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Managing Large Class in Tertiary Level: An Analysis to Delve into the Reality

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Abstract- The students from different places with a mixture of their capacities may arise with a plenty of difficulties in a large class due to a large number of students and a great variety of attitudes of the students. Although there is no alternative to delivering a traditional lecture to the students, a modern view of teaching with a combination of team learning and use of modern technology is often more effective for the students. Ensuring quality teaching at tertiary level in a large class poses unique challenges and difficulties because here a teacher has to undergo perplexities about student-diversity, evaluation system, contextual attention, befitting student-centered regulation. In this article, several possible ways have been discussed to get over any challenge or risk for the management of a large class. Moreover, here the efficacy of modern techniques for the management of a large class has been envisaged for the improvement of students of tertiary level.

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I. Introduction

Managing a large class at the tertiary level is, no doubt, challenging for an instructor, and it entails an amalgamation of techniques because a large number of students assemble in a hefty classroom and are unable to pay proper attention to the lecture and instruction of the teacher. No doubt, apt strategies are must for managing a large class which is, though very often, desecrated because of some constraints. There is no specific number of students to affirm class as a large one but a class having more than 30 students is usually considered as a large class. Whatever it may be, some keys such as determining the objective of a lesson, dividing the students into several small groups, monitoring learners' progress, assessing potential feedback of the students' work and evaluating the students' accomplishments can grow effectual for the management of a large class. A large class, bringing about ruffling in class management and curtailing the time for creative activities in classroom thereby, forces a teacher not to pay much individual attention to the students. The conducting of a large class is, therefore, a popular topic among the faculty in higher education. The advantages of a large class include the saving of staffing resource because a single teacher teaches a large number of students, efficacious use of time and talent of the faculty, availability of resources because a little amount of resources can facilitate a large group of students, and standardization of the learning experience (McLeod, 1998). No doubt, there are significant disadvantages of a large class such as strained impersonal relations between students and the instructor, perplexity with teaching methods, discomfort for an instructor teaching a large class, and a negative perception of an instructor teaching there. However, considering principles of managing a large class and taking to strategies for dealing many students in a classroom can be beneficial to teaching in many ways.

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II. Class size and Student Performance

Research so far done on the relationship between class size and student performance has identified conflicting results (Toth & Montagna, 2002). The results of some studies show no significant connection between class size and students' performance (Hancock, 1996; Kennedy &Siegfried, 1997), while other studies favor small class environments (Gibbs, Lucas, Simonite, 1996; Borden & Burton, 1999; Arias & Walker, 2004). Results based on the criteria used to gauge student performance as well as on the class size vary. In case of taking traditional achievement tests, a small class cannot provide more advantage than that a large class can (Kennedy & Siegfried, 1997). However, if additional performance criteria are used (e.g., long-term retention, problem-solving skills), it appears that a small class grows advantageous (Gibbs et al., 1996; Arias & Walker, 2004).

In a large class, it is difficult to get a satisfactory idea of students' needs. As a consequence of a large number of students in a class, the noise level which is sometimes extremely high may generate extra stress for the teachers. Organizing, planning and presenting lessons may constitute another challenge for teachers in a large class as students' abilities might differ considerably. In a large class, there is another difficulty about the active engagement of learners in the learning process that grows more inconvenient for a large number of students. Moreover, a large class creates a

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scope for the reluctant students against which they can fight shy of the teacher who always undergoes a kind of psychological pressure for the class management. Under these circumstances, a teacher can apply the strategies of cooperative learning.

a) Cooperative Learning (CL)

For managing a large class, cooperative learning through group work works amazingly. Students who work in a collaborative setting can learn and retain more than the students who learn individually in a class. Cooperative learning through group work is a process by which the students are involved in team-work to achieve a particular goal, and that is why all the team members are obliged to count upon one another to achieve that goal.

