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NAVIGATING CHALLENGES AND MAXIMISING OPPORTUNITIES: ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN LARGE UNIVERSITY CLASSES

The issue of large class sizes remains a persistent challenge in education. Factors such as limited academic staff, educational marketing, and the widespread availability of higher education have contributed to the global trend of larger university classes. As class sizes increase, the effectiveness of language instruction is impacted, necessitating the exploration of strategies to maximize learning opportunities. This paper examines teachers' and learners' challenges in large English language classes at the university level and explores approaches to optimize language acquisition. The study's participants were 25 ESP teachers from different universities in Ukraine. The data were collected using an open-ended question form designed by the authors during the autumn of the 2022/2023 academic year. The study reveals that educators struggle to provide personalized attention and feedback to students in large classes. Limited opportunities for meaningful interactions and managing classroom dynamics are commonly reported obstacles.

Additionally, student engagement and active participation decline in more extensive class settings. Resource constraints, including limited space and materials, further compound the challenges of English language teaching. To overcome these obstacles, educators employ innovative strategies such as technology integration, active learning, peer instruction, and flexible office hours. Assessment and feedback pose challenges due to the sheer number of students. Timely evaluation and personalized feedback become impractical, impacting student growth and motivation. However, diverse assessment methods and constructive feedback practices can promote student progress. The study emphasizes the importance of pedagogical innovation in optimizing language teaching. By embracing novel approaches, educators can foster dynamic learning environments, enhancing student engagement, critical thinking, and collaboration. Understanding the impact of large class sizes is essential to enhance universities' English language learning experience. By addressing challenges and embracing innovation, academic institutions can create a conducive environment for successful language acquisition in large classrooms.

Key words: *large class sizes, English language teaching, universities, student engagement, pedagogical innovation, resource constraints.*

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ПОДОЛАННЯ ВИКЛИКІВ ТА МАКСИМІЗАЦІЯ ПОТЕНЦІАЛУ ВИКЛАДАННЯ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ У ВЕЛИКИХ КЛАСАХ В УНІВЕРСИТЕТАХ

Збільшення кількості учнів у класі може вплинути на ефективність навчального процесу, тому важливо дослідити цей аспект і знайти стратегії максимізації можливостей за таких умов. Фактори, такі як обмежена кількість викладацького персоналу, освітня маркетингова діяльність та широкий доступ до вищої освіти, сприяли глобальній тенденції збільшення розміру університетських класів. Зі зростанням розмірів класів погіршується ефективність викладання мов, що вимагає дослідження стратегій для максимізації можливостей навчання. У цій статті досліджуються проблеми, з якими стикаються викладачі та студенти великих класів англійської мови на рівні університету, і вивчаються підходи до оптимізації засвоєння мови. Учасниками дослідження були 25 вчителів англійської мови для спеціальних цілей (ESP) з різних університетів України. Дані були зібрані за допомогою анкети з відкритим питанням, розробленої авторами, протягом осені 2022/2023 навчального року. Дослідження виявило, що викладачі зіштовхуються з труднощами надання індивідуальної уваги та зворотного зв'язку студентам у великих класах. Обмежені можливості для значущих взаємодій та керування динамікою класу – це поширені труднощі. Крім того, знижується залученість та активна участь студентів у великих класах. Обмежені ресурси, такі як простір та матеріали, подальше ускладнюють викладання англійської мови. Для подолання цих труднощів викладачі використовують інноваційні підходи, такі як інтеграція технологій, активне навчання, підготовка в парах та гнучкий розклад консультацій. Оцінка та зворотний зв'язок унеможливаються через велику кількість студентів. Однак застосування різноманітних методів оцінки та практика конструктивного зворотного зв'язку можуть сприяти прогресу студентів. Дослідження підкреслює важливість інноваційних підходів до оптимізації викладання мови. Шляхом впровадження новаторських підходів викладачі можуть створити динамічне навчальне середовище, покращити залученість студентів, критичне мислення та співпрацю. Розуміння впливу великих розмірів класів має вирішальне значення для покращення навчального процесу англійської мови в університетах. Шляхом вирішення проблем та впровадження інновацій академічні заклади можуть створити сприятливе середовище для успішного засвоєння мови великими групами студентів.

Ключові слова: великі розміри класів, викладання англійської мови, університети, залученість студентів, інновації в педагогіці, обмеження ресурсів.

