

*Opinions on English Teaching Large Classes as Perceived by English Teachers at
Burapha University*

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Abstract

English is not official language for Thailand, but Thai must use it as global language. Thai students need to improve their weak English proficiency for communication in the global context. The significant weakness of improvement is that there are not enough English teachers for overwhelming students who are increasing continually due to the Thai population growth. The way to solve this problem is conducting the class with large group of students, containing more than 60. Therefore, the objective of the study is to study English teachers' perception of teaching large classes in Burapha University to improve English teaching in Burapha University. The subjects were 35 English teachers teaching English with more than 60 students in the class. The research was conducted using a questionnaire. The data was analyzed by using frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. The results of the research could be divided into five aspects. The first aspect was that English teacher teaching in large classes didn't worry about teaching preparation. The second aspect was it was difficult for teachers to get to know their students well in large classes. The next aspect was that teaching large classes causes difficulty in class management. The fourth one was teaching large classes affected teaching techniques because of limited time and a large number of students in each class. And the last aspect was teaching large classes caused difficulty in assessment.

Introduction

To be an competitive country in Asia, Thai students must be prepared by enhancing their English language proficiency because English is the international language that is widely used throughout the world . According to National Statistical Office, Thai population continues growing. This means that Thai students who must be prepared in English proficiency are increasing too. As the number of English learners is increasing, the number of English teachers is still limited.

The educational institutes in Thailand try to solve this problem. Burapha University, the famous university in the East of Thailand, solved this problem with reorganizing class size. There are more than 60 students in each class. On one hand, it could solve this problem. The limited amount of English teachers could teach the increased number of students English. On the other hand, it may not be desirable because it may bring about difficulty in classroom management.

English teachers in Burapha University teach more than 60 students in each class. And the teachers have to conduct the class as effectively as they can. The study can express what their opinions on teaching in large classes are. These can be applied to effectively manage English classes in Burapha University.

Literature Review

Large Classes

The definition of large class depends on subjects and teacher's experience. English is the subject that focuses on interaction between teachers and students. It should not be taught in too many students class. From 108 secondary teachers surveyed in Bangkok, teachers feel that their classes are large if the average student in class is 42.57. (Sathit Wattanapokhakul, 2006)

Todd (2006) states that the large class could not be defined by only the amount of students because there still are three factors in defining the word "large class". The three factors are teachers' experience, content of the subject, and another factor; such as the size of classroom, learners' motivation, education level, and the students' age. Although the definition of the word "large class" is still controversial, the result of 14 studies conducted from 1976 to 1999 showed that the amount of 40-60 students in the class as the large class.

For Thailand, Shinokul (2006) points out that Thai higher education faces the problem of the amount of students in foundation classes which are 40-60 students. One thing that is happening right now is the universities have to conduct the class with a large number of students mostly in foundation course.

The size of class and Learning

There are many studies tried to survey the effect of class size on learning of students, and the result of the studies were showed in two ways. Some claimed that class size affected on students' learning, but some showed that it didn't. The result of the study from Central Institute of English & Foreign Languages Hyderabad in India showed

that activities, teachers' attitude, and teachers' role are more likely to affect on students' participation than class size. Kumar (1992)

For mathematics, large class affects students' performance in negative way, and this effect doesn't happen in Language subject. Pada, Ponzo&Scoppa (2009)

Peter(2003) proposes that large class with more than 30 students, teachers must take long time to attract students' attention to assignments in class. Teachers think the advantage of small class is good interaction between teachers and students. Teacher can know her students' background well. This can enable teachers to focus the suitable content for each student. It's hard to do this in large classes.

The problem of large class to teachers

Gibbs& Jenkins (1992) points out six aspects of large class problem to teachers. There are relationship building, class management, teaching methods, evaluation, resources, and health problem. Todd (2006) concludes the problem from teaching in large classes in 7 aspects; learning problem, class management and activities in class, physical problem, mental factor, students' reaction problem, evaluation and students' acceptance, and other problem.

Coleman (1987) presents the result of study that surveyed teachers' attitude in English class with 109 students in Nigeria. The questions in the questionnaire are divided into nine topics. They are individual attention, class management, evaluation, difficulty of teachers, materials preparation, limited physical factor, teaching and learning efficiency, interaction between teachers and students, and miscellaneous. The result of the study shows that there are three difficulties in teaching in large class. They are individual attention, class management, and evaluation.

The study

The present study proposed the English teachers' opinion on English Teaching Large Classes at Burapha University. This brings about the useful information to improve teaching in English foundation classes efficiently. The details of the study were divided into four steps. The first step is participants choosing. Then the questionnaire as the tool of the study was designed. The next step was data collecting. And the finally, the collected data were analyzed.

Participants

The study took place in Burapha University, and all 35 English teachers who taught English I in the first semester of 2011 academic year were participants. All classes of these teachers contained more than 60 students.