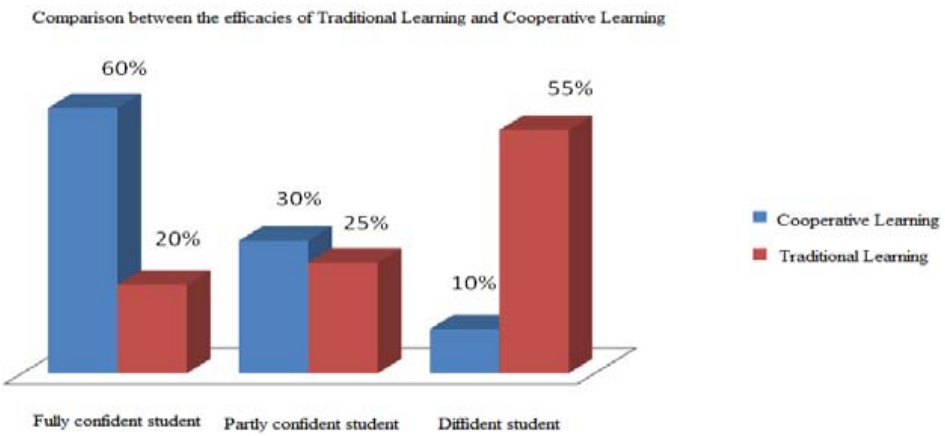
Group work is carried out interactively by the group members who contribute to their collective progress with feedback, reasoning, fundamental ideas and encouragement. The teachers of the tertiary level will encourage the students to develop and practice trust-building, leadership, decision-making, comm.-unication skill, and assist the students to solve the complex assignments in befitting ways. In a large class, the teacher advises his/her students to be involved in answering or generating questions, explaining observ-ations, solving problems, summarizing class lecture, troubleshooting and brainstorming. All these activities are of great use for high achievement from classroom, and for sure, these activities should be accomplished by working in groups for better yield. Worth mentioning, a large and rapidly growing body of research has already confirmed the effectiveness of cooperative learning in higher education (Astin, 1993; Cooper et al., 1990; Goodsell et al., 1992; Johnson et al., 1991; McKeachie, 1986).

Students who are taught with cooperative learning process in a class tend to exhibit higher academic achievement through greater persistence, high-level reasoning, critical thinking and clear understanding. The students remain focused on their collective effort having less disruptive behavior and lower levels of anxiety here. The interest of cooperative learning always provides the students with intrinsic motivation to learn, greater ability to address situations, keener adaptability, enthusiasm for subject areas, and higher self-esteem and confidence.

Students working in friendly environment of their groups not only have incentives to help one another but also gain confidence for their being together in many ways. Brighter students with the responsibility of explaining the materials of a lesson to the weaker students at times find problems in their understanding and can work out them. On the other hand, a student working alone may tend to delay in completing assignments or skip them altogether, but when he/she gets some others calculating upon him/her, he/she often feels forced to do the work in time.

b) Traditional Learning and Cooperative Learning: A case study

In a class of seventy-eight students of twelfth trimester who were doing their Basic English Course following Traditional Learning (TL) at World University of Bangladesh (WUB), as an experiment, I served each of them with a questionnaire to find out the level of their confidence in consideration of their academic achievement through persistence, capability of reasoning and critical thinking, and competence for understanding, before the trimester final examination. Disappointingly, it appeared that only sixteen students were fully confident, twenty-nine students were partly confident, and forty-three students were diffident. However, in another large class having eighty students doing the same course, I made ten groups each having eight students and guided them with the principles of CL. Before the trimester final examination I, to determine the level of confidence, served each student with a questionnaire, and the result was fantastic! Of these students, forty-eight were fully confident, twenty-four were partly confident, and only eight were diffident. The comparative Bar Chart below will show the result in percentage.



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c) *Teacher-Student Interaction*

Establishing a better understanding between a teacher and students is very important for managing a large class. Teachers must keep adequate patience to teach the students even if any student is less competent. This patient behavior can increase students' confidence and implicitly encourage the students to participate in class with enthusiasm. Many students keep mum and cannot pour forth their ideas in the classroom when they find the instructor harsh.

