

Attitudes and Perceptions of University Students Towards Teachers' Strategies for Managing Large EFL Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

This study explores students' perceptions and attitudes towards managing large classes in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at Yogyakarta State University. Using a quantitative survey approach, the research involved 45 master's students from the English Education Department. It examined aspects of classroom management such as physical environment, teacher communication, and instructional strategies. Results show overall positive views on the learning environment and teacher effectiveness but reveal challenges in experiential learning and student-teacher interaction within large classes. The findings emphasize the need for innovative teaching methods, thorough preparation, and tailored lesson plans to address the specific needs of large EFL classrooms. This research offers insights for educators and policymakers to enhance teaching and learning in similar settings

INTRODUCTION

Effective classroom management is a crucial aspect of the teaching and learning process, particularly in large classes. As educational institutions strive to accommodate an increasing student population while maintaining limited resources, teachers often find themselves in charge of classes with a high number of students. This situation presents unique challenges that demand innovative strategies and effective classroom management techniques to ensure a conducive learning environment and successful knowledge acquisition by students (Haryanto & Ngadiman, 2018; Wassid & Sunendar, 2011).

The concept of classroom management encompasses a wide range of activities and responsibilities undertaken by teachers to create an organized, comfortable, and enjoyable learning environment (Sagala, 2000). It involves managing time, resources, and supplementary activities while aligning them with predetermined teaching objectives (Trajkov, 2007). Effective classroom management not only contributes to an orderly and well-structured learning process but also enhances student proficiency and academic achievements (McLeod & Hoover, 2003).

Large classes, defined as those with an excessive number of students, typically considered to be 50 or more (Trang, 2015), pose significant challenges for teachers. These challenges include discomfort, discipline issues, inability to provide individual attention, difficulties in evaluation, and challenges in transitioning between learning activities (Hayes, 1997). Teachers accustomed to smaller class sizes may find it particularly demanding to maintain control, engage students effectively, and facilitate dynamic and creative teaching and learning sessions in larger classes (Harmer, 2000; Aoumeur, 2017).

The role of the teacher in the teaching and learning process is multifaceted, encompassing facilitation, counseling, and serving as a resource of knowledge and expertise (Benson, 2001). However, as Marzano (2003) emphasizes, the primary responsibility of teachers is to act as managers, effectively controlling the classroom environment to achieve desired academic outcomes. Failure to establish effective classroom management can hinder the teaching and learning process (Kakar & Sarwari, 2022).

In the context of teaching English as a second language, where students are acquiring proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills (Ngadiman & Haryanto, 2018), classroom management becomes even more crucial. Teachers must employ strategies that not only facilitate language acquisition but also maintain an environment conducive to learning. This challenge is particularly prevalent in large classes, where maintaining control and providing individual attention becomes increasingly difficult (Wang & Zhang, 2001; Zhou & Mann, 2021).

This study aims to explore students' perceptions and attitudes towards the strategies used by lecturers in managing large EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classes at the university level. More specifically, this study seeks to uncover students' views on the effectiveness of various classroom management techniques applied by their lecturers in the context of English language learning in large classes. In addition, this study also aims to investigate the challenges

faced by students during the learning process in large EFL classes. By understanding the students' perspectives, this research hopes to identify the most effective strategies for managing large EFL classes and uncover the specific difficulties that students experience in such learning environments. The knowledge gained from this research is intended to assist in the development of teaching approaches that can increase student engagement, improve learning outcomes, and create a supportive educational environment in the context of large EFL classes at the university level.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the realm of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, the concept of a "large classroom" poses significant challenges for both teachers and students. Large EFL classrooms are characterized by a high student-to-teacher ratio, often exceeding 30-40 students, and limited resources (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003; Hayes, 1997; Shamim et al., 2007; Nakauchi & Yoffe, 2021). These classrooms present a myriad of obstacles, including difficulties in providing individualized attention, managing diverse student abilities and needs, maintaining discipline, fostering active participation, and ensuring effective assessment and feedback (Hayes, 1997; Mulryan-Kyne, 2010; Shamim et al., 2007; Ur, 1996).

To address these challenges, researchers and educators advocate for various classroom management strategies, instructional approaches, and the integration of technology. Effective classroom management techniques, such as establishing clear rules and routines, promoting active engagement, utilizing positive reinforcement, and optimizing classroom layout, are crucial for creating a conducive learning environment (Hayes, 1997; Marzano et al., 2003; Nakauchi & Yoffe, 2021; Ur, 1996). Additionally, implementing instructional strategies like cooperative learning, task-based language teaching, differentiated instruction, and leveraging technology tools can enhance student participation, cater to diverse learning needs, and foster language acquisition (Jacobs & Renandya, 2016; Mulryan-Kyne, 2010; Nakauchi & Yoffe, 2021).

