

Teaching Compulsory English Course to Large Classes: Some Observations

Prof. Sandip J. Nikam, M.A., B.Ed., SET., Ph.D. Candidate

Abstract

Teaching English to large classes is one of the most common practices in India. A large class consisting of more than 100 students needs a lot of preparation and planning on the part of the teacher. Teaching English to large classes can be challenging even for experienced teachers. Every teacher of a large class ought to give more individual attention to the students. He/she must know that the learning of English depends on having plenty of opportunities for practicing the correct and enough exposure to target language. Most teachers of English and ELT experts may agree with the view that teaching a small group of students is quite simpler, more enjoyable and less time consuming than teaching a large group. The present paper is an attempt to explore various techniques /pedagogical devices to use group activities to cope up with limited resources in dealing with large classes to teach English.

Key Words: Large classes, Compulsory English Course, Challenges, Strategies, Pedagogical Planning, Classroom Management, Students' behavior, Techniques /Activities, Language Games, Describing picture/place, Narrating a story, etc.

Introduction

Most of the colleges affiliated to Indian Universities have the common observable fact that the number of students of compulsory English class is more than hundred. So teaching English to large classes is a regular feature of teachers teaching at UG level even in colleges affiliated to the University of Pune. Being a teacher, the researcher that the teaching of English in India needs a lot of innovations. The experiences and observations shared in this paper are based on the compulsory English classroom practices at the undergraduate level. It is very usual routine

to teach large classes like Compulsory English at the undergraduate level. So what to do as teachers face a class of more than hundred students?

There are certain challenges while dealing with a large class. It requires proper handling of those challenges and issues so as to facilitate the teaching and learning of English in the classroom. The following are some of the challenges and issues in regard to handling of large classes:

- To get familiar with as many students as possible
- To take utmost participation of students in the classroom
- To keep up discipline ongoing throughout the lecture
- To involve all the students of different abilities i.e. slow learners and advanced learners etc
- To manage with limited teaching - learning resources
- To create friendly atmosphere for language learning in the class

Advantages of Teaching Large Classes

As there are some difficulties in dealing with large classes, there are some advantages too. The large classes may be noisy, but they are full of energy and excitement. Moreover, when there are a large number of students in class, it helps the teacher to get answers easily from the class, but the teacher should make sure that answers from a variety of students involve students' participation. Another advantage of a large class is that students can share many different ideas and exciting life experiences. Moreover, during a group activity, students can learn to share responsibilities and help each other.

Strategies for Dealing with Large Classes

The teacher needs to identify some specific strategies for dealing with large classes. The following strategies may be used for dealing with the large classes.

- Motivation

- Warm-ups
- Encouraging Competition
- Students' Participations
- Group formation
- Use of group works and collaborative learning

Some of the researchers and ELT practitioners have been stated the three essential factors to implement an approach /method/technique. They are:

- Pedagogical design
- Classroom management
- Deployment of appropriate materials

As far as the pedagogical planning is concerned, the teacher needs to have a diagnostic test at the beginning before applying any method /technique. The teacher should also help students to set their learning goals, and he /she should individualize interactions as much as possible. He/she must be aware of the fact that the students have a vast range of ability. The teacher must also create a pedagogical plan that allows teachers to give individual attention and encourage students' responsibility and independence.

In classroom management the teacher must move skillfully and easily from one activity to another, he/she should also create interactive and interdependent classroom activities to facilitate the learning of English in the class. He/she should be well acquainted with assessment skills of students' assignment or group work. The teacher must set up routine for the classroom so that the students are habituated of classroom code of conduct and write everyday activity on the board. He must also create purposeful activities that keep learners on task, must give learners responsibilities and display the students' work and project.

While dealing with students' behavior, the teacher must be proactive, must make the class rules and practice. To create live atmosphere, the teacher should use reward and reinforcement system.