A teacher should create an interactive environment with a friendly attitude in his/her class to drive away the fear of weaker students of peer judgment - a nightmare for them - particularly in a large class where almost every student is afraid of being embarrassed in front of many of their peers. To address students' fear of peer judgment, an instructor will create an environment of trust and sympathy from the very beginning of a course. In that case, students are more likely to feel free to actively participate in the class fostering a sense of personal connection between them and their instructor who will always be facilitating the intimate relationship among the students. The instructor can provide handouts among the groups of students and ask them to generate potential questions and make effort to solve them. As to feedback in an initial stage, it is canny of the instructor to avoid pointing at students individually because it often creates an atmosphere of tension for many students worrying whether the teacher will single them out. However, when the teacher asks students to answer in small groups, most of them can respond to him confidently and correctly.

A teacher must give enough time to his/her students working in small groups to get on to the lecture and analyze it. However, in this connection, there is a labyrinth because if he/she assigns students to read complex material silently on their own, most of the students do not do it, and if he/she writes it on the board, they usually copy it into their notes without understanding. To veer this perplexity, if the teacher asks them to explain the lecture to one another under his/her cordial supervision, they will either work through it understanding or get stuck, and thus he/she must catch on to the reality. Teacher–student friendly interactions that persuade the students to make their best effort to conceive the knowledge of lesson help the whole learning process to a great extent.

III. Three Fundamental Considerations for Teaching in a Large class

a) *Consideration - 1: Scope for checking*

In the tertiary level, two students as "elbow partners" need scope check with each other about their learning, ask questions, guide each other and reflect together. And this is very crucial for a large class for in a large class a teacher does not have enough scope to check, with individual care, whether every student in a large class is absorbing the lesson. If a tight classroom space does not allow for quick triads or quad grouping, the instructor can use "elbow partners" -- two students nearby. As we know, in a large class, quiet students tend to get less involved because of their being introvert and less vocal. With less one-on-one time with small groups and individual students, teachers need to keep that large number of students talking and being listened. The instructor can take to 'turn and talk – technique' that is asking few students questions to be answered with one word or two individually even for a single minute to generate scope for him/her to avail an overall idea of the achievement in the class.

b) *Consideration - 2 : To demand a quick response to problems*

It will be judicious of an instructor to ask for a quick response from the students to the problems that they are facing in a large class. In fact, in a large class, the time constraint is a big challenge for the instructor. If the instructor took fifteen minutes to dig out the problems of the students in a small class in the past, now he/she has to give probably 30 minutes for doing the same job in a large class. The instructor will feel like lamenting over his/her present situation – of course, tormenting for him/her - considering the days in the past when he/she could roam about the whole room and provide each student with some quality moments or when he/she could offer immediate and thorough support to his/her students. Under these circumstances, the teacher can advise the students to write down their questions they can answer with only a few words on slip pads, and two students sitting side by side will exchange the slip pads so that they can help each other and determine their problems. Usually, only a few common questions are found because these questions being informative, the students working together can help each other to a large extent. After that, the teacher can discuss the answers to these common questions confusing for the students the way the students can understand nicely. Apart from this, against the new backdrop of the large class, the teacher can encourage the students to feel galvanized and point at their crisis quickly so that the teacher may find a fitting avenue to respond to the crisis promptly.

c) *Consideration - 3: To apply new strategies to engage students*

It is quite sure that, the larger the class size is, the more the relationship between the teacher and the students suffers. However, a teacher can – if necessary- conduct surveys once or twice a week where students can answer questions on a 'Likert Scale' and also ask questions to them. A teacher can inspire students to write letters – not a lot indeed - to him/her about their accomplishments, interests and in particular about the challenges they are facing in his/her class. A teacher

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may also rotate his/ her focus every three class days on some different students so that no one can slip from the attention of the teacher. If the teacher gives them a challenging task, they will try their level best to use their potential, and their real development starts then. Moreover, when the students remain engaged in the lesson altogether, it is effortless on the part of the teacher to control the class because the students, then, do not get any scope to talk unnecessarily in the classroom.