Research tool

The questionnaire as a tool of the study was designed by the researcher. The processes of the questionnaire building were studying related research and document, designing questionnaire, and proposing the questionnaire to specialists to evaluate content validity by using IOC (Index of item objective congruence)

There were three parts in the questionnaire. The first part was individual information of participants; gender, age, the ideal amount of students in their class, the real amount of students in their class, and their experience in English teaching.

The second part of the questionnaire was four level satisfaction questions in five aspects. They are satisfaction aspect, interaction between teachers and students, class management, teaching techniques, and evaluation.

The last part of the questionnaire was four opened questions. These questions brought about the participants' opinions on teaching English in large classes.

Data analysis

The data analysis of the first part of the questionnaire showed that the participants were 11 men (31.43%) and 24 women. (68.57%) There were 15 participants whose age between 20-30 years. (42.86%) There were 13 participants whose age between 31-40 years. (37.14%) There was 1 participant whose age between 41-50 years. (2.86%) And There were 6 participants whose age more than 51 years. (17.14%)

Table 1 The data analysis about teachers' opinions on effect of teaching in large classes

Aspects in analysis	Mean SD
1. Satisfaction	
1.1 You are always ready to teach English in English 1.	3.37 ± 0.65
1.2 You are worried about teaching in large class.	2.54 ± 0.82
1.3 Lecturing in front of large class makes you nervous.	1.74 ± 0.78
1.4 Teaching in large class makes you more tired than teaching in small class	3.11 ± 0.72
2. Interaction between teachers and students	
2.1 You can remember your all students' faces and names.	2.03 ± 0.86
2.2 Your students can participate in class very well.	2.26 ± 0.78
2.3 Your students are confident to answer your questions in class.	2.20 ± 0.47
2.4 You know and understand your all individual students' problem well.	2.03 ± 0.66
2.5 You have an opportunity to give your students advice.	2.11 ± 0.72
3. Class management	
3.1 Your class size is suitable for the amount of your students.	1.97 ± 0.79
3.2 You can walk around the class to monitor students during teaching conveniently.	2.26 ± 0.74
3.3 The atmosphere in your class is good.	2.03 ± 0.71
3.4 Your students obey you.	2.77 ± 0.81
4. Teaching techniques	
4.1 You can assign your students writing task as	2.34 ± 0.84

	often as you want.	
4.2	You can assign your students pronunciation task as often as you want.	2.40 ± 0.91
4.3	Your student can often practice listening skill.	2.86 ± 0.77
Aspects in analysis		Mean SD
4.4	Your students have an opportunity to practice conversation task.	2.14 ± 0.77
4.5	Your students have an opportunity to discuss in the class.	2.23 ± 0.69
4.6	You assign your students both in class and out class exercises.	3.00 ± 0.64
4.7	You always ask your students questions to know if they understand what you teach.	3.06 ± 0.76
4.8	You always assign your students both in class and out class group assignment.	2.31 ± 0.87
4.9	You can use material in class as often as you want.	3.09 ± 0.70
5. Evaluation		
5.1	You correct all your students' assignments by yourself.	3.31 ± 0.99
5.2	You assign your students to correct their homework by themselves.	2.17 ± 0.92
5.3	You have an opportunity to advise your students about their writing assignment as often as you want.	2.09 ± 0.61
5.4	You have an opportunity to advise your students about their pronunciation as often as you want.	2.51 ± 0.98
5.5	You always assign your students to do subjective exercises and you correct them by yourself.	2.17 ± 0.75
5.6	You always assign your students to do multiple choices exercises and you correct them by yourself.	2.11 ± 0.80
5.7	Correcting students' assignment is convenient.	2.71 ± 1.02
5.8	Grading is convenient.	2.89 ± 0.93

Remark 1 = very low 2 = low 3 = high 4 = very high

Findings and discussion

Through the analysis of the data, the opinions of English teachers who taught in large class with more than 60 students in Burapha University were divided into five aspects. The first aspect was satisfaction. Teaching in large class didn't make teachers nervous because they prepared their teaching very well, but it made them more tired than teaching in small class. This finding conformed with Coleman(1987).

Interaction between teachers and students in large class was not as good as small class. Teachers couldn't remember their all students' faces and names. This might be unfair environment. Teachers could not give advice to all their students as much as they should do.

Teachers thought that teaching in large class at Burapha University was not convenient because the size of the classroom was not suitable. The classroom size and the amount of students in the classroom was not balance. To do some activities and class management in the unsuitable size classroom were not convenient.

Teaching in large class could stimulate students to answer the questions in class much more. This made students understand the content deeply. Giving assignments and students' discussion hardly happened in large class because these took too long time. Teacher might not teach as much content as they want. This result of the study conforms with the study of Darawong & Srimavin (2006).

Although there were a lot of students in large class, teachers corrected their students' assignment by themselves. This was good for their students.

Conclusion

English teacher teaching in large classes at Burapha University didn't worry about teaching preparation, but it was difficult for teachers to get to know their students well in large classes. Teaching large classes causes difficulty in class management. Teaching in large classes affected teaching techniques because of limited time and a large number of students in each class. Teaching large classes caused difficulty in assessment too.

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