

**THE UNIVERSITY OF COMPUTER STUDIES, YANGON
MYANMAR**

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**SOME PRACTISING TECHNIQUES FOR LARGE CLASSES IN UCSY ,
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ABSTRACT

This paper encourages teachers to tackle problems of teaching in large classes and it aims for the researchers. The University of Computer Studies Yangon, Myanmar is the IT leading university and encounters with difficulties in large class size consisting of forty to sixty, and even eighty students in each class, which leads to lack of engagement in language teaching. In this situation, both teachers and students unintentionally experience the passive teaching and learning environment. To overcome this, teachers have created some applicable teaching techniques to facilitate students in their second language learning through limited resources. In previous time, teacher-centered method was used but learner-focused teaching is now being applied through critical reflection on professional practice. Some methods such as clickers for reading skill; project paper and minute paper for writing skill; think-pair-share and making presentation for speaking skill; and listening activities in language laboratory ,etc. have been done. It can be said that by means of teaching-learning facilitation mentioned above, large classes can be managed by changing teaching methods to increase students' participation plus interest.

Key words: large classes, lack of engagement, interactive teaching techniques, think pair-share, minute paper, learner-focused teaching, students' participate

1. INTRODUCTION

Myanmar is now marching to a modern democratic nation and all sectors are being changed in accordance with the demand of the new era. In developing countries like Myanmar, universities are experiencing significant growth in student enrollment. The University of Computer Studies, Yangon is the IT leading university affiliated with other twenty-four universities across Myanmar. And in computer studies, English is taught in every

level of courses though it is regarded as a supporting subject. Unfortunately every class size in UCSY consists of forty or fifty to sixty to seventy students, which leads to the lack of engagement in language teaching. In this situation, students have less motivation in their language learning and teachers especially language teachers have faced some difficulties in their teaching.

In order to tackle this problem, teachers have made some efforts – some techniques – help them facilitate in their language teaching. Since the syllabus prescribed in UCSY is IELTS (International English Language Testing System) along with grammar teaching, the techniques applied in the classroom are focused on reading, listening, writing, and speaking skills. Group discussion, clickers for reading; “think-par share” for speaking skill; “minute paper” for writing skill; and doing language laboratory for listening task.

In previous time, teacher-centred method was used, but at the present time, learner-focused teaching is being applied through critical reflection on professional practices. By doing so, Students can empower to take control of their own learning, by giving the autonomy and, by creating a socially democratic atmosphere in class. It can be said that techniques mentioned above can promote students motivation and can assess their ability in language learning. It also shows how large classes, exceeding a hundred students, can be managed by changing teaching methods and by increasing students participation through group learning and the deployment of group leaders.

This paper comprises five chapters. Chapter one provides an introduction. In chapter two, the status and importance of English language teaching in University of Computer Studies, Yangon together with some background history of English language teaching. In chapter three, some methods which can solve the problems of language teaching in large classes. Chapter four discusses the pros and cons of these methods. The final chapter looks at the future implications and offers practical guidelines on the management of large classes.

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF ENGLISH TEACHING IN UNIVERSITIES OF COMPUTER STUDIES

English in Computer Studies plays a very useful role even though it is a minor subject to aid the students in their specialized fields of study. Nowadays, ICT in Myanmar has already developed and computers are used to perform a wide variety of activities with

reliability, accuracy, and speed. Students may need to use English in occupational premises such as hotels, restaurants, companies, government offices, etc. to be a well-qualified efficient computer scientists, one must be proficient in English language skills, both receptive and productive skills.

The syllabus conducted for English in our university is mainly on International English Language Testing System (IELTS) courses. Students therefore need to develop language four skills and they need practising a lot. Although textbooks are prescribed in English, the medium of instruction is usually in bilingual. The grammar translation method is usually used in language teaching in order for students to learn more effectively. However, nowadays the main purpose of language teaching is to take the learners from grammatical competence to communicative competence, the syllabus designers will have to find and take into consideration the components of a communicative syllabus and the teacher will also need to teach in communicative approach.