Introduction. Teaching English in large university classes presents distinct challenges for both instructors and students. With increasing student enrollments, overcrowded classrooms have become more prevalent, which hampers the effectiveness of language instruction. This paper explores the obstacles that educators and learners encounter in large English language classes at the university level and proposes strategies to optimize opportunities for successful language acquisition. One of society's key responsibilities is to ensure accessible and high-quality education. Investing in education is vital for developing a country's human capital, especially as economic growth increasingly relies on advanced technology and the corresponding skills. However, in reality, it is challenging for the government to allocate education funds effectively while ensuring a significant return on investment. To address this issue, a comprehensive examination of Ukraine's educational network, its financial implications on the state budget, and its effectiveness in achieving its core objectives of providing equitable education for all students is crucial.

The issue of achieving quality education by reducing class sizes and increasing teacher salaries is multifaceted. Between 2005 and 2016, the average number of students per secondary school class declined in 24 OECD countries, yet the impact on academic achievement remains inconclusive (OECD, 2018).

Advocates for smaller class sizes, including educators and parents, argue for their benefits, but their implementation can be costly. Hiring additional teachers to reduce class sizes would lead to a substantial rise in per-student expenditures. To achieve smaller class sizes without incurring higher costs, alternative approaches such as reducing teacher salaries, increasing teaching hours, or decreasing study time may be considered by countries. It is crucial to assess the necessity of reducing class sizes and determine the circumstances in which compromises may be justifiable. Ultimately, the key to providing quality education lies in finding a balanced approach that takes into account the needs of both students and teachers.

Theoretical framework and research methods. Multiple factors are affected by the size of a class, such as the management of the classroom, the methods used for instruction, and the academic performance of the students (Smith et al., 2003; Blatchford et al., 2007). When there is a high student-to-teacher ratio, the effectiveness of instruction may be diminished. However, numerous school districts contend that larger class sizes are necessary due to limited educational funding. Finding the ideal class size presents a challenge, as it involves striking a balance between the need for cost-effective interventions and the provision of a quality education for students (Kennedy, 2003).

In Herbst's analysis, it becomes evident that there are multiple factors that contribute to the disparities in ideal class sizes among various educational institutions. The author posits that these systems differ in several regards, including but not limited to the evaluation methods employed, the existence of noteworthy incentives for both students and educators, the provision of supplementary assistance for students who are struggling or enrichment programs for high-achieving students, the allocation of resources, and the overall caliber of educators. It is Herbst's contention that these variables, when taken together, collectively impact class sizes in a multitude of educational settings (Herbst, 2001). When one fails to account for omitted variables amongst the characteristics of effective teaching, it can lead to biased estimations of educational production functions. These characteristics encompass a wide range of aspects, including the ability to effectively communicate challenging subject matter, engage students in hands-on experiences, provide timely and precise feedback, and create an environment conducive to family involvement. The endogeneity of class size in relation to student performance further complicates the estimation of the true impact of class size. To address this issue, Herbst suggests utilizing an identification strategy that focuses on exogenous variations in class size, explicitly excluding the aforementioned factors. Some of these exogenous factors pertain to classroom management, such as student discipline and cultivating a culture of diligence (Herbst, 2001). Upon evaluating the numerous factors that Herbst deems significant contributors to student achievement, it becomes evident that teacher behavior, feedback, and student cooperative assistance are more prevalent in larger classes.

Educators acknowledge the significance of ascertaining if there is a connection between the size of a classroom and the academic performance of students. The central focus of the conversation on class size centers around the goal of establishing ideal learning environments for every student, while also making informed decisions concerning the allocation of limited resources. It is imperative for all individuals involved in the education system to have access to empirical data in order to comprehend the genuine influence of class size on academic accomplishments (Gilman & Kiger, 2003).

The problem becomes especially prominent in economically disadvantaged rural areas, where the financial resources available may be more substantial in comparison to wealthier regions. Unfortunately, the determination of whether reducing class sizes is a feasible solution to improve academic achievement is further complicated by the numerous

contradictory research studies on this topic (Biddle & Berliner, 2002).

A report published by the British Council (2015), as cited by Hadi and Arante (2015), highlights several hurdles encountered when teaching English in sizable classrooms. These obstacles include maintaining discipline in large classes, accommodating students of varying ages and abilities who learn at different paces and through different methods, struggling to provide individual attention to each student, and facing limited resources such as books and teaching aids. The challenges faced by teachers when teaching English in large class settings are outlined in the 2015 report by the British Council titled "Internationalization of Ukrainian universities in the context of the English language." The report highlights that the teacher-student ratio in Ukraine is significantly higher than international standards, which undoubtedly affects the workload of teachers and limits their time for lesson preparation and professional development. It is important to note that the raw data may be misleading, as most universities surveyed had group sizes of around 15 students, similar to those in Western European universities. However, students consistently expressed their belief that smaller group sizes would lead to greater improvement in their English proficiency (British Council, 2017).

