

Managing Large Classes

• ***What is a large class?***

In literature there is no quantitative definition of what constitutes a large class. Teachers in all disciplines have different perceptions of what they consider a large class to be. It is a relative answer and people's perception of this varies from context to context (Hayes, 1997). What class size is considered as large one is, how the teacher regards the class size in that specific situation, regardless of the exact number of the students in it (Ur, 1996). A "large" class is less defined by form (size) and more defined by function (action); that is, a class is "large" when it becomes challenging to engage students as individual learners (CLTC, 2015). Therefore large class can be defined as the one with students more than the teacher prefers to manage and available resources can support.

• ***Does class size matter?***

The size of a class is inherently neither good nor bad for the educational process as lack of research evidence that less effective learning occur in large class. Class size is not a distinguishing feature of student performance it is quality of teaching (what lecturer does in course), curriculum design and kinds of activities / assessment used more important than class size

• ***What are the challenges of large class teaching?***

Large classes present a number of unique challenges that can impede students' learning and exhaust faculty members teaching the class. The challenge of teaching and learning in larger courses is not a new one. As early as the 1970a, practitioners were seeking to address some of the challenges in managing large lecture halls (Gaynor, 1976). The challenges associated with teaching in large classes can be physical, psychological and technical. The major challenges of teaching large classes presented can be grouped into four categories: (1) managing the classroom, (2) using pair and group work to encourage active and cooperative learning, (3) teaching with limited resources, and (4) motivating students in heterogeneous classes.

• ***How teachers can respond to these challenges?***

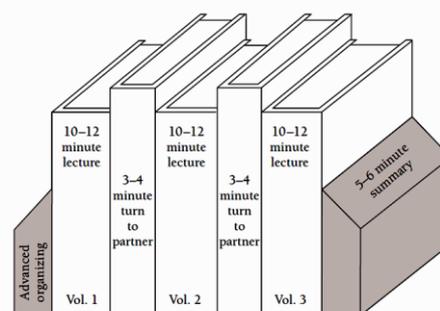
Large classes create a challenging teaching and learning environment, but not an insurmountable environment. Faculty across globe are engaging students in large classes through innovative and creative pedagogical approaches. There are a number of strategies like organization, climate, active Learning, using technology that can be used to meet the challenges of large classes. Organization is essential when it comes to managing a large number of students. Carefully planning all aspects of the course, and providing a clear structure to students, along with well-defined expectations, can among other things help reduce paper work and save time. Focusing on climate and the engagement of active learning principles are also important factors, since an inclusive, interactive and welcoming environment can positively impact engagement, help address anonymity concerns as well as group diversity. Another thing to consider is using technology in the classroom. Technology, when integrated appropriately both in and outside of the classroom, can help address any number of concerns.

• ***Is there any opportunity in large class teaching?***

Teaching large classes is a challenge, but it can also offer many opportunities for you to improve your teaching and to make it more enjoyable and rewarding for you and your students. Hess (2001) points out that in a large class there are always enough students for interaction, and there is a rich variety of human resources, the students must develop strategies for helping themselves and their classmates through peer-teaching and collaboration, thus fostering an atmosphere of cooperation. Teachers have the opportunity to improve their organizational, managerial, interpersonal, evaluation, teaching and presentation skills.

Examples of few possible solutions for large class management

- **Planning:** Plan ahead and Prepare thoroughly-- everything you are going to do and how you are going to do it; what topic to be taught, the learning objectives, teaching methods, classroom arrangement, main activities, resources, and assessment methods, What are the feedback stages?. Planning must be very detailed. Develop a formal lesson plan as a way to organize your teaching in a large class setting. Assess strengths and constraints in your context and once aware, be realistic.
- **Establish** classroom rules and set routines. One should state clear basic rules of conduct that learners understand. If they understand classroom rules and routines in particular and work within those rules and routines, it will help avoid wasting time. Set a late work policy with specific deadlines and consequences.
- **Engage** students and develop a sense of belonging; Do everything possible to get to know your students. Have your students introduce themselves to everyone in an interactive manner. You introduce yourself, as well. A positive relationship with your students builds a willingness on their part to actively participate in class.
- **Pull students in:** Build in assessments that check for learning during instruction to engage your students. *Prepare* assignments that really assess whether or not your students are learning what you are teaching. Give prompt feedback on assignments and exams.
- **Break it up:** Break up the lecture and see what students are learning by strategically using instructional activities using the “bookend approach”. In this design, the class opens with explanation of goals and an engagement activity—a question or task to spark student curiosity and help you discover what they already know about the material. The middle part is a series of back-and-forth transitions between lecture and student work, done individually or collaboratively. The final bookend activity is a summary or guided reflection on the class.



Going Deeper: Formal Small-Group Learning in Large Classes Karl A. Smith

- **Mix it up.** Mix active learning elements in traditional lecture formats; Plan a variety of activities that appeal to students with different learning styles and interests. Use visual media, handouts, skeleton lecture notes and problem-based activities to facilitate active learning. Challenge yourself and your students by adding new activities to avoid the rut of using the same technique every day.
- **Remember technology is your friend:** Use technology to assist students Provide online support (e.g. course FAQs; discussion forums on the web; self-review quizzes; links to key support sites). Use free tools (e.g., Piazza, PeerWise, TeamMates etc.) to increase student interaction, initiate discussions, and find what students are learning.
- **Manage** and support staff teams, including tutors; Introduce tutors in the first lecture to the class to let students know that you are all part of a cohesive teaching team. regular professional development of tutors (e.g. strategies for involving students in class discussions; ideas for identifying at-risk students; tips on providing feedback); meet tutor team regularly to ensure consistent and clear communication.
- **External Sources**
 - (1) Hayes, U. (1997). Helping teachers to cope with large classes. *ELT Journal*, S 1, 31-38
 - (2) Ur, P. (1996). *A Course in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
 - (3) Conference on Teaching Large Classes (2015) t Virginia Tech and Skelton Conference Center.
 - (4) Gaynor, J., & Millham, J. (1976). Student performance and evaluation under variant teaching and testing methods in a large college course. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 68(3), 312.
 - (5) Hess, N. (2001). *Teaching large multilevel classes*. New York: Cambridge University Press.