The University of Computer Studies, Yangon origins trace back to the founding of the **Universities' Computer (UCC)** in 1971. UCC provided computer training to university and government employees in cooperation with the Mathematics Department of Yangon University.. In 1988, it became independent as **Institute of Computer Science and Technology (ICST)**. In 1993, it started an internationally accepted International Diploma in Computer Studies (IDCS) programme with the help of UK's the National Computing Centre (NCC).

In this situation, the course for English subject was based on the NCC course – **“Human Communication”**. **The Grammar Translation method** was used for this course and reading and writing skills are mainly taught to the students. Although presentation skill was also involved in the course, there was less attention to this part. In 1997, the university was transferred from the Ministry of Education to the Ministry of Science and Technology and it was renamed the **University of Computer Studies, Yangon**. Since then a graduate school with master's and Ph.D. degree programs was established in 2001. Nowadays, UCSY is the leading IT and computer science university of Myanmar. The university, administered by the Ministry of Science and Technology, offers undergraduate and graduate degree programs in computer science and technology. The medium of instruction at UCSY is in English. Generally speaking, English is the supportive subject in computer universities but it

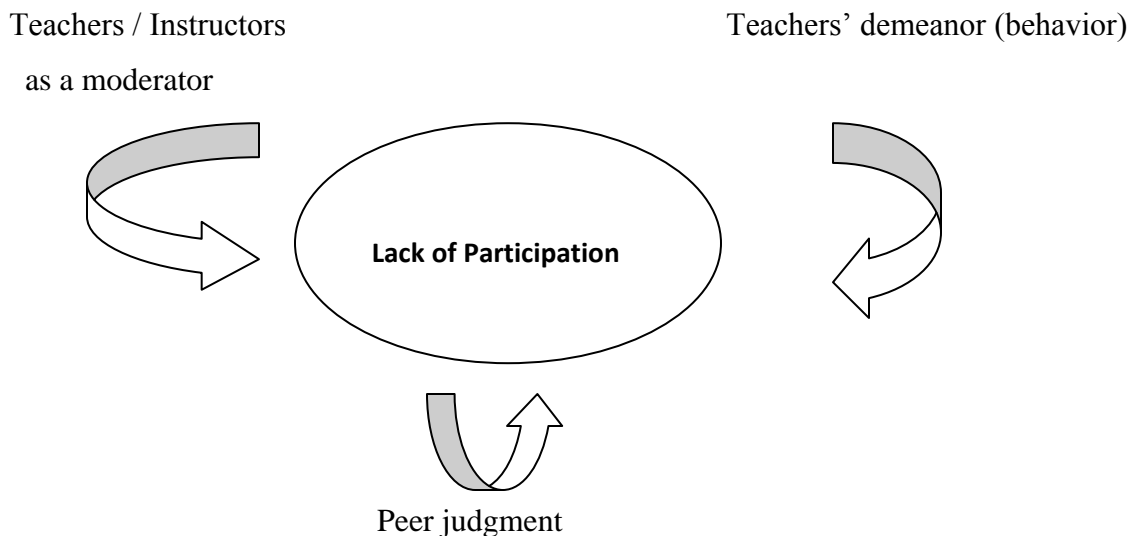
is related with other specialized fields of studies. In the University of Computer Studies, all the students have passed their Basic Education High school Examination with considerably high marks. Most students have a high level of proficiency in English and they attend the course with motivation.

Unfortunately, large class sizes pose many challenges, both in and out of the classroom and promote lack of engagement. Some students do not make participation in their learning; they maybe shine before the large group. This is an inevitable problem which can be seen in developing countries. Teachers therefore need to find out what are the causes of not participating and which solutions can be suitable for their students.

3. SOME CAUSES AND FACTORS WHICH HELP TEACHERS DEAL WITH SOME OF THE CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH TEACHING LARGE CLASSES

The very first step for teachers to tackle is promoting student engagement. Teachers have to consider what causes students to not participate. The following are the factors:

- (i) Students' perceptions of faculty authority
- (ii) Students' perceptions of the instructor / teacher
- (iii) Students' fear of peer judgment



(i) Perceptions of faculty authority

This issue requires particular attention in freshmen-heavy classes. In these classes students feel that the teacher is the arbiter (moderator) of knowledge. Students are more likely to sit silently in class and take it all in.