Xu's (2011) study identified three primary concerns associated with teaching in large classrooms: physical, psychological, and technical. In terms of physical challenges, educators often experience fatigue due to the demands of teaching in spacious settings. They may find themselves speaking louder, moving more frequently, and covering longer distances compared to teaching in smaller classes. Psychologically, some teachers may feel overwhelmed by the sheer number of students they must engage with, leading to uncertainty about their students' identities and expectations. Additionally, monitoring attendance and evaluating assignments can pose particular difficulties for instructors in large class environments, resulting in additional stress and worry.

One of the main challenges that educators encounter is the imperative to improve their management skills and offer more personalized attention to a large number of students. This presents difficulties in terms of delivering individualized feedback, addressing the specific needs of each student, and ensuring fairness in the grading process. Furthermore, teachers may feel overwhelmed when it comes to evaluating the unique characteristics of students and preventing instances of academic dishonesty. Another issue that teachers face is the daunting task of correcting a significant volume of written assignments after admin-

istering a test to a large group of students. Recognizing that a teacher's responsibilities extend beyond the confines of a single classroom is crucial. As a result, they may administer multiple assessments throughout the semester, typically amounting to three or four tests. Alongside these obligations, teachers must also allocate time for lesson planning and attend to personal commitments, such as quality time with their families. Consequently, the time-consuming process of grading numerous papers may limit the opportunity for comprehensive evaluation and providing detailed feedback (Le, 2002).

Le (2002) posits that a major obstacle faced by educators is the large class sizes, which hinders their ability to provide individualized attention to each student. During class discussions, it is often the more intelligent and extroverted students who dominate the conversation, leaving minimal opportunity for interactions with the remaining students. Consequently, the teacher is unable to distribute equal attention to all students. If the expectation were for every student to participate in answering questions, it would consume a significant amount of time, resulting in an incomplete lesson within the constrained timeframe. Consequently, disengaged students would become bored and seek out other distractions, while only a small portion of students would observe improvement in their English proficiency.

However, Bahanshal presents a contrasting viewpoint, suggesting that teachers are able to allocate greater amounts of time and attention to each student in smaller class sizes. As a result, they are able to implement instructional activities more effectively. Thus, it can be inferred from the abundance of evidence that English educators encounter numerous challenges when teaching larger groups of students and attempting to establish meaningful connections with each individual in the classroom. Specifically, certain students, particularly those who struggle academically, may find it difficult to stay engaged due to the lack of personalized attention and engaging learning experiences. Furthermore, Bahanshal argues that an increase in resources and learning materials is necessary to enhance English instruction in larger classes. This involves determining a specific threshold at which teachers are unable to effectively manage the number of students, and subsequently requiring additional resources to facilitate the teaching and learning process. Consequently, this issue poses significant obstacles for both teachers and students, as the limited availability of resources proves to be a challenge. The study faced several constraints, including restricted physical space for both movement and interaction, a scarcity of desks, and a limited supply of instructional resources like textbooks (Bahanshal, 2013).

As a result, the primary objective of this research was to address the following inquiry: What are the obstacles faced by ESP teachers when catering to the requirements of a large class size? This question aimed to discern the perceptions of ESP teachers and provide further understanding on the matter. The study's participants were 25 ESP teachers from different universities in Ukraine. The data were collected using an open-ended question form designed by the authors during the autumn of the 2022/2023 academic year. The question was left open and broad for a number of reasons: to encourage critical thinking, to elicit unbiased and unlimited opinions of the respondents, and explore responses perhaps not considered by the researchers nor found in literature review. Data were collected from May 2022 to December 2022. The method by which university faculties decided to disseminate the questionnaire varied from faculty to faculty.

The aim of the study. The study aims to investigate the unique challenges university ESP teachers face in large English language classes at the tertiary level. The study seeks to explore the impact of large class sizes on the effectiveness of English language teaching and learning. Additionally, the research aims to identify strategies and approaches that can be employed to maximize students' learning opportunities and success in these more extensive classroom settings.