Techniques /Activities for Large Classes

First, the teacher must establish a proper rapport with the students to provide individual attention so that learning can be effective. Use of time is also very crucial to monitor individual student's work.

A good teacher can deal with differences in proficiency and ability level and proper opportunity for actual language production and practice. He/she should also maintain control and provide discipline in a way that puts the focus on learning. The following are some the activities that as a teacher one shall use:

- Warm-ups
- Group Activities
- Greetings
- Choral Drilling
- Language Games
- Vocabulary Games
- Spelling Contests
- Questioning
- Describing picture/place
- Narrating a story

To begin with, some initial lectures a teacher can use **warm-up activities** and then he/she can lead to the topic from the content of the Compulsory English syllabus and then some language oriented **group activities** can work quite well to facilitate the teaching and learning of

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 16:11 November 2016

Prof. Sandip J. Nikam, M.A., B.Ed., SET., Ph.D. Candidate

Teaching Compulsory English Course to Large Classes: Some Observations

English. To create interest in learning English, a teacher can use some phrases of **greetings and respond** and get them practice and once the interest is created he/she can shift to the prescribed content. As a researcher and teacher of English let me point out that the techniques/activities suggested in this paper can be accompanied with the content of the Compulsory English syllabus to facilitate the learning of English because the ultimate goal of language teaching even at compulsory level is to enable students to communicate in English.

Choral Drilling

Choral drilling is very helpful especially to large classes as it gives exposures to most of the students of the class. Choral drilling involves giving an oral model of a word or phrase or utterance and whole class repeating it. The choral drilling helps the large class in the following ways:

- i) In a large class, it is very difficult to have everyone recite individually. So, choral drilling involves more students in the classroom by way of loud reading and it also develops a sense of responsibility. Choral drilling gives opportunities to participate to most of the students of the large class.
- ii) The students who hesitate to speak or read and would otherwise not recite, but with the help of choral drilling, they can gain confidence before they can recite individually.

Choral drilling involves reading together and answering together. While reading together the noticeable disadvantages of having the whole class read aloud may disturb adjoining classes, and that with so many students reading at the same time the teacher cannot detect individual mistakes. However, these disadvantages can be monitored and drawn out by simply moving among the students while they are reading. The errors of pronunciation can be detected and drawn out. If the students are to be trained in reading with the right stress and rhythm, they must have small units to imitate. The teacher must read a sentence, or even a part of a sentence and the students must follow him.

As a teacher of English, I used **Choral drill** as a pedagogical device. I found that this method of reading after the teacher had developed rhythmic reading among the students, so that

when individual students were asked to read a paragraph they were able to do so in a pleasing manner. The reading after teacher can be done by the whole class together quietly, or by reading with tone groups/utterances by the entire class. This activity requires division of the class into groups /pairs/rows. This imitative reading helps in almost all the classes at times for practice in stress and rhythm at the initial stage.

It is rarely advisable for the whole class to answer at once, but if the sections are used it is possible for the teacher to hear if a mistake is made. Sentences can be read from substitution tables, section by section. However, a little organization is necessary. The teacher must indicate in which column of the table the substitutions are to be made first. For instance:

I am		see a movie	this evening
She is	going to	play baseball	tomorrow
We are		buy some vegetables	on Sunday

The teacher says, “Exercise 1 Substitution table. Group A begin Line 1 of the table, change column 1”.

The group A will read, “I am going to see a movie this evening. She is going to see a movie this evening. We are going to see a movie this evening”.

Further, the teacher can instruct group B to change the column 3.

The group B will read, “I am going to see a movie this evening. I am going to play cricket this evening. I am going to buy some vegetables this evening”.

The same table can be used for a variety of sentences and get them practiced by your students. Even same sentences can be turned to questions and chorus answers can be taken from

the students. In a way as a teacher you can give exposure to different sentence patterns as well as questions.