IV. Six Important Techniques for the Management of a Large Class

a) Technique - 1: To know the students well

Knowing the students well is very important for the management of a large class. To know the names of the students, their learning styles, the limit of the span of their attention, their background knowledge and why they are taking the course helps an instructor to deal with a large class excellently. If the teacher can know about the style a student is learning, it grows more facile for him/her to initiate the most effective way. The teacher should always remember the view of Ignacio 'Nacho' Estrada who said if a learner cannot learn the way we teach, maybe we should teach the way he/she learns. The teacher should create such a situation in his/her class that the students can feel safe and valued for when they will feel so, they will overcome their coyness and take part in the class spontaneously.

b) Technique - 2: To maintain a lecture plan

A teacher in a large class, following a lecture plan focused on the underlying principles, most vital cognitive functions and content of his/her lecture and course, can enthrall his/her students and manage his/her class successfully thereby. The teacher while preparing his/her lecture plan must consider whether it can provide a meaningful context for the lecture material, provide an organization for the lecture material and a visual outline of the lecture. The objective – to give correct answers to some potential and significant questions- of the lesson should be categorically determined in the lesson plan so that the students can feel they are conceiving new ideas and knowledge that must help them to contribute to the development of the stream of studies they have targeted.

c) Technique - 3: To draw the attention of the students

A teacher, while saying or doing anything at the beginning of his/her lecture, should never forget the familiar but significant English adage - "The morning shows the day." The introduction of his/her speech should engage the students in such a way that they feel enthusiastic for listening to the speech and taking the challenges about it. The teacher can, to attract the attention of the students, create curiosity among the students and set his/ her expectations in the introductory part of his/her lecture. In this connection, the teacher can outline the students' role and then offer a problem stating a question to them.

Despite the beginning of the lecture being very efficacious, sometimes students' attention to the lesson is diminished in want of the attention grabbers used by the teacher. About this matter, the personal experience the teacher has is the most useful tool. A teacher, to keep the interest of the students in his/her lecture intact, can tell gripping stories pertinent to his/her discussion. Additionally, he/she can tell some jokes alluding to any tricky point of his/her talk that the students can understand through comparison and laughter. If possible, he/she can initiate something unpredictable which will, with certitude, surprise the students who then cannot help paying attention to the lecture of the teacher. Apart from this, the contextual change of tone in the speech of the teacher can create a dramatic environment which can catch the attention of the students failing to concentrate on a lengthy lecture in the class. Moreover, if the teacher can bring about an audio-visual effect befitting for the students, showing cartoon by a projector, he/she can multiply his/her chance to a large extent to arrest the attention of the students in a large class.

d) Technique - 4: Midpoint activity plan

In the course of a class lecture, sometimes students may feel boring because it becomes strenuous for them to retain their attention for a long time. In that case, to bring about a variation in a class, judicious planning can be of use. About this matter, if a teacher has a plan for the middle part of the class lecture in particular, students can enjoy the last part of the lecture, and retain their attention thereby. As a part of this planning, the teacher can ask his/her students to rise and relax at the midpoint of the lecture. He/she can make the students prepare 'study questions' before the lecture and then can discuss them at the midpoint of the lecture for ten minutes. The teacher may also have a Question Box in the class with discussion topics related to the lecture. He will pull one or two out at the midpoint of the class and have a ten-minute discussion on the topic/s. Furthermore, he/she may make the students write the answer to a 'test-question'. However, he/she should make sure one thing that the activity is meaningful and relates to understanding the lecture material. There may be a break in a lecture by making small (2-3 students) groups write, discuss, summarize and solve a problem related to the lecture. The teacher can embellish the midpoint of the class lecture with a quiz which – as researches show – can facilitate students to retain the essence of the course

e) Technique - 5: Effective use of visual aids

An instructor should use visual aids in such a way that it can encourage the active thought of the

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students. They should be enticing enough to attract the attention of the students and help them understand the organization, illustration, and clarification of the lecture thereby. Visual aids should increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the presentation. At the time of slide presentation, the instructor should not talk to the slides because looking constantly at the slides will impede the delivering of his lecture contacting the eyes of the students, and the students must lose their interest. If an instructor puts a lot of information in one slide and reads the slide word- for- word, the students will, of course, be bored. At the very beginning of lecture, the teacher should make it pretty clear to students that the use of visual aid in the discussion is not intended to encourage them to practice note-taking. If students keep writing a big amount of information from the slides, they cannot listen to the instructor, the central force behind the lecture, mindfully as they should do.