So how to deal with this problem?

First the instructor or the teacher should use content-centred, not instructor-centred. The teacher should ask students to practice questioning skills through exercises and which knowledge in our fields is contested and constantly evolving. To do this, break up the class into 10-20 minute segments(group), incorporating a specific question or exercise that requires student participation in each group. The question or exercise can take several forms. The following techniques can be used in practice:

(a) Think-pair-share

This strategy can help teachers learn how to organize students and classroom topics to encourage a high degree of classroom participation and assist students in developing a conceptual understanding of a topic. Since think-pair-share is one of the collaborative learning strategies, it helps students work together to solve a problem about reading comprehension. By using this strategy, students think individually about a topic or an answer to a question, and they work in pairs to solve a problem and share ideas with the class. Discussing with a partner maximizes participation, focuses attention and engages students in comprehending the reading material. However, teachers need to know how to use this strategy. There are some tips as follows:

- Decide upon the text to be read and develop the set of questions or prompts that target key concepts.
- Describe the purpose of the strategy and provide guidelines for discussions.
- Model the procedure to ensure that students understand how to use the strategy.
- Monitor and support students as they work through the following:

Think: Teachers begin by asking a specific question about the text. Students “think” about what they know or have learnt about the topic.

Pair: Each student should be paired with another student or a small group.

Share: Students share their thinking with their partner. Teachers expand the “share” into a whole-class discussion.

When teachers use this strategy, they should be sensitive to learners’ needs: reading skill, concentration skills, language skill, in creating pairs and allow students to choose who will share with the whole group. For example:

Q; I have a problem of my hair. It becomes thinner and thinner. I use various kinds of shampoo which is the best. What is your suggestion?

In this situation, the teacher gives the problem and make the students into pair and tell the solution by discussion.

(b) Dual Dictation

For listening practice in the classroom, teachers can use this dual dictation activity. In this activity, teachers ask students to get into pairs to write a dialogue. When student A is speaking, student B should write down what they are saying and vice versa. When they have finished the conversation, they should check what each other has written and put the two sides of the conversation together. Teachers could then ask students to perform their dialogues again to the rest of the class, or to swap with other pairs. This activity works best if teachers give students a theme or role-play, for example,

- A conversation between friends about leisure activities
- An interview with a well-known person
- A funny incident

Learning to listen to each other carefully can build students’ ability and confidence in real-life situations, in which they need to focus on both listening and speaking. This dual dictation activity is a fun way of getting students to concentrate more and to remember information.

(c) Back-to-Back Interview

With this interactive activity, students will explore interviewing and answering interview questions. They will be paired with a classmate and take turns interviewing each other. This activity is not only a great way for students to introduce to other classmates but also a good chance for students to practice their listening and speaking skills.

The way to improve listening and speaking skills is to practice. If students find it particularly difficult to concentrate on what someone is saying, they should try repeating their words mentally as they say them. This will reinforce their message and help them stay focused. To enhance students' listening skill, teachers have to remind their students to pay attention to what the other person is saying. Listening and speaking skills are closely related to each other. By becoming a better listener, students will improve their productivity as good speakers. They will have an ability to influence, persuade and negotiate among others. What's more, they will avoid conflict and misunderstandings. All of these are necessary for workplace success.

(d) PowerPoint Presentation

PowerPoint is regarded as the most useful, accessible way to create and present visual aids for effective teaching. Using PowerPoint in teaching is a quick and easy way to organize ideas and information. One of the advantages of teaching with PowerPoint instead of traditional teaching method is that students pay more attention on lecturers because they can easily see and learn the key points on slides. Moreover, teachers can ask questions after lecture to know how much students can remember and understand the lessons from the slides. It is a great chance for both teachers and students to see their strengths and weaknesses. Teachers can use colorful PowerPoint slides for teaching grammar and business writing: report writing for Bar charts, Pie Chart and writing CV.

However, it takes countless hours thinking in PowerPoint and developing slides. It needs basic equipment like a computer, a projector, a multimedia classroom and electricity. In addition, teachers have to handle the electronic devices well and do have computer skills.