Results. The study reveals several findings concerning the influence of large class sizes on the teaching and learning English in university environments. The research findings indicate that instructors who teach English in large university classes face considerable obstacles when offering personalized feedback and individual attention to students. One of the most commonly reported challenges is the lack of opportunities for meaningful one-on-one interactions with each student. Additionally, managing classroom dynamics was identified as another major difficulty. Encouraging active involvement and interaction among students is crucial for effective student engagement and participation. Educators can enhance the learning experience and promote deeper understanding by fostering an environment that promotes student engagement. Active participation can be achieved through various strategies such as group discussions, hands-on activities, and collaborative projects. These approaches encourage critical thinking and problem-solving skills and foster a sense of ownership and responsibility for one's learning. Additionally, incorporating technology and multimedia resources can enhance student engagement, allowing for personalized and interactive learning experiences. By prioritizing student engagement

and participation, educators can create a supportive and inclusive learning environment that empowers students to become active learners and contributors to their education. The research findings have determined that when class sizes are increased, there is a notable decline in student engagement and active involvement. This decreased motivation can manifest as a reduced willingness to participate in classroom discussions and activities, resulting in a less vibrant and interactive learning atmosphere. Assessment and feedback are crucial components of the learning process. They play a significant role in providing students with valuable insights into their progress and areas for improvement. Assessments help educators evaluate students' understanding and mastery of the subject matter, while feedback offers specific guidance on enhancing their performance. Teachers can gather comprehensive data on students' knowledge and skills by incorporating various assessment methods, such as quizzes, exams, projects, and presentations. This information can tailor instruction and provide targeted feedback that addresses individual needs. Effective feedback is constructive, specific, and actionable, highlighting both strengths and areas for growth. It helps students develop a growth mindset and encourages them to continue learning. Additionally, feedback can foster a sense of accountability and ownership as students actively reflect on their progress. Ultimately, assessment and feedback are powerful tools for promoting student growth, fostering a culture of continuous improvement, and supporting overall educational success. The findings indicate that timely evaluation and constructive criticism can be particularly problematic in university courses with many students. Educators encounter obstacles when promptly assessing assignments and offering comprehensive feedback to learners, which can affect their academic advancement and drive. Resource constraints refer to limitations or restrictions on the Availability of resources, such as time, money, personnel, or materials, that may impact the execution of a project or the achievement of desired outcomes. These constraints pose challenges and require careful planning and prioritization to ensure the efficient and effective utilization of available resources. Organizations must identify and manage resource constraints to optimize project delivery and meet objectives within the given limitations. In large university English language classes, the study highlights the issue of resource limitations as a prominent concern. The insufficiency of classroom space, materials, and technological resources can potentially hinder the efficacy of language instruction. Looking

at the bright side, the study reveals successful tactics educators utilize to optimize educational opportunities in classrooms with many students. These tactics encompass the incorporation of technology to amplify student involvement, the implementation of interactive learning techniques, the promotion of peer instruction and collaborative tasks, and the provision of adaptable office hours for personalized assistance. The significance of pedagogical innovation cannot be overstated. It plays a crucial role in shaping the future of education by introducing new and effective teaching methods. These innovative approaches can potentially revolutionize how knowledge is imparted and acquired by students. By embracing pedagogical innovation, educators can enhance student engagement, foster critical thinking skills, and create a dynamic learning environment that promotes creativity and collaboration. Through the exploration and implementation of new teaching strategies, we can pave the way for a more impactful and transformative educational experience. The importance of pedagogical innovation in tackling the obstacles brought about by large class sizes is highlighted by this study. Educators can foster interactive learning environments and facilitate language acquisition by implementing inventive teaching methods like flipped classrooms and formative assessment techniques.

Overall, the study's results emphasize recognizing and addressing the challenges associated with large university English language classes. Educators can create a more engaging and supportive learning environment by implementing effective strategies and fostering pedagogical innovation, ensuring students' success in their language learning journey. The study's findings can provide valuable insights for educators, administrators, and policymakers to optimize English language teaching in the context of large university classes.

Conclusion. As large class sizes continue to be a prevalent trend in university settings, understanding the impact on English language teaching is crucial for enhancing the learning experience of both students and educators. By recognizing and addressing the challenges, such as effective feedback provision, managing marking load, student engagement, and resource constraints, academic institutions can develop targeted strategies to optimize language learning outcomes in large classrooms. Embracing technology and pedagogical innovations while investing in educator professional development are vital steps in navigating the complexities of large university classes and ensuring a conducive environment for English language teaching.

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