



# Obstacles in Teaching English to Pre-University Large Classes: A Qualitative Case Study of the Punjab (Pakistan)

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## Abstract

*The size of class has vital and pivotal significance. Teaching and learning English being an important language depends upon the size of the class. Teaching English to large classes is a phenomenon. This qualitative multiple case study has been conducted to explore the obstacles in teaching English to large classes in the Punjab (Pakistan). The study has been conducted among the Five (5) Teachers of Government College (Boys), Mianwali, Government Degree College, Kalabagh, District Mianwali and Government College Township, Lahore to determine the obstacles in teaching English to large classes. This study has shown certain obstacles i.e. teaching and learning difficulties as well as discipline conditions due to the existence of large classes. The study has recommended the suggestions to improve this condition.*

**Keywords:** Large Classes, Teaching English, Learning, Pre-University students, Size of the Classes.

## 1. Introduction

Teaching and Learning depend upon the size of classes. Particular English teachers have been facing challenges in teaching to large classes in the context, like Pakistan, where English is in practice for lingua franca, compulsory subject from school to higher education, international communizing language, official language and medium of instructions. For these reasons, the significance of English in Pakistani context cannot be ignored. Not only Pakistan, but also other countries like Saudi Arabia, Egypt and India are creating problems for the English teachers to cope with increasing size of their classes (Bahanshal, 2013). The size of the classes does not matter for the English teachers but this gives and creates obstacles in way of better and judicious teaching. The researchers of Pakistani context have admitted that in spite of huge effort by the English teachers, the failure rate in the subject of English is increasing day by day (i.e. Abbas, 1998; Mansoor, 2003; Mansoor, 2004; Memon, Joubish, & Khurram, 2010). According to Bahanshal, (2013), large classes themselves are not problematic but these require preparation and strategy to cope with them. Bahanshal (2013) has given guidelines to the English teachers like assigning and grouping the students according to their ability and academic requirements in small groups to manage them but this is neither issue nor solution to this problem. Pakistani teachers are facing obstacles (Memon et al., 2010). Besides teachers' issues, there are other related issues which Pakistani educational system is facing problems (Malik et al., 2014).

The purpose of this paper is to look on the obstacles being faced by the English teachers to teach English to large classes. The focus of this paper is to analyze the obstacles faced by the English teachers who are teaching Grade 11 and Grade 12 Students, Male and Female both in Public Sector

institutions. In Pakistan, in private and public sector both, there are Higher Secondary Schools, Intermediate Colleges and also Degree colleges are going to conduct Grade 11 and Grade 12 Classes. According to GoP (2013), the 4,480 higher secondary schools and inter colleges in Pakistan which are imparting education facilities to the students. The total share of these institution is 2% in overall educational system of Pakistan. This report shows that there are 1,492 institutes at higher secondary level which is 33% of total. The enrolment rate is 1.246 million of toata 1.106 million which is 89% is found in public sector institutions of Pakistan. This indicates that total 95,974 teachers are employed in higher secondary and inter college's level of teaching of Pakistan. The 40,767 (42%) are at work in the public sector. This data shows that the number of students is increasing in the public sector colleges.

## 2. Definitions of Obstacles

Simply speaking, obstacle is a term which can be defined as a thing that occurs in way of progress. This is a type of obstruction which stands in way of advancement of anything. The actions towards the development are blocked and hindered. However, here this term has been used as problems and issues while teaching English as a subject to the Pre-University or Intermediate Students of Pakistani educational setting in public sector colleges. According to Eastern (2003, P. 69), "a large class as one in which characteristics and conditions present themselves as inter-related and collective constraints that impede meaningful teaching and learning". According to (Guide, n.d.), a large class comprises of 100 students but according to it there is no fixed and limited size regarding the definition of large class. At hand there is no universal explanation of what establishes a big class. The collected works, for instance, according to Smith and Warburton (1997) large classes are as fluctuating from 25 to 30 students in the United Kingdom and more than 35 students in the US (i.e. O'Sullivan, 2006), and 60 or extra students in unindustrialized countries (Valérien, 1991; Michaelowa, 2001).

### 2.1 Obstacles reflected in the empirical studies

The size of English classes in any educational context or setting has been a crucial concern for the teachers (Eastern, 2003). However, a teacher is bound and mentally prepared to cope with the class of any size but large classes, crowded and more than usual creates problems and obstacles in way of teaching and learning. The sizes of the classes are increasing because there is high demand of getting education while the stakeholders have failed to provide the teaching facilities and accommodate this increasing enormous number of the students in classes. Cooperative learning strategy has been recommended by Nan (2014) but feasibility and effectiveness also have been suggested. This suggests that there is no harm with the large classes but the issue is to provide reasonable teaching and learning to the students. This situation becomes more distressing where English is being taught and learnt as English as a Second Language (ESL) and even it becomes more worst in the contexts like Pakistan where the teachers and students are facing multilingualism.