(e) Mind Maps for Essay Writing

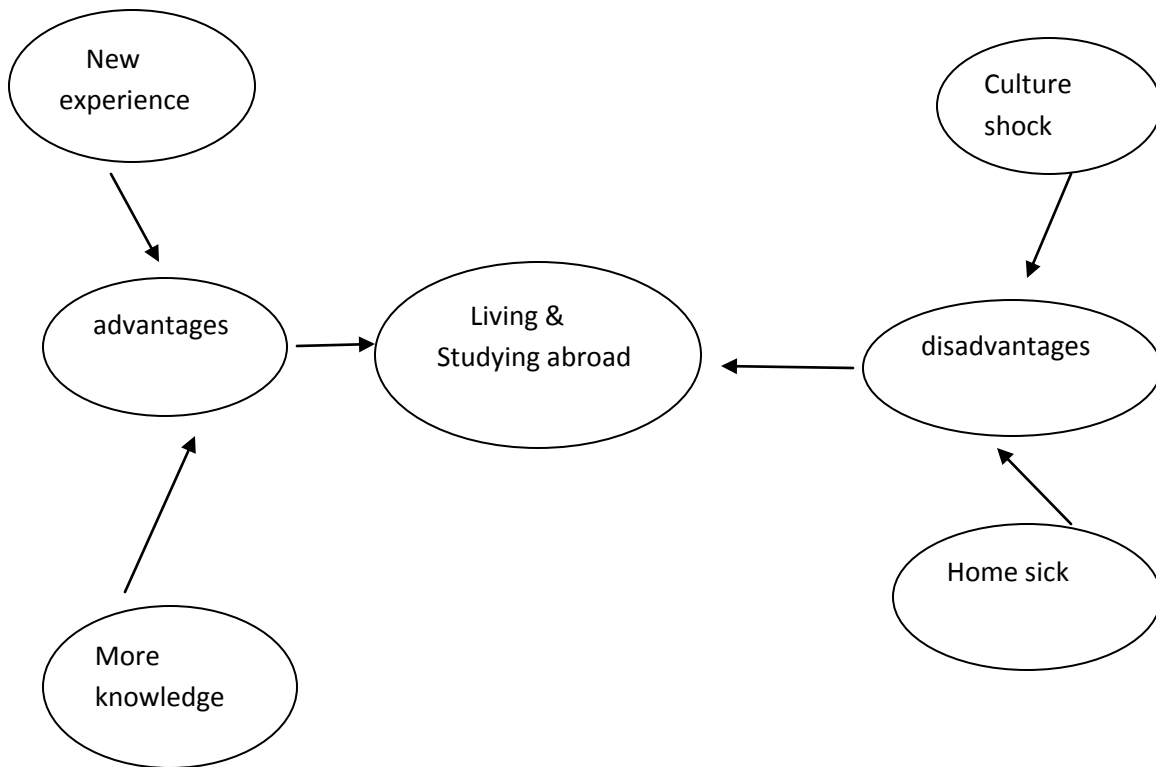
A mind map is a diagram that displays information visually. It is good for planning an essay. Before starting with the actual writing, it is very important that an outline of the essay should be made. This will help students create a coherent structure of the arguments, counterarguments, examples, and evidence they want to add in each argument. Teachers first need to teach how to draw a mind map to students. The rules for creating a mind map are simple:

- Write the subject in the center of the paper.

- Draw branches that point away from the center. Each branch symbolizes one thought or idea related to the subject. Use Meaningful keywords to write these ideas onto the branches.
- From each branch, more ideas can branch off.
- Use colors, icons and images whenever possible.

Using mind maps to plan and outline the essay will not only make the writing process a lot easier, it will also enable students to work through sources more efficiently and help them find information more quickly. It is one of the brainstorming activities that is useful for all types of writing – from essays, short stories, assignments to papers. For example:

“ Pros and Cons of living and studying in abroad”



(f) Minute Paper

The minute paper is a very commonly used classroom assessment technique at the end of class. It can be used at the end of any topic discussion. Its major advantage is that it provides rapid feedback on whether the teacher’s main idea and what the students perceived as the main idea are the same. Additionally, by asking students to add a question at the end, this assessment becomes an integrative task. Students must first organize their thinking to rank the major points and then decide upon a significant question. Sometimes, instead of asking for the main point, a teacher may wish to probe for the most disturbing or most surprising item. It is thus a very adaptable tool. The one-minute paper that takes a few minutes of class time may be very helpful because the feedback the teacher receives is invaluable.

