

## Problems Faced by the Teachers of a Large Class in Imparting Writing Skills at the Tertiary Level

B. Ramya Devi, M.A. (English), PGDTE, (M.Phil.)

=====

### Abstract

In India, the greatest challenge in the field of English language teaching remains the teaching of language skills. It is indeed surprising that after studying English for 12-15 years, the students fail to correctly express themselves in writing. This paper discusses the role of classroom size in second language teaching, problems confronted by a language teacher in imparting writing skills and possible solutions.

**Key words:** writing skill, large classes, tertiary level competence, teaching skills

### Classroom - Definition

Classroom is the place where organized teaching and learning takes place. In ESL (English as a second language) it is especially important as the learning of a second language demands more “comprehensible input” (Krashen1975), error treatment and language interaction.

As soon as the word ‘classroom’ is mentioned, the immediate thought comes to mind is about the size and strength of the classroom i.e. (how many students are there in the class?). This is because of the reason that second language learning is a skill subject where the skills of language have to be actively practiced by the learner, if they are to be mastered and effectively used. He must ensure that the learners understand what they are asked to do, providing at times even the necessary linguistic items they need for various activities. While the students are engaged in various communicative activities, he can monitor their strengths and weaknesses. This enables him to determine the area of their weakness which he must cater for later.

At this point the ‘largeness’ of a class size poses seemingly unsurmountable problems.

## **Large Class**

A study on the effect of class size on teaching in a second language classroom has been carried out for a very long time (Fleming 1959; Siegel et al. 1960; Ryan, Greenfield and Barr 1975; Lindbloom 1977; Glass et al. 1978, Smith and Glass 1980; Shapson et al. 1980; Fieldman 1984; McGeel 1986, 1991; McKeachie 1986; Bolton 1988; Gibbs and Jenkins 1992).

A major part of research done on the issue of class size and second language learning and teaching (Forrester 1968; Long 1977; Coleman 1989; Nolasco and Arthur 1986, 1988; Duppenhaler 1991; Gaudart 1991; George 1991; Safnil 1991; Sarwar 1991) aimed at helping teachers teach effectively in a large class.

‘Large’ is of course a relative term, and what a ‘large class’ is will vary from a teacher to teacher. Some think 15 as large and 20 as unteachable. Some teachers think 60 as an ideal size and teachable. A study done by the team of the Lancaster-Leeds “Language learning in large classes research project” (project no. 4 of Coleman et al., 1989) indicates that an average perception of the large class may be around 50 learners. Probably, however, the exact number does not really matter: what matters is how the teacher sees the class size in his own specific situation.

The following are some of the problems faced by a teacher in a second language large classroom:

### **Pedagogical problems**

- The practice in language skills of speaking and writing would be difficult to carry out.
- It would be difficult for a class teacher to monitor and give feedback on the learners’ performance.
- There could be problems for providing individual learning.

### **Management problems**

- Correcting and returning assignments.
- Maintaining discipline problems.
- Difficulty in attending to all students during class time.

### **Affective problems**

**Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 **16:4 April 2016**

B. Ramya Devi, M.A. (English), PGDTE, (M.Phil.)

Problems Faced by the Teachers of a Large Class in Imparting Writing Skills at the Tertiary Level

- Difficulty in learning learners' names.
- Impossibility of establishing good rapport with learners.
- Inability to pay special attention to disadvantaged learners.

### **A Preview on teaching writing:**

Writing is the representation of language in a textual medium through the use of a set of signs or symbols. Written communicational skills are central to learning though speech has been placed above writing. They require more individual effort than speaking. Whether in academic life, in the workplace or in personal life, they offer a powerful advantage in a world in which people must constantly absorb new information.

By putting together concepts and solving problems, the writer engages in “a two-way interaction between continuously developing knowledge and continuously developing text” (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987:12). Indeed academic writing requires conscious effort and practice in composing, developing, and analysing ideas. Writing in second language requires a more complex mental effort: the learners have to concentrate on both the meaning as well as production of ideas.

### **Some common practices of writing**

The sub skills of writing that are relevant to English in higher studies are:

- Note making.
- Note taking.
- Narrating personal experiences
- Dialogue writing
- Paragraph writing and
- Writing a news paper report

These skills are largely role-based. The teacher should provide the learner with ample opportunities for writing. The teacher should explain the tasks and allow the learners to work on similar tasks either in groups or individually. These tasks which produce letters or paragraphs or reports or essays help the learner to improve his writing.