Differentiated instruction, in particular, has gained prominence as an approach that addresses the diverse needs, abilities, and learning styles of students within large EFL classrooms (Tomlinson, 2001). By tailoring instruction to individual learner profiles, teachers can enhance the development of productive skills, such as speaking and writing (Galora Moya & Salazar Tobar, 2022; Mardhatillah & Suharyadi, 2023). Differentiated instruction strategies, including flexible grouping, tiered instructions, scaffolding, and anchored activities, promote inclusivity, active participation, and student autonomy (Tomlinson, 2001).

Furthermore, the integration of technology in large EFL classrooms can provide engaging and interactive learning experiences, enable instant assessment and feedback, cater to diverse learning styles, and facilitate collaboration and communication (Pradeepa & Hema, 2022; Yuniartika, 2022). Social media platforms like blogs, podcasts, and multimedia presentations can enhance writing, listening, and speaking skills, while online collaborative tools

foster peer interaction and language practice (Al-Emran et al., 2016; Siddiqui, 2018; Marzuki, 2022).

While implementing these strategies presents challenges, such as increased preparation time, multitasking in class, and the need for professional development (Kótay-Nagy, 2023), their potential benefits in addressing the unique needs of large EFL classrooms are significant. By adopting a combination of effective classroom management techniques, differentiated instruction approaches, and technology integration, teachers can create an inclusive, engaging, and supportive learning environment that promotes language acquisition and student success (Suwartono, et al., 2019).

METHODOLOGY

This research design uses a quantitative approach with survey method to explore students' attitudes and perceptions towards large class management strategies in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning at Yogyakarta State University. Survey research offers a comprehensive examination of the trends and inclinations identified in the data (Cresswell & Guetterman, 2019). Surveys are instrumental in revealing and comprehending the opinions and mindsets of individuals. The scope of the study included students of English Education study programme, focusing on the challenges faced in large classes and the strategies implemented by teachers. The research variables were operationalised through a questionnaire that included statements about students' attitudes and perceptions, which was designed based on previous research by Retnaningtyas (2011). The study population consisted of 215 students enrolled in the programme, with the sample drawn purposively to ensure data relevance. Data collection techniques were conducted through the distribution of questionnaires, while data analysis was conducted descriptively using Microsoft Excel software to process survey results (Sugiyono, 2012; Cohen et al., 2018).

RESULT

This study investigated students' perceptions and attitudes towards teachers' strategies in managing large EFL classes, as well as the challenges faced by students in these learning environments. The research was conducted among 45 master's students enrolled in the English Education Department at Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta for the academic year 2022/2023.

Table 1. Descriptive Analysis on Physical Environment of EFL Classrooms

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	SD
The physical classroom environment has good lighting, sound, and comfort level.	42,22	48,89	6,67	2,22	0,00	4,31	0,70

The use of projector is effective in the learning process	55,56	33,33	11,11	0,00	0,00	4,44	0,69
Necessary equipment is available and functions well.	31,11	60,00	8,89	0,00	0,00	4,22	0,60

The analysis of the physical classroom environment revealed high levels of student satisfaction. A significant majority (91.11%) of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the classroom provided good lighting, sound, and comfort levels, resulting in a mean score of 4.31 on a 5-point scale. The use of projectors was particularly well-received, with 88.89% of students agreeing or strongly agreeing on their effectiveness (mean score 4.44). Similarly, 91.11% of participants expressed satisfaction with the availability and functionality of necessary classroom equipment (mean score 4.22).

Table 2. Descriptive Analysis on Participants' Perceptions of General Contribution of Mobile Apps in English Learning

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	SD
The teacher's voice is clear and easily heard.	35,56	46,67	11,11	4,44	2,22	4,09	0,92
The teacher's body language supports the learning process.	40,00	44,44	15,56	0,00	0,00	4,24	0,71

Regarding teacher presence and communication, students reported positive perceptions. The clarity of the teacher's voice was rated favorably by 82.23% of participants (mean score 4.09), while 84.44% agreed or strongly agreed that the teacher's body language supported the learning process (mean score 4.24).