Sample Form of the Minute Paper

Please answer the questions below:
1. What did you find useful about today’s session?

2. What would you still like to know more about?

3. Is there anything you did not understand?

Source: activelearningps.com

(ii) Students perceptions of the instructor / teacher

In language teaching, the instructor's or the teacher's demeanor is also important. In large classes, it is more difficult to have meaningful exchanges with each and every student. But there is much that we can do to project a demeanor that promotes student participation.

(a) Make it a priority to learn and the students' names

In this case, the teacher calls on students at random from the card pile "equity cards". It means to help students ensure a broad participation, choosing students at random to answer the questions.

(b) Establish a rapport

At the beginning of each semester, the teacher asks students to fill out note cards describing some of their interests. By looking over these note cards and memorizing students' names, the teacher gets to know students and tries to greet them by name and speak with them when they enter the classroom. Such efforts often result in a better rapport between teacher and student and as a consequence, a more engaged classroom.

(c) Be patient and affirmative with student in class and out

These behaviors can bolster student confidence and more confident students are much more likely to participate. The teacher therefore should support and acknowledge student's performance.

(d) Develop strategies to encourage students to use office hours

Students need to meet the teacher with group of (4 or 5) during the first few weeks of the semester. The brief social interaction (generally about 5 minutes per student) helps teacher remember students' names and makes them more comfortable with him or her.

(iii) Students fear of peer judgment

Particularly in large classes, students are fear of being embarrassed in front of dozens or even fifty of their peers. They are too shy to participate in discussion. To deal with this

problem, the teacher promotes an environment of trust and mutual respect from the very beginning of the course. In such an environment, students are more likely to feel safe to actively participate in. Try to foster a sense of personal connection between student and teacher through group and partner activities that help students get better acquainted. And the teacher should make a balance student voices by not allowing any students to dominate discussions and protecting student from interruption.

4. CHALLENGES IN LARGE CLASS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AT UCSY AND SOLUTIONS TO THEM

This chapter emphasized on how we make the students proficient in their English learning at UCSY. In University of Computer Studies, Yangon, Myanmar, English is prescribed as a compulsory subject from the first year to Ph.D. courses. Teaching English for students therefore can be said that it is as important as their computing subjects. Since the course is based on the IELTS, reading, listening, writing, and speaking skills play important roles. Unfortunately, teaching English in a large class can have challenges in which students' participation and interaction between teacher and students, and between one student and another. In higher education level in Myanmar, universities are facing with the problems of teaching large classes. Likewise, in UCSY, the number of students in one class is as high as 50 or so.

Therefore **the very first problem is that the teachers especially language teachers cannot pay attention equally to all of the students.** If he /she tried to call on everybody in the class to answer the questions, it would take too much time and some uninvolved students would get bored and start to do something else. According to my observation, **in reading section**, while the teacher was explaining the text, the students, not all, who seated at the back of the class, were having something to do like messaging or reading some unconcerned materials they bring to read. When the teacher asked the question, only the students who

were in front row answered. As a result, students' participations are lessened while a few good students improve their reading skill.

Solution to this issue is that teachers should use learner-centered method instead of using teacher-centered one. He /she should introduce the topic as a pre-reading task and make them read the text and find the main point of a paragraph or the writer's opinion through applying skimming and scanning skills. And ask them at random .By doing this, the students who are not interested in reading will participate and the teacher can manage the whole class.

The second challenge is due to the difference in background knowledge of language learning. In our university, students are heterogeneous – some are good command of English , but others are not. Their proficiency skills vary greatly – the materials prescribed are easy for some students but difficult for others. And their attitudes towards English language are also different. To take **speaking section**, for example, authentic materials based on IELTS make them quite difficult. Some students are too shy to speak because they are not being criticized by peers.

