

Pedagogical Explorations Beyond the Numeric Hurdle: Professional, Psychological and Intellectual Benefits of Large Classes for English Language Teachers in Pakistan

Dr. RIAZ HUSSAIN

Assistant Professor, Department of English Linguistics,
The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan.

Email: mriazraa@gmail.com

Tel: +923027425578

ZEENAT NAZ

M.Phil Scholar, Department of English Linguistics,
The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan.

Email: zeenatnaz1989@gmail.com

Tel: +923027868391

MUHAMMAD SAJJAD

M.Phil Scholar, Department of Applied Psychology,
The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan.

Email: sajjad198712@gmail.com

Tel: +923027868391

Abstract

Different phases and stages of life exist as learning processes for man. Teaching is also a learning process. In large classes, teaching may become a challenge but this pedagogical trial may bring opportunities of intellectual, psychological and professional growth for teachers. This exploratory study explores how the quality of language teaching matters more than the perceived numeric hurdle or size of a large class. The study was conducted to know about ELT teachers' perceptions about opportunities offered by large classes. Quantitative research method was used and data was gathered from 200 English language school teachers (serving in Bahawalpur, Pakistan) through a questionnaire designed by the researchers. The findings of the study show that by teaching English language in large classes, ELT practitioners improved their soft and hard skills. Around 80% of the respondents (teachers of English language in Bahawalpur, the Punjab) were cognizant of the professional, psychological and intellectual paybacks embedded in large classes. This awareness and description of the benefits potentially may, in turn, boost the motivation of the teachers in the field of linguistics and language education. With similar improved affective, behavioural and cognitive make-up teachers may effectively transform a large class into a small class.

Keywords: Pedagogy, English Language Teaching (ELT), Large Classes, Opportunities, Challenges, Advantages, Soft and Hard Skills of Teachers, Language Education.

Introduction

Teachers' critical reflections on their own teaching practices are important, Bughio (2013). The current study invites teachers and practitioners of English language teaching towards critical reflection of ELT practices. It is an attempt to reframe perceptions of teachers who teach language in difficult circumstances. The phenomenon of large classes is considered as a serious issue in English language teaching classes for primary and secondary school teachers in developing countries. Bahanshal (2013) mentions that most of

the teachers are discouraged by the perceived numeric hurdles in case of large classes. But, in this context, the point to ponder is this 'Is there anything beyond numeric hurdles?'. The answer to this question, as this study later reveals, is 'yes'. ELT teachers seem to be silently aware of this 'yes' answer. In order to see ELT teachers' affirmative awareness in this respect, we need to explore their perceptions and attitudes about large classes.

There are a number of key questions regarding large classes in English language teaching. Some of the most important issues are: 'What is the significance of a large class in ELT domain?' and 'What are teachers' attitude towards large classes?'. This part of the world situated between the Arabian Sea and the Himalayan mountains has been home to dry Monsoon climate, agrarian economy, trading routes and concentrations of population since ancient times. Today, Pakistan is a developing South Asian country with a large population. English language is taught to students in schools, colleges and universities. On account of infrastructural constraints, certain English Language Teaching (ELT) settings involve teaching English in large classes (Shamim and Kuchah, 2016). Large classes do not pose challenges to Pakistani teachers only. Developing countries face the problem of large classes. While the population is increasing fast, the schooling rate seem to remain low. World population has reached 7.8 billion in 2020 (PRB, July10, 2020) and it is projected to reach 8.5 billion in 2030, 9.7 billion in 2050 and 11.2 billion by 2100. In the current scenario, large classes are the unavoidable need of the hour because huge inequality has been seen between student-teacher ratio. Massive inequality has been perceived between student-teacher ratio.