Being the researcher, I am aware that this kind of activity belongs to structural approach. However, an improvising on such activity, can certain bring some innovations in it and that could be used in the classroom effectively. Along with these activities, the teacher should also use conversation, storytelling, dramatization, discussion and description to facilitate the learning of English.

Language Games

The language games are very useful in teaching and learning of English. The language games aim at enhancing students' communication skills. The present game/activity is based upon the railway timetable. This activity is useful regarding language use. Students can communicate with each other fluently. This activity needs to be conducted on both the levels: group and pair level. The following game based on railway timetable proves effectively if deployed properly in the classroom. (This idea of railway timetable activity is taken from British Council Module- A train timetable – exercises).

Time: 40 minutes

Level: First Year B A Class

Age of the students: 18-20 years

The Process

The teacher divides the class into two groups and one group will be assigned the role of inquiry officers, and another group will play the character of the passengers. The passenger's' group will ask one by one question involving all the members of the group. The inquiry officers' group will answer the questions. Before applying this game, students should be given a railway timetable and ticket at least five minutes before so that they go through it and prepare some question before hand and another group also study it as they have to answer the questions.

The passengers are going to travel, and they will refer to the timetable to ask few questions. Moreover, there are some general questions based on requesting information

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 16:11 November 2016

Prof. Sandip J. Nikam, M.A., B.Ed., SET., Ph.D. Candidate

Teaching Compulsory English Course to Large Classes: Some Observations

regarding the railway timetable. This game/activity is consist of the questions, gaps filling exercise, true or false exercise and chooses the following

The following are some the activities in this game:

- I) Material: Railway Timetable
- II) Railway Ticket
- III) Satge-1: Check your understanding: true or false
- IV) Stage-2: Questions/Answers
- V) Satge-3: Fill in the Blanks with multiple choice options

RAILWAY TIMETABLE

Departs	From	To	Arrives	Duration	Changes	
10:43	Mumbai Platform 1	Thane Platform 11	11:54	1h 11m	1	
11:01	Mumbai Platform 1	Thane Platform 2	11:59	58m	0	
11.07	Mumbai Platform 1	Thane Platform	12:14	1h 07m	1	
11.16	Mumbai Platform 1	Thane Platform 4	12:23	1h 07m	1	

TRAIN TICKET

Satge-1: Check your understanding: true or false

MUMBAI TRAINS		
CLASS	TICKET TYPE	PASSENGER TYPE
STD	RETURN	ADULT
DATE VALID		TICKET NO
5 AUGUST 2016	254625 8956251	
FROM	PRICE	
MUMBAI	₹ 100	
TO		
THANE (All Stations)		

(The first group will ask the question based on the information they need confirmation from the inquiry office group regarding the train schedule, and the timings of the trains, ticket price, platform no, etc. and inquiry office group will answer the questions in the form of True/False)

THE INQUIRY OFFICERS' GROUP

THE PASSENGERS' GROUP

- The ticket is for trains to Mumbai.
- All trains leave from platform 1.
- The first train leaves Mumbai at 10:43.
- The 10:43 train from Mumbai takes 58 minutes to get to Thane.
- One need not to change trains if he takes the 11:01 train.

- The 11:16 train from Mumbai arrives in Thane 3.

- This ticket is for one side journey only

Stage-2: Questions/Answers

(The passenger group asks the questions, and the inquiry group answers the questions)

THE PASSENGERS' GROUP

THE INQUIRY OFFICERS' GROUP

1. How long this train ticket valid for?
2. What is the cost of a return train ticket from Mumbai to Thane?
3. When does the 11:07 train from Mumbai arrive at Thane Station?
4. How much time does the 11:01 train take from Mumbai to Thane?
5. From which platform do all trains leave from Mumbai?
6. When did the train at Thane platform 4 leave Mumbai?

The probable answers are given in the box below.