To tackle this problem, the teacher uses **think-pair-share technique**. Students are divided into groups and the topic is discussed by pairs or one another. The teacher monitors them and sometimes he /she encourages them who are weak in speaking skill. In my class, some students are eager to speak and want to describe their ideas but they cannot use the right kind of language. In this situation, I encourage and guide them how to use the language function correctly.

Moreover, in order to improve the students' speaking skill, every student of each year has to **talk about one topic in the class** and this is recorded as their exam assessment. **Power point presentations** are also made for the final year and the master's students on any topic and the teacher records their performances by evaluation forms. This is added to the examination assessment. In my opinion, this activity can promote students' motivation and it is one of the practical and useful techniques for large classes while it takes some time for the teacher to accomplish the whole task.

For **listening task**, our university has two language labs holding 80 students and every class has to take listening activity once a week. The students who attend the listening class are recorded and the listening test is done at the end of the semester, which covers 10

percent in examination. By doing this, students participate in listening activity and they realize they have to motivate themselves.

Another difficult problem the teachers have to face in large classes is writing activity. The duration for one period is only 55 minutes and in doing writing task, students avoid writing by pretending to do something else or looking for some sources for their essay to spend the time.

In order to tackle the problems of lack of participation of students or the challenges of large classes, in our English Department, evaluation forms or assessment forms are recorded for every level of class ranging from the first year to the Ph.D. The class teachers fill up the record sheets and keep them for the final examination, which will cover 20 percent of the exam result. The assessment form is as follows:

Sr.No.	Roll No,	Name	Reading (5%)	Listening (5%)	Speaking (5%)	Writing (5%)	Total (20 %)
1.	1CST -2	Mg Aung	4	4	3	4	15

Apart from the problems mentioned above, **heavy workload can be a problem for the teachers to large classes.** In our department, a teacher has to take at least 3 or 4 classes, and one has 40 students, so he / she handles with altogether with 120 people, which can be a heavy duty and difficult to control the performance of the individuality in time. Teachers are snowed under with marking and paperwork. The teachers especially cannot give the feedback to each student. Writing essay or short paragraph cannot be made correction properly and the students may have the misunderstanding over the teacher. Therefore, the teacher has difficulty in helping students to improve their language skill.

The possible solution to this case is that human resource is the only answer. We should realize the “**teacher shortage**” and should launch a nationwide publicity campaign to show the positive sides of teaching profession. Another solution could be to set a maximum number of hours per week that teachers can work or balance on their schedule.

4.1 Some Good Points of Large Classes

We should not always look on the dark side of the large classes. By teaching a large class, the teacher has to come up with ideas and activities that will interest and engage his or her studies. There are many coping skills and activities that will make teaching easier. Since

large classes have at least 50 or more students, in general, lessons and activities will take longer to complete ,but for large classes there will be no fillers. The time passes quickly.

Large classes are heterogeneous - which can offer a high energy setting that is more fun and exciting. In addition, the teacher can exploit the various ideas or positive aspects of the students. For developing countries like Myanmar, which has budget limited and space constraints, large classes can provide simultaneously and help a great number of human resources improve in their language learning.

5. CONCLUSION

Teaching large classes will be easy to distract for the teachers, but this can be overcome by using some useful and effective methods through the hard work of the teachers. It would be a challenging task for some teachers. In this case “ teacher development” is the important factor that needs to be considered. Teachers should be trained for what to consider and how to teach in large classes.

In this Digital Era, technology makes people more effective in their teaching and learning. Teachers of today can use the technical devices (Projectors, CD player, computers, Internet) to make their teaching more interesting. There is a saying that “Technology will never replace teachers, but technology in the hands of a great teacher can be transformational,” by George Couros. In the University of Computer Studies, Yangon, Myanmar, power point presentations are occasionally used and CD players and videos are also applied for listening task. The teachers usually download some video clips from You tube and make students watch to improve their four skills.

In conclusion, we cannot escape from teaching large classes and the outcomes but we can handle with the problems to some extent by means of using effective techniques together with advanced technology.

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