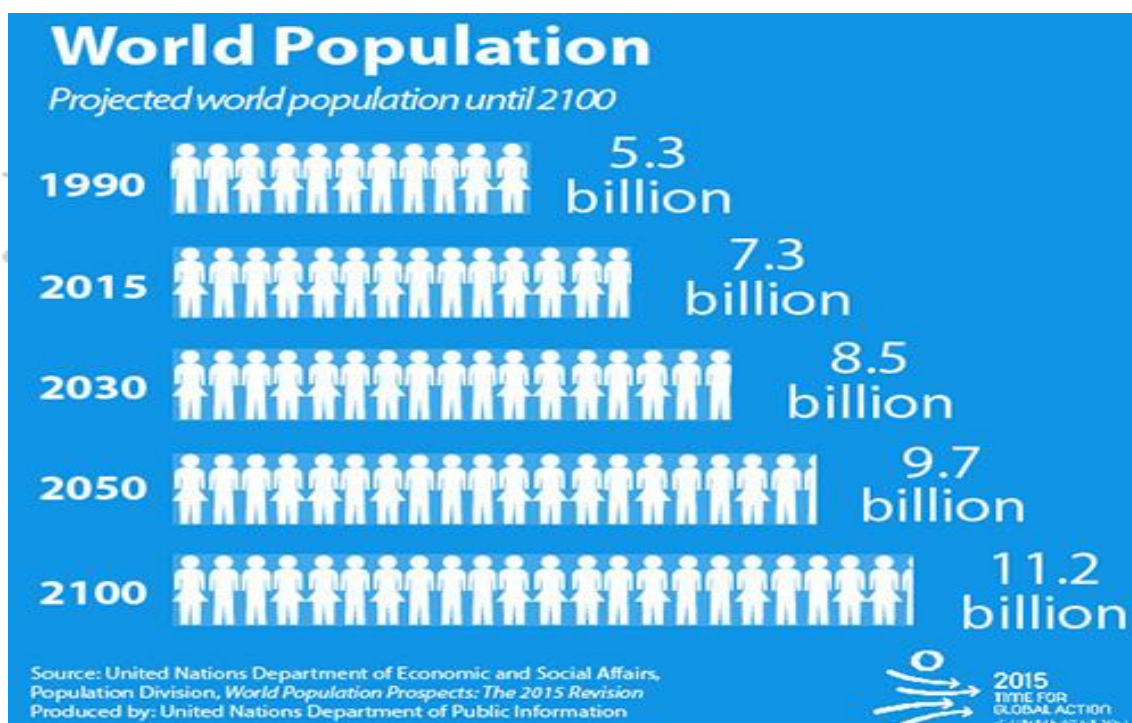


Figure 1: World Population over the Years
 Retrieved March 4, 2021, from <https://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/population/>

The current research was set to explore the (perceived or not perceived) opportunities for teachers that large classes provided them during the course of teaching English language. In Pakistan, English is taught as a compulsory subject up to graduation level. Some learners choose English in order to get their degrees after sixteen years of education and some learners choose English Language Teaching (ELT) profession as a career. According to the World Bank estimates, the population of Pakistan in 2019 was 216,565,318 (The

World Bank, 2019). On account of these figures of population, it may not be feasible for a developing country like Pakistan to provide quality infrastructure for all types of schooling.

A classroom can be defined as a specific place in school where teachers and learners interact with each other and work together on a regular basis. The size of a class can be described as the actual strength of learners in the classroom. But the concept of a large class varies from country to country. 'A large class' remains a relative concept. Class size is often defined in terms of numbers. However, our perception of a large class is determined not only by number of students but by several additional factors. A teacher's previous experience, his or her teaching style and his or her threshold level, teacher-student ratio and available space and resources also count in determining a large class. What matters is not the size of the class, but the quality of the language teaching and beyond the numeric values of large classes, as we have already hinted at, there can be benefits for teachers. Potentially, as it is generally stated that large classes may offer a number of advantages to English language teachers and learners such as cooperative learning and greater opportunities to interact with greater number of people. Similarly, large classes may offer opportunities for teachers as well as for learners. So, theoretically, the said benefits are manifold and multidimensional.

Opportunities in Large Classes

In large classes, teachers interact with a relatively varied psychological world of human nature. Large classes contain a diversity of learning styles and teachers can apply many different active ways of teaching in a large class. Large classes provide many opportunities for teachers such as improving organizational, managerial, presentation, evaluation, pedagogical and interpersonal skills. McLeod (1989) declared that large classes provided various benefits like decreased costs of instructors, use of faculty time and talent efficiently, and standardization of learning experiences. Researchers in the field have studied effects of large classes on several levels of education: school, college and university. In this context, a study by Mulryan-Kyne (2010), explored challenges and opportunities of teaching large classes at college and university level. Milesi and Gamoran (2006) figured out the effects of 'class-size' and instruction on kindergarten achievement. In addition to the level of education, researchers explored large classes from the point of view of assessment. For instance, Brady (2012) discussed managing assessment in large EFL classes. In most of the studies, class-size seems to have little correlation with performance of the students. In the light of the above-given theoretical insights observed results and empirical findings, the following research questions and objectives were formulated for the current study:

Research Questions

1. What opportunities do large classes offer to English language teachers in (the Punjab), Pakistan?
2. What are the perceptions of Pakistani teachers of English language (in the Punjab) about the opportunities offered by large classes?