In recent years two different views on the nature of writing have emerged:

**Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 **16:4 April 2016**

B. Ramya Devi, M.A. (English), PGDTE, (M.Phil.)

Problems Faced by the Teachers of a Large Class in Imparting Writing Skills at the Tertiary Level

- Product approach
- Process approach

David Nunan (1989:36) very clearly defines what approach is, when he says, ‘The product approach to writing focuses on the end result of the act of composition-i.e., the letter, essay, story and so on’. The writing teacher who subscribes to the product approach will be concerned to see that the end product is readable grammatically correct and obeys discourse conventions relating to main points and supporting details. The focus in class will be on copying and imitation carrying out sentences expansions from cue words and developing sentences and paragraphs from models of various sorts.

A process approach on the other hand is whole class activity, where the teacher is a facilitator, a friend, and a guide, who provides supportive atmosphere throughout the whole act of writing, right from the generating of ideas stage through the different drafts till the preparation of the final draft. A teacher can impart writing skills to his learners by using both the product and process approach.

### **Objectives of the study**

In India, the greatest challenge in the field of English language teaching remains the teaching of writing skills. It is indeed surprising that after studying English for 12-15 years, the students fail to correctly express themselves in writing. The errors though marked in red, are not discussed at length with the learners or if the teacher do discuss the errors, they often give the correct answers without any reason, because of the constraints placed on the teachers due to lack of time and the large class size.

Students are given topics for letter writing, report writing, precis writing, paraphrasing and are asked to write without first providing adequate guidance. The only guidance they get is on format. The teacher fails to focus on purpose or reader awareness which is a part of process approach.

Giving feedback on a learner’s piece of writing is another problem faced by a teacher in a large class. He has to focus both on meaning related aspects and code related aspects while evaluating a script. So, the objectives of the study are as follows:

- To find out the problems confront by a language teacher in imparting writing skills.

- To suggest the ideal class room size for teaching writing skills in English.

Based on the objective, the following questions are answered:

1. What are the problems a language teacher face in large classrooms?
2. What is the ideal class room size for teaching writing skills in second language?

## **Methodology**

In the study the researcher used two tools to collect the data. The type of the tools and the purposes of using them are given below:

- Teacher's questionnaire.
- Informal interviews with teachers.

## **Selection of samples**

The college teachers (n=6) were selected on the basis of their experience of teaching English to the tertiary level classes.

## **Preparation of questionnaires and interviews**

The questions in all the questionnaire were set in such a way that the information sought should be specific, unambiguous and accurate. Hence, objective type questions like Yes/No, marking the preference, and provision for free responses at the end of each important section was made in the questionnaire. We did not include many open-ended questions because we assumed that respondents need appropriate clues to clarify their thoughts and attitudes towards a particular issue. Therefore, we provided clues through forced choice questions.

Similarly interviews were used keeping in mind the important reference points of our study.

## **Objectives of the Teacher's questionnaire and interviews**

The teacher questionnaire consists of 7 questions out of which 4 are close ended questions and 3 are open ended questions. The purpose behind administering the questionnaire to the teacher is as follows:

- To understand the teacher's profile.
- To get the teacher's opinion on the size of the classroom and its effects on second language teaching.

A detailed description of the objectives of formulating specific questions in teacher's questionnaire follows:

Question 1-3 of part I aim at building the profile of the teachers in terms of name, teaching experience and educational qualification. Question 4-6 of part II deals with collecting data about the teacher's opinions on the classroom size. Question 7-9 of part III based on questions related to the impact of a large class on writing skills. Question 10 of part IV aims at collecting data about some possible ways of dealing writing skills in large classes.

Similarly personal interviews with our identified subjects were combined with the administration of questionnaires. The purpose was to get their affective reactions to the issue of large classes, and also to fill in the 'gaps' deliberately felt in the questionnaire, so as to seek elaborate comments of the teachers on particular aspects of language learning large classes.

### **Analysis of the teacher's questionnaire**

The analysis is carried out on the questionnaires that were administered to 6 teachers of English in 2 colleges under study.

Part I of the teacher's questionnaire comprises 3 questions which discuss about the profile of teachers. The profile includes names, teaching experience and educational qualification. All the 6 teachers are post graduates. All the teachers have English teaching experience for more than 2 years.

Part II has 3 questions out of which first two questions are close-ended and last question is open-ended.

Question 1 of this part attempts to collect information from the teachers whether the size of the class affects teaching English or not. All the 6 teachers responded that, the size of the classroom does affect teaching English.

Question 2 of this part tries to collect information from the teachers whether a large classroom affects the teaching of English or a small classroom affects the teaching of English. All the teachers responded that a large classroom affects teaching of English.