With the prodigious expansion of higher instruction in China, the amount of college undergraduates has moved out up at an irresistible amount in the previous fifteen years. This largely becomes a lack of English teachers and students number upsurge. This is incredible for most of universities and colleges in China to form small classes with the perfect class size of less than 30 pupils for English language instruction and learning and so great classes with more than 45 students adapt unavoidable (Nan, 2014). Teaching to big classes is supposed to be a major impairment in providing excellence teaching. These classes posture encounters not only to beginner teachers but also to numerous well knowledgeable educators who are having deficiency the knowledge of the services and policies that can be used to make the education of large classes in effect (Ara & Hossain, 2016). According to Ara and Hossain (2016), this is due to socio-economic factors of developing countries like Bangladesh. Such large classes are creating problems like disorganization, unrest and indiscipline in the institutions.

In this way, the countries like Vietnam education budget are very low which cannot provide more teachers to teach increasing large classes. In this situation, however, a teacher has to teach in every respect (Ky, 2002). A study conducted by Bahanshal (2013) has found that Saudi Secondary School teachers are facing numerous problems in teaching English as Foreign Language (EFL) to the students due to alarming large classes. This study has shown that in spite of huge input by the English teachers, the result in the subject of English has been dismal. The paper presented by Renaud, Tannenbaum, and Stantial (2007) has provided the information that there are more than 78 students in a small room which creates problems to teach. This informs that the room is too small to enable a teacher to move around the students to give them proper attention. According to this article, the teachers have reported to teach classes of more than 200 students. Renaud, Tannenbaum, and Stantial (2007) have reported that the teachers in a workshop have idealized a class of consisting of 25 students. This is very challengeable to teach large classes (Nakabugo et al., 2006).

In the context of Asia large classes have become a critical issue where the students are more in comparison with the availability of teacher (Office Bangkok, Bureau for Education in Asia, & Pacific, 2014). This is very interesting that even in some countries students' number from 25 to 35 are considered to be large but in some context this is normal size of the classes. However, it depends upon the teachers themselves who can take and interpret themselves. Actually it also depends upon the nature of a subject to be taught and learnt in an educational institution. As English is compulsory subject in Pakistani educational setting from Grade 1 to onward higher education, so, Pakistani English teacher is usually facing obstacles in teaching to these large classes.

### **3. Problem**

The English teachers are teaching English as a compulsory subject to the pre-university students in Punjab (Pakistan). English is not only a compulsory subject but also as a second language (ESL), medium of instructions and official language in Pakistan. Although in recent years, Urdu (National Language) has been declared to be its official language and the process is going on to give it the status of medium of instructions yet still this progression is in its infancy. The Pakistani English teachers and students are bewildered in this situation. Not only that but they are facing many obstacles which is creating an outlandish and bizarre scenario in educational institutions of Pakistan.

The large English classes are challenging for Pakistani English College Teachers. This challenge is widely affecting teaching and learning both in Pakistani context. Beyond the conventional size, the large classes are influencing the educational situation in the developing countries like Pakistan. The researchers like Sullivan (2006) agree that such large classes affect the assessment and examination procedures of the students. In comparison with large classes, it is very easy to assess the small size of a class of the students. This has become a problematic issue among the college English teachers in Punjab (Pakistan). Thus, this paper is an attempt to explore the obstacles among these teachers who are teaching these large classes.

### **4. Methodology**

The researchers have adopted a qualitative case study for the exploration of the obstacles for teaching English being faced by the teachers in a Pakistani context. According to Yin (2009a, p.18), "An empirical inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon (e.g. a "case"), set within its real-world context- especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident". Thus, it is clear that the researchers have conducted this current case study to examine the context and other related complexity of the issue of obstacles in teaching to large English classes which have become necessary to understand. The researchers have conducted multiple case studies as the attempt has been made to explore the cases in various context of the Punjab (Pakistan). According to Yin's (2012) approach, this is an exploratory case study as this has tried to explore the obstacles.

#### **4.1 Participants**

The researchers have adopted purposeful sampling strategy because according to Creswell (2013), this technique is helpful in identification of the themes and cross case analysis. Creswell (2013) has recommended 4 to 5 purposeful sampling; therefore, the researchers have selected Five (5) purposeful sampling as following.

- Two teachers from Government College (Boys) Mianwali (i.e. Prof. Abdul Ghaffar Khan Khattak & Prof. Nasir Iqbal)
- One teacher from Government Degree College Kalabagh (i.e. Prof. Zafar Khan Niazi)
- Two teachers from Government College Township, Lahore (i.e. Prof. Muhammad Saeed Malik & Prof. Muhammad Zubair Virk)

#### **4.2 Research questions**

The following are Three (3) main research questions.