Objectives of the study

1. To know about opportunities that large classes offer to English language teachers (in the Punjab), Pakistan.
2. To know about perceptions of Pakistani teachers of English language (working in the Punjab) about the opportunities offered by large classes.

Literature Review

Oliver (2012) explains that literature review of a study 'provides previous knowledge and gives us an anchor to which to attach our new ideas' (p.1). Besides attaching our work to previous studies through review of literature, there is another reason for including review of literature in a scientific study. Bruce

explains that the purpose of literature is ‘to provide the background to and justification for the research undertaken’ (as cited in Ridley 2008, p. p.3). Let us survey the available literature from this perspective.

The available literature on large classes encompasses multifarious aspects of the educational phenomenon. In fact, historically, teaching of English in a large class forms a component of the predefined area of teaching English in difficult circumstances or resource-constrained settings. The issue of difficult circumstances in ELT was first brought to light by West (1960). West underlined the ELT challenges in classrooms—over 30 pupils, congested on benches with teacher who does not speak English well --- working in a hot climate (p.1). ‘Difficult circumstances’ refer to insufficient or outdated textbooks, crowded classrooms and lack of adequate resources and facilities for teaching English.

Furthermore, it should be clarified that the difficult circumstances exist not because of lack of resources but also because of lack of the required pedagogical skills. Therefore, the researchers in the field of applied linguistics in the context of English language teaching focused on the above-mentioned aspects. Renaud, Tannenbaum and Stantial (2007) explored student-centered teaching in large classes with limited resources. Todd (2006) discussed fundamental questions of large classes. In literature available on large classes, the main areas are teaching materials, assessment of learners and pedagogical approaches of teaching (Shamim, 2012).

Hess (2001) opines that if a class consists of 30 or more than 30 learners, it is called large class. When learners perform in large classes in the form of groups, they show positive outcomes. Different scholars gave different points of views regarding class size. A large class may not be an issue if a teacher is highly competent. Teaching skills exist as human capital and this human capital seems to be more important than any other factor in the external or physical world around a teacher or a student. It is this aspect of importance of human capital which has been underlined in several studies on teaching challenges in large classes.

Hattie (2005) stated that another point regarding large class is its relation to the subject being taught. For Instance, a large class does not matter when the main motive of the teacher is to convey authentic knowledge. Mulryan-Kyne (2010), positively explained that effective learning is possible in a large class. Hoxby (2000) was able to see beyond the numeric hurdle and mentioned that size of the class seems to have no significant effect on learner’s progress. In the same way, Milesi and Gamoran (2006) reported that students’ performance cannot be affected by class size. Ximing (2003) underlined the role of cooperative learning in large ELT classes.

Adrian (2010) conducted study on college learners and examined that active learning was only possible when all learners participated in class activities and went through different tasks. In large classes, teachers can make their teaching effective through learners’ involvement. For learners’ involvement, a teacher must make groups and assign them a task and give them freedom to explore their ideas through different experiments and also allow them to cooperate with each other. In this way, a teacher can improve the level of learning in large classes and enhance knowledge, skills and abilities of his learners.

Literature available on the subject shows that effective teaching and learning are possible in large classes. According to Khurram (2010), in Pakistani context, there are some specific conditions through which it is possible to engage learners in large classes. These conditions are:

- Teachers should be fully prepared with lesson plan.
- Teacher should use various teaching methods.
- Teacher should know about when or how to teach.
- Develop a comfortable learning environment.

Against a background of the relative concept of ‘a large class’, when we talk about effective teaching, as hinted before in this study, a language teacher’s competence seems to emerge as the most important factor. A competent teacher can transform challenges into opportunities. Sulistyowati (2012) explored how large classes could be made smaller with the help of best teaching techniques and high motivation of teachers and learners.

