

**A SURVEY ON TEACHING STRATEGIES USED BY LANGUAGE TEACHERS
IN LARGE CLASSROOMS IN KOTA KINABALU SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

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ABSTRAK

KAJIAN TENTANG STRATEGI PENGAJARAN YANG DIGUNAKAN OLEH GURU-GURU BAHASA DALAM KELAS SAIZ BESAR DI SEKOLAH-SEKOLAH MENENGAH KOTA KINABALU

Eva Hartini Matinding

Pengajaran kelas saiz besar adalah satu fenomena biasa yang terjadi di sekolah-sekolah pada masa kini. Guru-guru harus merancang strategi pengajaran dalam usaha menangani situasi ini supaya pembelajaran berkesan boleh berlaku. Oleh itu, kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengenalpasti strategi pengajaran yang digunakan oleh guru-guru bahasa dalam kelas saiz besar di sekolah-sekolah menengah terpilih di Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. Kajian ini juga bertujuan untuk mengenalpasti persepsi tentang strategi pengajaran yang digunakan serta cabaran-cabaran yang dihadapi oleh guru-guru dalam pengajaran kelas saiz besar. Sehubungan itu, kaedah soal selidik telah dijalankan kepada 150 orang guru bahasa dari enam buah sekolah menengah. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa terdapat 5 strategi pengajaran yang sering digunakan oleh guru-guru bahasa iaitu latih tubih, pembentangan, pemerahan minda, tunjuk cara dan kuiz. Selain itu, terdapat 5 strategi pengajaran yang dianggap berguna oleh responden seperti kuiz, kertas kerja, stesen kerja, 'buzz' atau kumpulan kecil dan perbincangan dalam kelas. Namun begitu, terdapat 5 strategi pengajaran yang dianggap kurang berguna seperti menari, perkongsian peribadi, pembacaan koir, bengkel dan menyanyi. Cabaran-cabaran utama yang dihadapi dalam pengajaran kelas saiz besar adalah masa tidak mencukupi untuk mencapai sukatan pengajaran, guru mengambil masa yang lama untuk memahami pelajar dan sukar untuk melaksanakan kerja secara berkumpulan. Oleh itu, guru harus melalui latihan yang reflektif untuk memenuhi keperluan para pelajar supaya pembelajaran berkesan dapat dicapai.

ABSTRACT

A SURVEY ON TEACHING STRATEGIES USED BY LANGUAGE TEACHERS IN LARGE CLASSROOMS IN KOTA KINABALU SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Eva Hartini Matinding

Teaching large classrooms are the reality and common phenomenon in many schools nowadays. Many teachers have to devise teaching strategies to deal with the situation in order to promote meaningful learning. Therefore, this study attempted to investigate the teaching strategies used by language teachers in the large classrooms in selected secondary schools in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. This study also aimed to find out the perception of usefulness of teaching strategies used as well as, the challenges faced by the teachers in teaching large classrooms. For this survey, a questionnaire was administered to 150 language teachers from six secondary schools. The findings revealed that five teaching strategies frequently used by language teachers were drill, presentation, brainstorming, demonstration and game. Besides that, five teaching strategies that were perceived as useful by respondents were quiz, worksheets, workstation, 'buzz' or small group and class discussion. However, the five teaching strategies that perceived to be least useful were dancing, personal sharing, choral reading, workshops and singing. The main challenges of teaching in large classrooms were inadequate time to meet the syllabus requirements, taking lots of teacher's time for students' comprehension and difficult to arrange group work. These outcomes may imply the need for teacher professional development through reflective practice to meet the needs of students so that optimal learning may take place.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 An Overview

This chapter will discuss the statement of the problem, objectives of the study as well as the research questions that will be studied. Besides that, it examines the significance of the study to the practitioners, operational definitions of terms related to the study and the scope of the study.