f) Technique - 6: Magnetic movement and conditioned voice of the teacher in the classroom

A man nowadays is conditioned to expect changes in their viewing focus as he has the habit of enjoying TV ads. The average TV commercial changes the camera angle 15-30 times in 30 seconds. Similarly, the focus of the viewers shifts very rapidly. Traditionally the viewers expect changes while they are listening to anybody for a long time. If a teacher, in the course of his/her lecture, shifts his/her location at regular intervals, the memory of the students will be stimulated to retain the information associating it to different positions of the teacher in the classroom. Position of the teacher in the classroom can, as such, force students to pay closer attention to the lecture — especially if the teacher is standing right next to the students.

A teacher has to use his/her voice as an attention-grabbing tool. Attractive tone of a teacher is always proved to his/her students to be his/her strength while he/she is teaching. According to the number of students and the size of the classroom, the pitch of his/her speech should be adjusted to ensure perfect listening for the students. A teacher cannot always be highly motivational in lecture, but if he/she delivers it in dulcet voice, the students will never feel bored. It is, that is why, wise of a teacher to include thinking of where he/she can use his/her voice for emphasis, demonstration, exaggeration, surprise, etc. in planning a lecture.

V. Need-Based Preparation

Managing a large class in which a teacher wants to ensure quality teaching and wants his/her students to act on, think about, scrutinize, or practice a particular section requires unique kind of preparation. A class is successfully managed only if the teacher and the students are prepared for and busy with the lesson. A teacher, therefore, needs to focus his/her concentration on his/her arrangement for class and the learning of the students. Need-based preparation can pave the way for effective teaching which automatically facilitates a teacher to manage his/her class whatever its size may be.

A teacher will, with certitude, feel most comfortable to manage the class if he/she has had preparation more than necessary, especially if he/she is teaching for the first time. At least for the first few weeks, the teacher must support himself/herself being prepared elaborately for each class, reading extra background material, creating handouts, working out a minute-by-minute schedule, and devising various means of beguiling his/her students into thinking they are having enjoyment when they are, in fact, learning the material.

VI. Discipline

An instructor in a large class needs to be co nscious of various disciplinal issues which never refer to putting a bar on the smiling faces in the classroom or creating unfriendly circumstances. To be strict about discipline and rules does not mean the instructor has to be necessarily a mean one. What the instructor will not tolerate should be made clear by him/her from the first day of class, and he/she should enforce it consistently. As a large class goes with the possibility of being crowded and chaotic, the teacher has to draw the attention of almost every student to ensure discipline in the classroom. He or she must play a role as an excellent coordinator who must smell the class and taste what the students are cooking in their minds. He/She should then take his/her initiatives upon the matter. Adopting the techniques to handle a class and becoming familiar with the students can also be considered as an achievement. In the tertiary level, students give in to love and affection but not to threat of an instructor. Students at this level, therefore, remain disciplined in the class of a teacher who provides his/her students with quality education and shows much affection and love for them. Moreover, making students busy with relevant thinking is a very effective strategy to get students disciplined in the classroom.

VII. Conclusion

To manage a large class in tertiary level is, no doubt, a challenge which a teacher can face with innovative ideas and befitting application of teaching techniques. No approach can be fruitful, if the outcome is not proved to be effectual. A teacher can successfully manage a large class by winning the hearts of his/her students who, at their tertiary level of education, undergo a lot of psychological changes. It is imperative of an instructor willing to manage his/her class of a large number of students to take to cooperative group learning in class. Favorable interaction between a teacher and his/her students, the most crucial facilitating factor for ensuring wonderful management of a large

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class, should be maintained with an eye to knowing the students inside out. Giving time for the students to check their class understanding and initiating new strategies are always conducive to making the students reflective and to keeping them controlled thereby. If an instructor can know the students well and maintain good lecture plan having the scope, if necessary, to use attention catching visual aids, he/she can manage the class comfortably, even if a lot of students are there in his/her class. The leading of students through a kind of discipline from the day the lesson starts with the taking of continuous preparation for class on the part of a teacher - as I believe - can be proved to be very useful for the teacher managing a large class to impart quality education.

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