Methodology

Gravetter and Forzano (2011) argue that ‘research designs are general categories that classify research according to how the study was conducted (p.191). Flick (2009) gives a detailed definition of a research design in these words: ‘research design is a plan for collecting and analyzing evidence that will make it possible for the investor to answer whatever questions he or she has posed. The design of an investigation touches almost all aspects of the research, from the minute details of data collection to the selection of techniques of data analysis’ (p. 128). Thus, in the light of these observations, this was a non-experimental, descriptive, survey-based exploratory study. In exploratory and descriptive studies, surveys are ‘the most commonly used descriptive method’, according to Cohen & Manion (as cited in Nunan 1992, p.141). Surveys are used to gather information about ‘conditions, attitudes, and /or events at a single point of time’ (Nunan, 1992, p141).

In addition, surveys are common in language studies as well. Brown (2000) argues that ‘surveys also provide tools for in-depth investigations of people’s experiences with language’. He further argues that ‘surveys are also useful for in-depth investigations of people’s ideas, attitudes, opinions and evaluations with regard to a particular language, nationality or culture’ (p. 20). For the data collection process, the researchers designed a questionnaire.

In the days of Covid-19 pandemic, since it was not advisable and feasible to approach respondents physically, ‘Google Forms’ was used for the online data collection process. After making a questionnaire on ‘Google Forms’, the researchers conducted its pilot study. Then, the researchers created a link of that questionnaire and shared that link through social media channels. Simple random sampling was used. Rubin and Babbie (2010) explain that ‘random sampling is a precise, scientific procedure for selecting research respondents. There is nothing haphazard about it’ (p.132).

Population of the Study

Salkind (2010) explains that ‘there are two types of populations that a researcher can sample—theoretical and accessible. In practice, researchers sample an accessible population because a sample of a theoretical population would be quite arduous undertaking and the cost of such a sample would be quite prohibitive’ (p. 1215). Though Salkind has differentiated theoretical population from accessible population, he has not defined it.

Schaller (2010) explains that ‘the population that the researcher wishes to generalize to is the theoretical population’. He further explains that ‘the population that the researcher can gain access to is the study population’ (p.13). Schaller’s words define the two types of population. Now we can talk about the theoretical population and the accessible population of this study. All the English language teachers teaching in the state-run schools of the Punjab during the year 2019-2020 formed the theoretical population of the study. In terms of accessible population, the researchers collected data from 200 English language school teachers.

Data Analysis and Results

The researchers analyzed the gathered data through MS Excel sheet and described it in terms of frequencies with the help of charts and diagrams.

Table 1: In large classes, teachers can use varied ways of teaching.

	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative percent
Valid Strongly Agree	28.5	28.5	28.5
Agree	51.5	51.5	80
Neutral	14	14	94
Disagree	5.5	5.5	99.5
Strongly Disagree	0.5	0.5	100
Total	100	100	

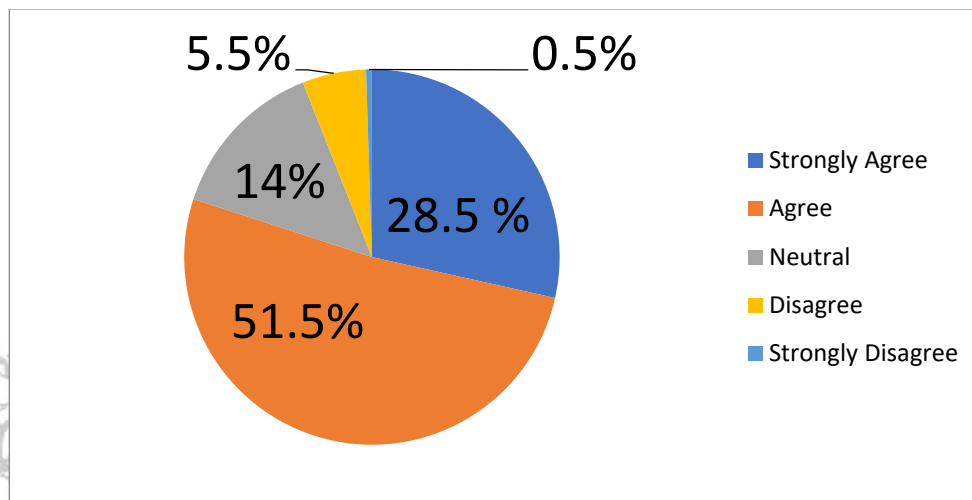


Figure 2: In large classes, teachers can use varied ways of teaching.