1.1 Background of the Study

Malaysia is highly committed in providing education to all in order to meet the goal of youths who complete a full course of primary and secondary education. Thus, the education sector faces numerous challenges in its journey towards achieving excellence. As a result, Ministry of Education (MOE) has reviewed the Education Act 1996 which revolves around the provision of pre-school, primary and secondary education. The review focusing on Section 29A (1) of the recent Education Amendment Act 2002 (Act A1152), was for the purpose of the implementing of compulsory education for all children aged 6 starting in the year 2003. This policy

ensures that every child in Malaysia beginning the age of six, regardless of sex, social and economic background and residential locality has the right to pre-school, primary and secondary education (Ministry of Education, 2004). Accordingly, every Malaysian parent must ensure that their children have access to primary education and parents who fail to enrol their children would be liable to a maximum jail term of six months or a 5,000 ringgit fine or both. Hence, the education reforms result the increasing number of students in Malaysian schools as shown in the Table 1.

Table 1: Participation Rates in Public Educational Institution by Level of Education in 1993 and 2003

Level of Education	Age Group	Participation Rate (%)	
		1993	2003
Primary	6+ - 11+	98.57	98.49
Lower Secondary	12+ - 14+	85.97	84.40
Upper Secondary	15+ - 16+	55.74	73.52
Post Secondary and College	17+ - 18+	19.27	24.05
University	19+ - 24+	5.9	18.7

Source: Ministry of Education (2004)

At the primary level, this is evident by the maintained rate of 0.08 per cent in 2003 from the year 1993; with the effect of compulsory primary education in 2003. Furthermore, during the same period the participation rate at upper secondary level recorded an increase from 55.74 per cent to 73.52 per cent. This 17.78 per cent increase marked the highest among all levels of education and is a testimony of the Government's commitment in providing 11 years of education to all children. However, these figures only refer to public schools and do not include figures from private educational institutions. Thus, this is one of the factors that have contributed to the increase in the number of students in Malaysian secondary school classrooms.

Another significant educational reform in the 1990s was the democratisation of education (Lee, 2002). The Malaysian education system was extended to 11 years in 1991. With the implementation of Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR) examination at the end of lower secondary level, majority of students can now proceed to the upper secondary level and complete five years of secondary education instead of three years. Under this new policy, the education system has changed from an elitist secondary education to a universal one (Lee, 2002). However, due to this more there was an increase in student enrolment. As such, one of the immediate problems was the shortage of classrooms in many of the Malaysian secondary schools. Class sizes now are as large as 60 to 70 students per class in some schools (Lee, 2002).

1.2 Nature of the large classroom

Large classrooms are the reality and common situation in many schools. According to LoCastro (2001), to determine whether the class size is large or too large depends to a great extent upon the individual teacher's perceptions and experiences. In some countries, 25-30 students per class is considered to be large classroom. While in other countries this is seen to be normal or even relatively small. In Malaysia, a class that consists of more than 35 students is considered a large one. However, in this study a large classroom is defined as having more than 45 students (Musit, 2005). The ideal setting of classes is around 15-30 students so that learning can take place optimally. In a class such as this, teachers would be able to approach students individually and ensure that there are no students are left unattended.

However, a large class size causes some problem to arise in teaching and learning such as limited instructional time, limited financial support, and lack of physical space (Marcus, 1997). These factors influence the teaching and learning process in classroom whereby teachers have to be fully prepared, systematic and organized before they enter the classroom.

1.3 Challenges in teaching large classrooms

Based on research by LoCastro (2001), there are three main problems that are related to large class size in relation to language learning which are pedagogical, management and affective. Firstly in terms of pedagogical problems, teachers face difficulties in carrying out speaking, reading and writing tasks since teachers have to deal with a large number of students. Moreover, teachers also face difficulties in monitoring work and giving feedback as well as, problem with individualizing work. Teachers have to check the task one by one and this takes a lot of time. Teachers also have to deal with difficulties in setting up communicative tasks because they have to control many students. Thus, this leads teachers to avoid activities that are demanding to implement.

Secondly, in managing classrooms teachers face with noise and discipline problems (LoCastro, 2001). Students tend to make noise during learning process because they have to accomplish task given hence, this situation will affect neighboring classes. Thus, for instance teachers face difficulties in implementing pair and group work in large classes.