5th 100 12:14 58 Platform1 11:16

Satge-3: Fill in the Blanks with multiple choice options

(This handout is circulated to both groups anyone from the first group reads the sentence, and the members of the other group try to answer the gaps)

1. The 10:43 train from Mumbai takes_____

(58 min. // 1 hour 11 minutes/1 hour 7 minutes)
2. The 10:43 train from Mumbai is the-----

(slowest / fastest train)
3. The 11:01 train from Mumbai arrives-----

(before midday / after midday)

4. The 11:07 train from Mumbai arrives at-----
(platform 11 / platform 2 / platform 3 / platform 4)
5. The 11:01 train from Mumbai is the-----
(slowest / fastest)
6. The 11:16 train from Mumbai takes-----
(under 1 hour // over 1 hour/ exactly 1 hour)

The present task is time bound. The entire question- answer session needs to be completed within specific time. This activity helps to enhance the speaking skill of students. It includes the skill of questioning and responding to a particular type of statement or question. This game can be excellent even for practicing pronunciation with the help of drilling and role plays. Thus, game functions well if deployed properly with preparation.

FYBA Compulsory English Course Syllabus:

The FYBA Syllabus is revised in the year 2012-13, and the prescribed text is 'Visionary Gleam.' This book consists of three main sections on prose, poetry and grammar and communication skills. It includes short stories, prose lessons, newspaper articles, success stories of newly emerged entrepreneurs and poems. Every unit consists of pre-reading activity, new words, a vocabulary exercise, study skills, speaking activity along with the text.

Now as a researcher my concern is how to make use of techniques and activities suggested in this paper for the dealing with the large class. Fortunately, the book is designed with the most expected objective that the students should make use of language in the day to day life. To fulfill this goal one can make the best use of the techniques and activities suggested in this paper for the dealing with the large classes so as to facilitate the teaching and learning of English.

Some Observations

The strategies mentioned above have been used at the compulsory level, accompanied with the content of the Compulsory English syllabus to promote the learning of English because the ultimate goal of language teaching even at compulsory level is to enable students to communicate in English. The following are some of the observation after deploying these particular pedagogical devices in the class for compulsory English level.

- i) Students were motivated a lot for further language learning
- ii) Students were ready to participate in the classroom activities
- iii) Students competence level has substantially increased
- iv) Students were very much interested in new words and excited to use them for their daily usage
- v) The activities like games, warm-ups, short dialogues, vocabulary games, questioning proved very useful techniques and students enjoyed them a lot.
- vi) The railway timetable games with three sections were a very new activity for them; they see railway time table many times, but they have not ever thought this could be used for communication among them.
- vii) Students became more friendly to their fellow mates regarding the use of language, informal communication, etc. after the deploying the materials.
- viii) It also helped them motivated for their general study of the other subjects
- ix) It was noticed that initially, students were hesitating for participation in the class but then after some sessions, they were quite friendly, became free in the use of language, though with some mistakes.
- x) Students found this technique interesting, and so they develop likeness to English language learning
- xi) They appreciated various teaching aids provided to them, and they become motivated a lot,
- xii) They now started initiating the small utterance, framing questions and responding to spoken discourses
- xiii) Overall they developed a perspective of a real life use of language in their day to day use.

Conclusion

Thus, it can be said that the large classes are often challenging. However, pedagogical planning, preparation, proper classroom management and handling and monitoring of students behavior will probably make your students learn numerous usage of language. The selection of material and deploying it skillfully in the classroom will enhance students communication skills. Moreover, students attitudinal issues toward English can also be resolved by proer use of material with numerous pedagogical devices, especially of a large classes.

References

<http://learnenglishteens.britishcouncil.org/skills/reading-skillpractice/train-timetable>



Sandip J. Nikam
M.A., B.Ed., SLET., Ph.D. Candidate
Assistant Professor in English &
Research Scholar
S. P. Pune University
Ganeshkhind
Pune 411007
Maharashtra
India
sandipnikam59@rediffmail.com