This statement focused on benefits of professional growth in large classes for ELT teachers. Figure 2 shows that 51.5% of the teachers agreed that “In large classes, teacher can use varied ways of teaching”. 28.5 % respondents strongly agreed to this statement. 14% of the teachers gave neutral response. 5.5% teachers disagreed and 0.5% strongly disagreed to this statement. In large classes, teachers have to teach a lot of learners so in order to make their teaching more effective they use different ways of teaching. Majority of teachers agreed to this statement.

Table 2: Large classes provide opportunity for teachers to improve their evaluation skills.

	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative percent
Valid Strongly Agree	21	21	21
Agree	55.5	55.5	76.5
Neutral	16.5	16.5	93
Disagree	7	7	100
Strongly Disagree	0	0	
Total	100	100	

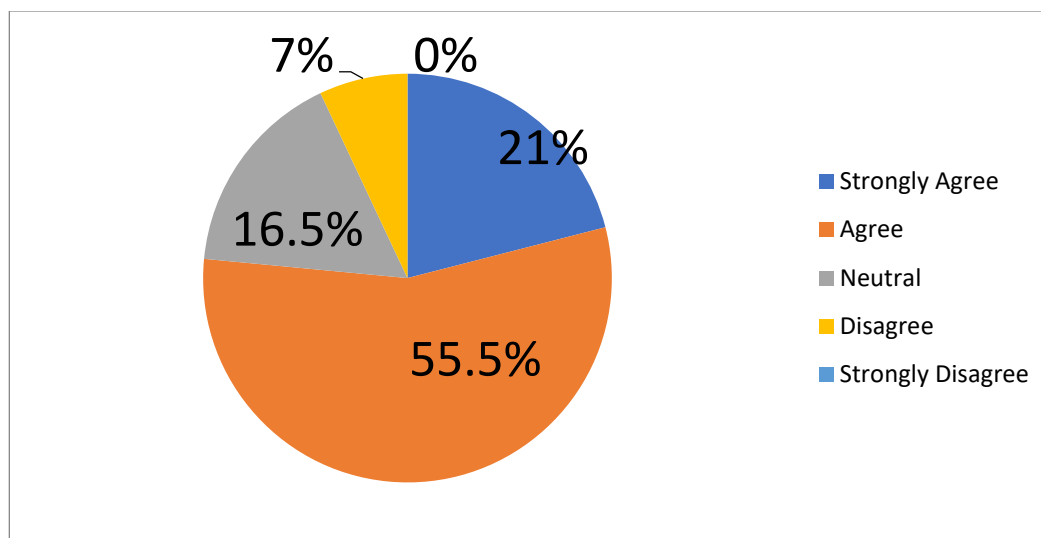


Figure 3: Large classes provide opportunity for teachers to improve their evaluation skills.

This statement also focused on benefits of professional growth in large classes for ELT teachers. Figure 3 shows that 55.5% of the teachers agreed that “Large classes provide opportunity for teachers to improve their evaluation skills”, 21% teachers strongly agreed to this statement. 16.5% of the teachers gave neutral responses. 7% of the teachers disagreed to this statement.

Table 3: Large class provides opportunity for teachers to improve their teaching style.

	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative percent
Strongly Agree	30.1	30.1	30.1
Valid Agree	51.7	51.7	81.8
Neutral	11.6	11.6	93.4
Disagree	5	5	98.4
Strongly Disagree	1.6	1.6	100
Total	100	100	