Teachers are also unable to focus longer time on helping the weaker students (LoCastro, 2001). They cannot approach the students individually thus, his or her attention may only focus on certain students. Hence, other weaker students will be left behind. A crowd phenomenon is also known to happen where students do not listen to what the teacher or other students are saying. Teachers have to control the class effectively so that all the students are able to listen to what the teacher or other students are saying. Problems in assessing students' interests and moods in classroom also need to be taken into consideration. Teachers may find it difficult to judge students' interests and moods because there are so many of them in the class. These problems challenge teachers whereby they have to plan ahead their lessons and carefully choose the appropriate materials.

1.4 Statement of the Problem

Large classrooms are the common phenomenon in Malaysian secondary schools nowadays. Teaching in large classrooms is very challenging because these classes consist of more than 45 students. Teachers must be ready to react to the prospect and reality of large classrooms (Marcus, 1997). Although, Gilman et. al (1987) stated that teachers' attitudes and morale were more positive when dealing with small class numbers (as cited in Marcus,1997). Some previous research studies such as Nakabugo, & et al. (n.d.), Marcus (1997) and Sheppard (2001) have found that teaching of large classes can be successful too. However, it involves many requirements of good practice in teaching, including the use of different teaching strategies. In order for teaching and learning process could to in classroom effectively and efficiently teachers have had to employ teaching strategies that accommodate the variety of contexts in which teacher encounter, the variety of content that must be taught and the different types of learners with different backgrounds and needs (Freiberg & Driscoll, 1992).

According to Wong (2007), large classes cause lack of interpersonal relationship between teacher and students. This is due to the fact that large groups are too heterogeneous (Habeshaw, 1992 as cited in Wong, 2007). While, Valerian (1991) claimed from psychological point of view, "students' personal developments are affected in large classes and this can be reflected in their lack of attention" (as cited in Wong, 2007). This is because the overcrowded classrooms contribute discomfort in learning with the teacher unable to help each student individually. For example, students who sitting at the back will experience the most disadvantages whereby they neglected by the teacher and generally they are not successful in their learning. This happens because teachers cannot monitor the students individually due to large number of students.

Wong (2007) further stated learning tasks that assigned to students often finish at a later time than expected in large classes. Hence, teachers should expect that some parts of the lesson planned may not be covered. In addition, longer time is needed to persuade and get the attention of the students to participate in an activity. Subsequently, teachers spend a lot of energy to deal with large classes. Apart from that, Wong (2007) revealed that lack of materials and space for the students in the library arises because of the large number of students. Classroom and library resources in addition, spaces in the library are often not enough to cater to their large number.

However, not many studies have been carried out to investigate the teaching strategies used by language teachers during teaching and learning process in large classrooms particularly in Sabah. This study therefore hopes to fill this gap by investigating teaching strategies used particularly by language teachers when teaching large classes in this context. Hence, this study aims to find out the language teachers' perception of usefulness of the teaching strategies used during teaching-learning process in large classrooms. Besides that, this study attempts to identify the challenges that language teachers face in teaching large classrooms.

1.5 Research Objectives and Questions

This research aims to answer the following questions:-

- 1) What are the teaching strategies which are regularly used by language teachers of the selected secondary schools during teaching-learning process in large classrooms?
- 2) What are the language teachers' perception of usefulness of the teaching strategies used during teaching-learning process in large classrooms?
- 3) What are the challenges faced by language teachers of the selected secondary schools during teaching-learning process in large classrooms?

1.6 Significance of the study

The findings of this research is hoped to provide useful data to schools administrators and other teachers of large classes in providing pedagogic alternatives for large classrooms so that teaching and learning process could be beneficial for all students. Moreover, it is hoped that the findings may change teachers' views that teaching large classrooms is challenging.

In addition, the findings may serve as guidelines or references to other teachers of large classes who could try to apply similar teaching strategies or adapt the suggestions to suit their needs or environment in classrooms.

The findings also may encourage more researchers to explore matters related to this research. Hence, it is hopes that the contribution of this study may enrich our understanding of students' language learning particularly learning in large language classrooms.

1.7 Operational Definition of Terms

Below are the definition of variables that related to the study:

1.7.1. Teaching Strategy

A teaching strategy is a particular set of steps to evoke from learners a specific set of desired behaviors (Silver, Hanson, Strong & Schwartz, 1996). A teacher has to assist students in acquiring the skill, knowledge or attitude by using various modes of presentation in learning. Hence, both teacher and students will cooperate to achieve the desired goals or particular learning objectives.

