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Teaching Compulsory English to Large Classes in India

Solanki Gopalkrishna Ramjibhai

Abstract

It is widely admitted that teaching English to a large class has certain disadvantages over a small class. But in many schools even universities in India, large class teaching is still a common practice. English teachers in many universities in India often have a lot of teaching difficulties and problems. Therefore, it is necessary for those teachers to understand the main principles and learn some basic strategies for large class English teaching in order to improve their teaching. This paper aims to suggest some guidelines for large class EFL teachers.

English Classes are Large

In recent years more and more students have been enrolled in many colleges. At the same time, English is a very important required course for them. So, English teachers are in

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 3 March 2012

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great need in colleges. It is a normal phenomenon for teachers to teach English in a large class in which there are more than one hundred students. How we can teach the foreign language effectively has been a problem puzzling all the English teachers. More importance has been attached to the learning process and learning strategies of learners instead of only just focusing on results of learning and transformation from teacher - centered tradition to the learner-centered learning, i.e., more attention to the individuality of learners, such as their self-discipline, their self-dependence, and their self-determination. Therefore, it is necessary to suggest ways for large class EFL teachers to cope with the special problems in large class English teaching in order to help them improve their teaching. In this article, some teaching strategies will be discussed.

Challenges Posed by Large Classes

Before giving any suggestions, we should first consider the many challenges that large class EFL teachers may encounter in their work: In large class situation, teachers have more students to know and more names to remember. In large class situation, it seems that students' attention wandering happens more easily. In large class situation, each student is more easily influenced by others and it is more difficult to keep good discipline going in class. In large class situation, teachers have much more to prepare for students of different abilities, wanting to learn different things at different speed and in different ways. In large class situation, teachers cannot easily give each student the individual attention they need. In large class situation, teachers may not have enough teaching and learning aids. In large class situation, teachers have to spend more time checking students' works. In large class situation, teacher may have to spare more efforts to prepare a multi-level assessment for different students, etc.

Teachers Feeling Discouraged

It's quite normal for inexperienced teachers to feel discouraged while facing all these difficulties, it's also necessary for them to know that although large class EFL teaching has its disadvantages, it also has some advantage compared with small class teaching. When there are many students in a class: They can share many different ideas and interesting life experiences. They can discuss and learn from each other. More students can make the group work and collaborative learning more effective,. More students may bring up variety and speeds up the work, etc. Therefore, it is not the number of students that is the determinant of success in EFL teaching. How teachers manage and administrate the classroom activities is very important. In the following parts we will give some suggestion to large class EFL teachers.

1. Understanding Individual Students in Large English Classes

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 3 March 2012

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Good understanding of every student in a large class is very important of a successful teaching. As we all know, the feeling of being cared by teacher may lead to interest and passion in learning, while the feeling of being neglected may depress the learners from the beginning. In a large class, as the opportunity for contact between students and teacher is significantly reduced, if teachers only give general instructions to all the students at the same time, they may fail to help the individual students efficiently in their learning. The students who cannot get enough care and help may be discouraged and become less interested in learning. As time goes on, they will give up. So, the overall understanding of each student in the class is a must for the teachers. Only by knowing the individual student better can it be possible for the teacher to serve specific help for them in their language learning and thus make the teaching more pertinent.

2. Clarifying Learning Goals to Inspire the Motivation and Interest of the Students

Knowing clearly what to do and why to do it is always helpful for students learning any subject. It is also the case in large class English teaching. To stimulate and sustain the students' interest in learning is a priority in large class teaching. Students who have more interests in English learning are often ready to take greater effort in their study and thus get a better understanding of the language they learn. Study shows that those who have more clear structure and set of goals to guide their learning in class often get better results than their fellow classmate. Being aware of the goals they are expected to achieve also helps the students to monitor their own learning and check their understanding against the stated objects. As a result of all this, learners' who has interests and passion in English learning can always save much of the teacher's effort. So it is important for the teacher in large class English teaching to clarify learning goals for the students.

3. Use of Group Work and Collaborative Learning

Group work is frequently used by large class teachers. A well-planned group work with each group given clear, defined and achievable goals, can promote deeper and broader learning outcomes for all students. It not only can help students develop language and communication skills but also can give the students' opportunities to experience cooperated learning. The positive and pleasant atmosphere will help to realize the notion of learner - centered language teaching. What is more, group work turns the competition between individual students into a race of different groups. In a large class EFL teaching, the advantage of group work may be doubled. On the one hand, too many students make it impossible for the teacher to give proper directions to each of them; on the other hand, the many students make it easier to share their ideas. With all these merits, group work and pair work are no doubt a very reasonable choice in large class EFL teaching. When planning a group work, teachers should know clearly what the students are supposed to achieve and

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 3 March 2012

Solanki Gopalkrishna Ramjibhai

Teaching Compulsory English to Large Classes in India

outline expectation and provide guidance on how to coordinate the group object.

4. Foster the Students' Independent Learning Abilities and Reduce Their Dependence on Teacher

In colleges, students should learn how to study by themselves in stead of just listening to teachers in classes. In India, most teachers have been used to the traditional teaching method, that is, teachers keep talking for the whole class while students just sit there listening, especially in Higher Secondary high school. That's why most freshmen find it hard to adapt themselves to their college life. So part of teacher's role is to teach their students strategies that are more effective and appropriate to their learning needs. Good learning strategy is important to anyone in learning. As opportunities for large class students to get timely help from their teacher is much less than students in small classes, large class teachers, therefore, should spend more time to help their students to find their own method. Once they have formed their own learning system, the students will be less dependent on their teachers, and reduces reliance on teacher as the only source of information.

5. Different Learning Materials and Different Teaching Forms

The more students there are in a class, the more needs they have. Different students have different language levels and different learning styles in large class. Some students prefer to learn by listening, others may like visual representations; still others like to learn by doing. So teacher should collect as much learning aids as he/she could to meet the different needs of students in a large class. How they arrange their class is of great importance. Since students have different tastes for language learning, a teacher also needs to plan his/her lesson in a student-centered manner. Teachers should try their best to think of a way to arouse the students' interest in their class. How can they explain the text and grammar? How can they make students involved in the practice of the conversation? How can they keep their students interested in language learning? All these need the teachers to provide some different learning materials and different teaching methods in their class. Besides these, there are also other strategies, such as, talk with individual student after class, finding their problems and understanding their feelings, understand the students with true love, knowing their need for English learning as well as other needs.

In fact, most students are easily moved by their teacher's love and care or their devotion in work. Because of this, they will always have more passion and put more effort in the subject that the teacher is teaching and the teacher can therefore get twice the result with half the effort. At the same time providing a welcoming and engaging learning environment is also very important. It will make the study easier and happier. But in large classes, teachers often neglect some of the students unconsciously. These students who are neglected are those who are not good at English and need more help from their teacher.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 3 March 2012

Solanki Gopalkrishna Ramjibhai

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Lack of attention in classes will become negative stimulus and cause the students lose their interest and be unwilling to cooperate with the teachers in class. What is more, their negative feeling may spread to others, and make more students feel depressed, so large class teachers should often take some measures in their class to arouse their students' interest and initiative. In fact, the number of students in a class is not the last determinant of success in EFL teaching. Much room is left for teachers to take advantages of large class EFL teaching to get a better result.

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