1. What are your views about the size of the class?
2. What obstacles you have been/are facing to teach large class/classes?
3. What do you recommend about the size of class?

#### **4.3 Research instrument**

The semi-structured interviews consisting of open ended questionnaire items have been conducted. Approximately, the duration of interviews is from 30 to 45 minutes. The interviews have been recorded audio and transcribe by the researchers.

#### **4.4 Data analysis procedure**

The researchers have adopted Content Analysis approach for the data analysis. The interviews have been transcribed and after making codes, the themes have been made.

### **5. Findings**

As mentioned earlier, according to the multiple case study approach, this study has been conducted in various sites to collect the data. The followings are the findings as obtained from the sites of the study.

#### **5.1 Government College (Boys), Mianwali**

Prof. Abdul Ghaffar Khan of English Department has been teaching English since last 32 years. He has a vast experience of teaching English to all levels. Currently, he is teaching English to the students of the Campus of University of Sargodha (UOS), in Mianwali. According to his views about the size of class, he says:

*“The English being a compulsory subject and also for other socio-economic reasons, the size of the classes is enormously increasing. I have taught large classes more than 150 students in open ground because those students could not be accommodated in a small room. But, I have seen that no individual attention could be given to each student in such situation”.*

He has expressed his response to the second question that he has been facing obstacles in teaching large classes as he could not examine the assignments of the students daily due to shortage and more students in the class. He has recommended that an ideal English class should be between 50 to 60 students.

Prof. Nasir Iqbal is teaching English since last 20 years and he is Assistant Professor of English and also HOD (Head of Department of English) at Government College (Boys) Mianwali. He says about his views of the size of the class:

*“An English class’s size be ideal and size or number of the students does not matter but an English teacher should be given all necessary facilities to teach”.*

He tells that no doubt there is difficult to teach large class which crosses and beyond the control of teacher. According to him the English class size should be from 60 to 70.

### **5.2 Government Degree College, Kalabagh (Distt. Mianwali)**

Prof. Zafar Khan Niazi is teaching in Government Degree College Kalabagh (Distt. Mianwali) for a duration of 10 years. He says:

*“I have no problem with any size of class. I can control and tackle the students by involving them in various learning activities. However, I feel comforted in a good size of a class because I can give them proper individual attention to them”.*

According to him he has never experienced to teach large class and he recommends that a class size should be from 20 to 30 students.

### **5.3 Government College Township, Lahore**

Prof, Malik Muhammad Saeed is teaching English since last 22 years. He has been teaching English in various Colleges of Punjab (Pakistan). He says:

*“He has no problem whatever the size of class but the issue is the duration of time. The English period should be at least One Hour because he has experienced that if a teacher has enough time with full determination and teachings will, he or she can teach better”.*

He says that he has an ideal class size in his college which comprises of 60 students. He says that English class size of maximum 60 students at a time.

Prof. Muhammad Zubair Virk is an energetic young English teacher. He says:

*“He has been lucky that in Government College Township, Lahore he is teaching English to the classes which are ideal consisting of 60 students. However, he has been teaching in Government College Pattoki, but there was no matter but he had to travel from Lahore to Pattoki which created obstacles for him”.*

According to Prof. Muhammad Zubair Virk the ideal size of the class is from 60 to 70 students.

## **6. Discussion**

Based on the findings which have been collected through the semi-structured interviews with open ended questionnaire item, the following points of discussion have been emerged.

1. The study has shown that the teachers vary about the size of the class. This range varies from 30 to 70 students. This study has shown consistency with the researchers (i.e. Eastern, 2003; Nan, 2014) that the size of the classes varies from context to context.
2. The study also shows consistency with the empirical studies (i.e. Bahanshal ,2013; Renaud, Tannenbaum & Stantial ,2007) that large classes beyond a limit create obstacles for a teacher as well as a student which greatly affects the teaching and learning process.
3. This study has shown that large classes are creating obstacles as unrest among the students, indiscipline in the educational institutions and inconvenience for assessing the students.

## **7. Recommendations**

The study recommends the following.

- The size of English class should comprise the number of students which can be controlled.
- The size of a class should be lowest as a teacher can teach better.
- The English teachers should be given all teaching facilities to teach the students.
- The duration of English classes should be increased to meet the learning needs of the students.

- The Education Department should provide a reasonable ratio of English teachers to the Colleges.
- Especially in the remotest areas like Mianwali, government should provide teaching and learning facilities to the students to avoid their inconvenience which create their travelling costs for their education.
- The students of the remotest areas like Mianwali should be given financial scholarships to continue their education.

## 8. Conclusion

This study has concluded that large classes of English are creating obstacles not only for teachers but also for the learners. The size of class very much affects the process of teaching and learning. The large classes are also creating discipline matters for the educational institutions in Pakistan. This study has recommended the suggestions to improve the conditions especially in the remotest areas like Mianwali District (Distt.).

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