sector colleges of Lahore at the Intermediate level pose numerable problems for teachers and students to teach and learn respectively in many ways. Benbow and Oliver conclude in their report that classroom management is a sizable obstacle to many teachers. Those who teach in classes more than 50 students,

managing the learning process can become quite difficult.

It has been seen that there is no proper teacher-student interaction in a large ELT class and teachers are unable to pay individual attention to students. Only lecture method which is the traditional form of teaching has not produced any positive effects for language teaching in large ELT classes. Xia mentions that it would be neither wise nor interesting to overuse one method. In fact no method can be used at anytime, anywhere, and with anyone. Therefore, the teacher should constantly adjust his or her ways of management according to learners' needs, time and real situation. However, one thing should be kept in mind when working with a large class is to have all learners participate in the learning process during the time available, and help them become less dependent on teachers inside and outside the classroom.

The study has proved that much time is wasted by teachers just to control the disciplinary problems of the class and rest of the time is allocated to cover the syllabus through one way communication by teachers without participation of students and activity based teaching.

Deprivation of the use of technology like audio visual aids for language teachers in public sector colleges has shown a deterioration of students' motivation for effective learning. It is the need of the time for provincial and federal governments to pay heed to the recommendations proposed in the study regarding the issue.

English language teachers in public sector colleges need to attend training workshops and lecture on regular basis to perform their duties well within constraints. Gibbs & Jenkins have suggested that there is need for professional development for teachers and course managers in relation to large classes and there should also be availability of basic classroom equipment and resources for better results.

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