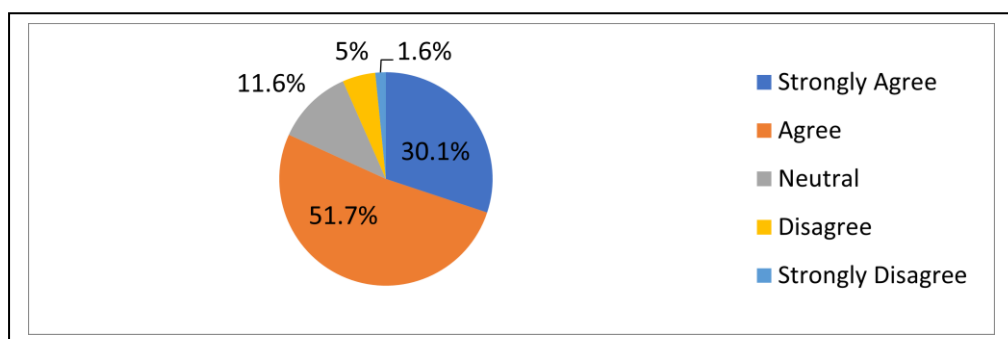


Figure 4: Large class provides opportunity for teachers to improve their teaching style.

This third statement also focused on benefits of professional growth in large classes for ELT teachers. Figure 4 shows that the majority of respondents 51.7% agreed that “Large class provides opportunity for teachers to improve their teaching style”. 30.1% of respondents strongly agreed to this statement. 11.6% respondents remain neutral. 5 % teachers disagreed and 1.6 % of the respondents strongly disagreed to this statement. In large classes, teachers have to teach a large number of learners so in order to make their teaching effective they use different ways of teaching and improve their teaching style.

Table 4: In large classes, teacher has opportunity to enhance sense of responsibility among learners through group activities.

	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative percent
Strongly Agree	34.8	34.8	34.8
Valid Agree	51.7	51.7	86.5
Neutral	11.4	11.4	97.9
Disagree	2	2	99.9
Strongly Disagree	0.1	0.1	100
Total	100	100	

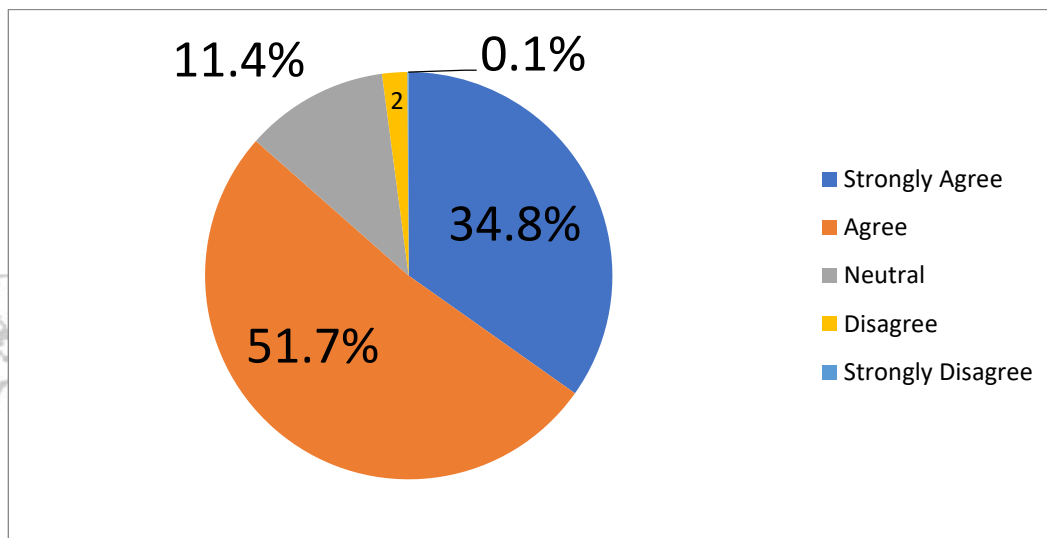


Figure5: In large classes, teacher has opportunity to enhance sense of responsibility among learners through group activities.

This statement focused not only on benefits of professional growth in large classes but also on opportunities to enhance soft skills of collaboration and responsibility among learners. Figure 5 shows that 51.7% of the teachers agreed that “In large classes, teacher has opportunity to enhance sense of responsibility among learners through group activities”. 34.8% strongly agreed to this statement. 11.4% of the teachers remain neutral . 2% of the teachers disagreed and 0.1 % of the teachers strongly disagreed to this statement.

Table 5: Large classes provide opportunity for teachers to know about diverse life experiences of the learners.