Question 3 of this part attempts to get responses from the teachers regarding the problems they face in a large class. The response to this question from all the teachers can be summed up as –they find that it is difficult for a single teacher to handle students of different educational, social and economic backgrounds. He/she cannot take care of a child and feedback cannot be given. One to one interaction is not possible.

Part III-This part has 3 questions out of which two questions are close-ended and one question is open-ended. All questions are based on the impact of a large class on writing skill.

Question 1 of this part enquires to know from the teachers whether writing skill gets less attention in the large class or not. All the teachers said that writing skill receive less attention in a large class.

Question 2 attempts to get the response from the teachers that ‘why writing skill needs more attention in large class?’ The response to this question from all the sections can be summed up as- they said that English is a second language which has restricted atmosphere to use the language. So, the role of feedback plays a vital role. In a large class, a teacher cannot handle all the students equally. It impacts students’ learning. Even that is important stage of learning. So, the role of a teacher and feedback play crucial role in order to improve students’ proficiency.

Question 3 attempts to get the response from the teachers that at which level they face difficulty in handling writing in a large class either at conducting assessment or at giving instructions. The response to this question from all the six teachers can be summed up as- They find difficulty both at the level of assessment and giving instructions.

Part IV- This part has one question which is open ended. The question in this part attempts to gather information from the teachers regarding the reasonable ways of teaching writing skills in a large class. The response to this question from all the six teachers can be summed up as follows-They find that few strategies like peer/group discussions, brain storming will be helpful. Proper feedback and comprehension should be given to learner.

Though they are difficult to handle in large class, if a teacher is creative and come up with proper planning and handouts(supplementary material) then large class will become a boon to both the learner and teacher.

### **Findings of the study**

It has been found from the present study that classroom size plays a key role in second language teaching. If the classroom size increases it will create more problems to a language teacher. He/she cannot give or pay more attention to writing skill which indeed needs more attention because of its complexity. A learner always expects proper feedback from his/her teacher which a teacher fails to give because of the largeness of the class size.

### **Suggestions**

Group work/pair work can be introduced in large classes. Interactive writing allows students to share the pen with the teacher.

Peer-correction can be a time saving and useful technique, students can work on their first drafts, giving each other feedback on content, language and organization; they then rewrite and give in the final draft to the teacher.

---

---

### **References**

#### **Works cited:**

Bereiter C. & Scardamalia M. (1987). *The psychology of written composition*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Coleman, Hywel. Approaches to the Management of Large Classes. ERIC Document. Lancaster-Leeds Language Learning in Large Classes Research Project, 1989.

Krashen S.D. (1975). *The Input Hypothesis: Issues and implications*. London: Longman.

Nunan David (1989). *Designing Tasks for the Communicative classroom*. Cambridge University Press.

#### **Works consulted:**

**Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 **16:4 April 2016**

B. Ramya Devi, M.A. (English), PGDTE, (M.Phil.)

Problems Faced by the Teachers of a Large Class in Imparting Writing Skills at the Tertiary Level



Baker, Joanna (2006). *The English Language Teacher's Handbook: How to Teach Large Classes with Few Resources*. London: Continuum.

Bearne, Eve (2003). *Making Progress in Writing*. London: Routledge Falmer.

Carbone, Elisa (1998). *Teaching Large Classes: Tools and Strategies*. London: Sage Publications.

Donn, Byrne (1979). *Teaching Writing Skills*. New York: Longman Group Ltd.

Fisher, Douglas (2007). *Checking for Understanding: Formative Assessment Techniques for your Classroom*. Alexandria: ASCD

Hess, Natalie (2001). *Teaching Large Multilevel Classes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mathew, Rama (1988). *Resource Books for Teachers: Just write Tasks for Teacher Development*. Hyderabad: CIEFL.

Newble, David (1989). *A Handbook for Teachers in Universities*. London: Kogan page.

Nolasco, Rob, Lois Arthur (1989). *Large Classes*. London: Macmillan.

Penny Ur (1991). *A Course in Language Teaching: Practice and Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Watkins, Chris (2005). *Classrooms as a Learning Communities*. London: Routledge.

=====

B. Ramya Devi, M.A. (English), PGDTE, (M.Phil.)  
Assistant Professor  
Anil Neerukonda Institute of Technology & Sciences  
Sangivalsa 531 162  
Visakhapatnam District  
Andhra Pradesh  
India  
[ramyadevi.bommanaboina@yahoo.com](mailto:ramyadevi.bommanaboina@yahoo.com)