According to Leask (2001) teaching strategy is defined as the choice and range of teaching methods used for lesson. Some examples of teaching strategies that language teachers use in teaching large classes are such as group work, workshops

approaches, teamwork, simulations, singing, choral reading, competitions and quiz (as cited in Musit, 2005).

For the purpose of this study, the teaching strategies do not include classroom management strategies such as organization skills, communication, monitoring and maintaining class discipline.

1.7.2. *Large classrooms*

In this study, large classrooms refer to classes that have more than 45 students studying together in the same setting or class (Musit, 2005).

1.7.3 *Perception*

According to Campell (1967) perception is closely related about something that is being observed and what is said about it. It is a process where one will form an impression about someone or something. While, Hornby (2002) defined perception as “a personal opinion or attitude, thought or comment in something”. In this study, perception can be defined as a language teacher’s personal view and opinion about the usefulness of teaching strategies used in the large classrooms.

1.7.4 *Challenge*

Challenge means a demanding or stimulating situation where demand requires special effort (Sinclair, 1994). In this study, a challenge refers to the demand of the special effort that language teachers need to put in order to teach students in the large classrooms.

1.8 Scope of the Study

Since the study only involves the language teachers from selected secondary schools in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, the findings of this study cannot to be used in making generalization to all language teachers in other schools of Sabah. These are not including teachers who teach other subjects even though teaching in large classrooms.

Apart from that, the perception of these selected language teachers are merely based on their perception of usefulness of teaching strategies used in the large classrooms. These are not including perceptions on other possible strategies except for ones listed in this study.

Furthermore, these selected language teachers may encounter different challenges in teaching large classrooms based on their experience. Thus, this finding of study could only represent these groups of teachers.

1.9 Summary

Teaching large classrooms are the reality and common phenomena not only in many schools in Malaysia but also worldwide. This situation is commonplace due to an increase in the number of students due to the newly implemented educational policies. Therefore, this becomes a challenging experience for teachers who are teaching large classrooms where the students' have varied abilities, styles, levels of proficiency and preferences.

There are some challenges in teaching large classrooms such as monitoring work and giving feedback, setting up communicative tasks, implementing pair or group work and approaching students individually. These problems are disadvantages for those students who sitting at the back because teachers unable to help each student individually. Hence, teachers have to be reflective and flexible as well as willing to make accommodations to meets the needs of all students.

The next chapter will review some related literature relating to teaching strategies used by teachers when teaching in large classrooms. Besides that, it will discuss useful teaching strategies for large classes.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the relevant literature review relating to large classrooms and the useful teaching strategies for large classrooms used by teachers. In addition, this chapter will touches on the challenges of teaching and learning in large classrooms to support the present study.

2.1 Large classes

There is no definitive definition of what constitutes a large class. According to Marcus (1997), large class size is subject to individual interpretation, which also supported by LoCastro (2001). To determine whether the class size is large or too large depends to a great extent upon the individual teacher's perceptions and experiences. The literature, for example, shows large classes can range between 25-30 learners in the United Kingdom (Smith and Warburton, 1997), have more than 35 learners in the US (O'Sullivan, 2006), and 60 or more learners in developing countries (Valérien, 1991; Michaelowa, 2001 as cited in Nakabugo, & et al., n.d.).

2.2 Studies on Large Classrooms

There have been many studies which have tried to tackle the issues that revolved around large classes. Most research on large classes has mainly focused on measuring the impact of large classes on teaching and learning, or on student achievement (Glass & Smith 1979; Hedges & Stock 1983; Gibbs, Lucas, & Spouse 1997, Maged 1997; Jin and Cortazzi, 1998). Major findings have found that large classes constrain teaching and learning, and therefore, contribute to low student achievement. Among others, large classes limit regular and in-depth discussions with students, timely and frequent feedback to students and active problem solving, which are the keys to facilitating meaningful learning.