	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative percent
Valid Strongly Agree	25.5	25.5	25.5
Agree	62	62	87.5
Neutral	10	10	97.5
Disagree	2	2	99.5
Strongly Disagree	0.5	0.5	100
Total	100	100	

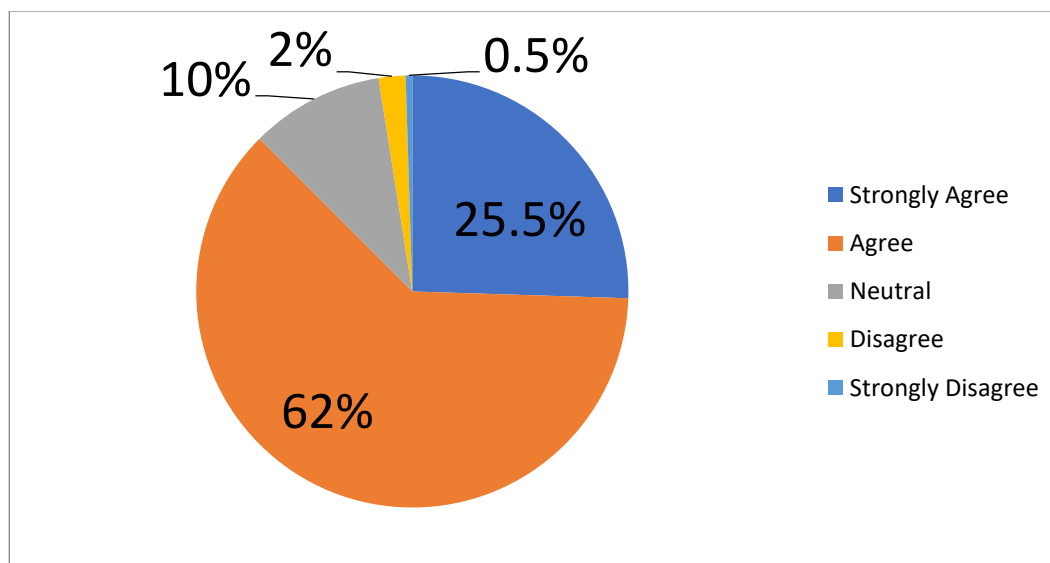


Figure 6: Large classes provide opportunity for teachers to know about diverse life experiences of the learners.

This statement focused on benefits of psychological and intellectual growth in large classes for ELT teachers. Figure 6 shows that 62% of the teachers agreed that “Large classes provide opportunity for teachers to know about diverse life experiences of the learners”. 25.5% teachers strongly agreed to this statement. 10% of the teachers gave neutral responses. 2% of the teachers disagreed to this statement. While 0.5% of teachers strongly disagreed to this statement. While teaching large classes teachers interact with different learners and get many different life experiences from learners.

Conclusion

In the end, it is concluded, in the light of the perceptions of the teachers of English in Pakistan, that large classes provide many advantages for teachers. The findings reveal that most of the participants believe that large classes broaden their understanding of learner-psychology and enhance their teaching skills. 80% of the teachers agreed that large classes helped teachers introduce varied ways of teaching and improve their teaching styles. 76% of the respondents agreed that teaching large classes improved teachers’ evaluation skills. Around 87% of the respondents agreed that through large classes they came to know about diverse life experiences of the learners. Around 87% of the respondents agreed that through large classes teachers could impart sense of responsibility among the learners. Thus, the findings of the study show that around 80% the teachers of English language in Pakistan are positively aware of the professional, psychological and intellectual benefits embedded in large classes. This awareness should play a significant role in raising the motivational level of ELT teachers teaching in large classes. These perceived benefits of large classes should help in encouraging and improving critical reflections on professional practice, as underlined by Bughio (2013). The findings of the study bear some relationship with the results of Winstone and Millward (2012) who conclude in their study that if the hurdles are overcome, large classes have potential to become a powerful learning environment. Furthermore, as already mentioned in the study, Hoxby (2000) and Milesi and Gamoran (2006) advocate seeing ELT in large classes beyond the perceived numeric hurdle. If ELT teachers are able to see beyond the numeric hurdle, a large class may become a small class.