Within the literature on large classrooms in North American and Western Europe there is equivocation on the point at which classes become too large and result negatively on education quality (Benbow, Mizrachi, Oliver, & Said-Moshiro, 2007). However, other studies like Bozzomo (1978), Bourice (1986) and Bolton (1988) confirm that there was no relationship between the size of the class and the results (as cited in Fabunmi, PeterBrai-Abu, Adeniji, 2007). Bolton (1988) found that “there was no significant difference in post test achievement scores between large classes and small class control groups in developmental English”. He further added that, “larger is sometimes better”.

Studies also have revealed that it is possible to have effective teaching and learning in a large classes. The most important factor is the quality of the teacher and his or her approach to teaching, specifically the capacity to create a culture for organizing large classes in such a manner that learning can be successfully mediated. For example a study by Bain (1989) which was conducted in United States revealed that some teachers of large classes were as effective as their counterparts teaching smaller classes (as cited in Maged, 1997). In the study, fifty effective US teachers and the materials they used were studied to determine what effective teachers did to promote learning in reading and mathematics. Of the 50 teachers, 43 had small class

or large classes with aides. Seven teachers had large classes without an aide. Admittedly, the majority of effective teachers were effective in smaller classes. However, the study also showed that effective teaching was possible in large classes as well, as showed by the seven teachers who had no aide. To complicate the issue further, there are examples of very large classrooms with excellent student learning outcomes. South Korea, who placed second on the 1996 TIMSS, has an average of 56.9 students per class in mathematics and 48.8 in science. Similar conditions have been observed in both Japan and Singapore, where students are also excelling in larger classes.

In the relation to language classrooms, LoCastro (2001) claimed that having a group of more than 15, makes it difficult to give all the learners chances to practice the target language. Research in second language acquisition (SLA) since Barnes' (1976) and Long and Porter's (1985) have emphasized the role of meaningful interactions in promoting proficiency in the target language (as cited in LoCastro, 2001). More recently, Long's interaction hypothesis (1996) and Swain's output hypothesis (1985) have attempted to conceptualize the need for learners to negotiate comprehensible input and the role of their own output in driving their language development. Apart from that, the work of Vygotsky (1978) emphasizes the importance of zone of proximal development, and the teacher's role in scaffolding and reconceptualizing learner's output to push not only language development but also cognitive gains (cited in LoCastro, 2001). Hence, more emphasis is on teachers' training learners to increase their awareness of variety of learning strategies so that they can achieve their language learning goals.

Apart from that, there are some studies which concluded that small classes are better. Over the years, research has been done to bring in focus the reasons why smaller classes may lead to improved student outcomes than large classes. Reasons such as easier and regular discussions with students, timely and frequent feedback to students, and active problem solving have been pointed out (Bennett, 1996; Billington, 1997; Davies, 2000; Gibbs *et al.*, 1997; Race, 1998 as cited in Nakabugo,

& et al., n.d.). On the other hand, research has also found that smaller classes are more effective not simply because they are smaller, but because they often offer an educational setting in which it is easier and more feasible for active learning to take place.

After reviewing many of the class size studies, it can be seen that there is conclusive findings when it comes to whether class size is a determining factor in scholastic achievement.

2.3 Useful Teaching Strategies for Large Classrooms

A few strategies to teach in large classrooms have been identified and systematically used in the developing world. There are a number of education projects addressing these conditions through in-service teacher training efforts. These efforts have not been undertaken through projects specifically designed to address large classrooms, but rather through project implementers who find themselves faced with large classrooms and teachers who are asking for help dealing with the many problems they confront in large classrooms. Some teaching strategies are such as use of small groups, pupil-to-pupil support and mentoring, using the most effective teachers in the larger classes, team teaching and shift instruction (Benbow, Mizrachi, Oliver, & Said-Moshiro, 2007). Even whole class instruction or also known as direct instruction can be an effective practice depending on the learning goals such as memorization of formulas or vocabulary. This approach is teacher-centered and most commonly includes explaining, lecturing or recitation.

Based on empirical study of primary school teachers in Uganda by Nakabugo, & et al. (n.d.), some strategies suitable for teaching large classes have been suggested to be used in Ugandan primary classrooms. Interviews, observations and document analysis were the instruments used for the study. There were thirty-five teachers in twenty government aided schools in Kampala and Wakiso districts and 20 school administrators participated in the study. The study attempted to establish the