References

- Adrian, L. M. (2010). Active learning in large classes: Can small interventions produce greater results than are statistically predictable? Active learning in large classes. *The Journal of General Education*, 59(4), 223-237.
- Bahanshal, D. A. (2013). The Effect of Large Classes on English Teaching and Learning in Saudi Secondary Schools. *English Language Teaching*, 6(11), 49-59.
- Bughio, F. A. (2013). Improving English language teaching in large classes at university level in Pakistan (Doctoral dissertation, University of Sussex).
- Brady, B. (2012). Managing assessment in large EFL classes. *The Cambridge Guide to Second Language Assessment*, 291-298.
- Brown, J. D. (2000). *Using surveys in language programs*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Flick, U. (2009). *An introduction to qualitative research*. London: SAGE.
- Gravetter, F. J., & Forzano, L.-A.B. (2011). *Research methods for the behavioral sciences*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- Hattie, J. (2005). The paradox of reducing class size and improving learning outcomes. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 43(6), 387-425.
- Hess, N. (2001). *Teaching Large Multilevel Classes*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Hoxby, Caroline (2000). "The Effects of Class Size and Composition on Student Achievement: New Evidence from Natural Population Variation." *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, pp. 1239-85.
- Khurram, B. A. (2010). Beating learner passivity in large classes. Retrieved from <https://www.dawn.com/news/880958>
- McLeod, N. (1989) *What teachers cannot do in large classes. Lancaster-Leeds language learning in large classes research project. Report No. 7*. Overseas Education Unit, School of Education, Leeds, University of Leeds.
- Milesi, C., & Gamoran, A. (2006). Effects of class size and instruction on kindergarten achievement. Educational evaluation and policy analysis. *American Educational Research Association*, 28(4), 287-313.
- Mulryan-Kyne, C. (2010). Teaching large classes at college and university level: Challenges and opportunities. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 15(2), 175-185.
- Nunan, D. (1992). *Research Methods in Language Learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Oliver, P. (2012). *Succeeding with your literature review: A handbook for students*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- PRB (July 10, 2020). World Population Data Sheet Shows Older Populations Growing, Total Fertility Rates Declining. Retrieved from <https://www.prb.org/2020-world-population-data-sheet/>
- Renaud, S., Tannenbaum E., & Stantial, P. (2008), *Student-Centered Teaching in Large Classes with Limited Resources*. Retrieved from <http://maggiie.blogbus.com/logs/21227901.html>
- Renaud, S., Tannenbaum, E., & Stantial, P. (2007). Student-centered teaching in large classes with limited resources. *English Teaching Forum*, 45 (3), 13- 15.
- Ridley, D. (2008). *The literature review: A step-by-step guide for students*. London: SAGE.
- Rubin, A. and Babbie, R.E (2010). *Essential Research Methods for Social Work*. Belmont, CA: Brooks / Cole, Cengage Learning.
- Salkind, N. J. (2010). *Encyclopedia of research design*. Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE Publications.
- Schaller, B., (2005). National Research Council (U.S.), Transit Cooperative Research Program., United States., Transit Development Corporation., & Schaller Consulting. . On-board and intercept transit survey techniques. Washington, D.C: Transportation Research
- Shamim, F. (2012). Teaching large classes. *The Cambridge guide to pedagogy and practice in second language teaching*, 95-102.
- Shamim, F. & Kuchah, K. (2016). In Hall, G. (Ed), Teaching large classes in difficult circumstances. *The Routledge handbook of English language teaching*. New York: Routledge

- Sulistyowati, T. (2012) Making Large Classes Smaller: The Challenge of Teaching English to Young Learners in Indonesia. *T E Y L I N 2 : from Policy to Classroom*. pp.170-178
- The World Bank (2019). Total population of Pakistan. Retrieved March 15, 2021, from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=PK>
- Todd, R. W. (2006) Why investigate large classes. *King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi Thailand Journal of Language Education*, 9, 1-12.
- West, M. (1966). *Teaching English in difficult circumstances*. London: Longman
- Ximing, Y. (2003). The Effectiveness of Collaborative Learning in EFL Large Class Teaching. M.A. dissertation, Northwestern Polytechnical University.
- Winstone, N., & Millward, L. (2012). Reframing perceptions of the lecture from challenges to opportunities: Embedding active learning and formative assessment into the teaching of large classes. *Psychology Teaching Review*, 18(2), 31-41.