Table 3. Descriptive Analysis on Participants' Perceptions of Teachers Attendance Physically in the Classroom

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	SD
The teacher is physically present in the classroom on time.	33,33	48,89	13,33	4,44	0,00	4,11	0,80

The teacher appears professional and fully prepared.	48,89	35,56	13,33	2,22	0,00	4,31	0,79
The teacher maintains appropriate proximity to students in the classroom.	40,00	40,00	13,33	6,67	0,00	4,13	0,89
The teacher-student relationship is well-established and appropriate.	37,78	44,44	11,11	6,67	0,00	4,13	0,87
The teacher's movements in the classroom effectively support learning.	35,56	44,44	15,56	4,44	0,00	4,11	0,83
The teacher's voice is clearly audible throughout the classroom.	33,33	44,44	15,56	6,67	0,00	4,04	0,88
The teacher's pronunciation is clear and easily understood.	51,11	37,78	6,67	4,44	0,00	4,36	0,80
The teacher maintains voice quality throughout the lesson.	42,22	48,89	6,67	2,22	0,00	4,31	0,70

The study also examined students' perceptions of the teacher's physical presence and professionalism. A large majority (82.22%) agreed or strongly agreed that the teacher was punctual (mean score 4.11), and 84.45% perceived the teacher as professional and well-prepared (mean score 4.31). Students appreciated the teacher's ability to maintain appropriate proximity (80% agreement, mean score 4.13) and establish a well-balanced teacher-student relationship (82.22% agreement, mean score 4.13). The teacher's movements in the classroom were seen as effectively supporting learning by 80% of participants (mean score 4.11).

The clarity of the teacher's voice throughout the classroom received positive feedback from 77.77% of participants (mean score 4.04), while 88.89% agreed or strongly agreed that the teacher's pronunciation was clear (mean score 4.36). The consistency of voice quality was highly appreciated, with 91.11% agreement (mean score 4.31).

Table 4. Descriptive Analysis on Participants' perceptions of Managing the Teaching and Learning Strategies

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	SD
The seating arrangement supports the learning process.	40,00	46,67	13,33	0,00	0,00	4,27	0,69
Student grouping is done effectively.	33,33	48,89	13,33	4,44	0,00	4,11	0,80
The teacher provides constructive feedback to students.	35,56	40,00	17,78	2,22	4,44	4,00	1,02
The teacher manages large classes well	28,89	51,11	15,56	2,22	2,22	4,02	0,87

Regarding teaching and learning strategies, 86.67% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the seating arrangement supported the learning process (mean score 4.27). Student grouping was perceived as effective by 82.22% of participants (mean score 4.11). The provision of constructive feedback was appreciated by 75.56% of students (mean score 4.00), and 80% agreed or strongly agreed that the teacher managed large classes well (mean score 4.02).

Despite overall positive perceptions, the study revealed significant challenges in large EFL classrooms. The most prominent issue was student experiential learning, highlighted by 23 out of 43 respondents. Students expressed difficulties such as lack of individual attention, limited interaction, and a sense of anonymity. The second most significant challenge was student-teacher interaction, mentioned by 7 respondents, followed by classroom management and time constraints.

Table 5. The Dimension of the Most Challenging Issue When Learning in A Large Class

Dimension	Total
Student experiential learning	23
Classroom management	5
Time	4
Student-teacher interaction	7

DISCUSSION

The results of this study provide valuable insights into the dynamics of large EFL classrooms and the effectiveness of various teaching strategies. The high satisfaction levels with the physical classroom environment, including lighting, acoustics, and equipment, align with previous research emphasizing the importance of an optimized classroom layout and equipment use (Nakauchi & Yoffe, 2021). This positive perception suggests that when equipment and physical conditions are well-managed, they significantly support effective learning.

The appreciation for clear teacher communication and supportive body language corresponds with the need for effective communication and instructional strategies in managing diverse classrooms (Mulryan-Kyne, 2010). These aspects are crucial in large classroom settings where background noise and distance from the teacher can pose challenges. The positive feedback on these elements indicates that teachers' communication skills are integral to the success of their teaching strategies.

The high regard for teacher punctuality, professionalism, and preparedness aligns with the importance of creating a supportive and engaging classroom environment (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003). These factors contribute to establishing a sense of discipline and structure, which is essential for managing large classrooms effectively. The positive perception of the teacher's physical proximity and interaction supports the creation of a supportive and interactive classroom atmosphere, fostering better learning outcomes.

The satisfaction with seating arrangements and student grouping reflects the effectiveness of cooperative learning strategies (Jacobs & Renandya, 2016). These strategies help create an inclusive and engaging learning environment that supports diverse learning styles and needs, which is particularly valuable in large classes where individual attention from the teacher may be limited.

However, the challenges identified in the study, particularly regarding student experiential learning and teacher-student interaction, echo findings from previous research on large classroom dynamics (Kofina & Tsay, 2021). The difficulties in implementing experiential learning in large class environments highlight the need for innovative approaches to overcome these limitations.

The emphasis on prior preparation and customized lesson plans as essential tools for instructors aligns with best practices in teaching large classes (G.Pushpalatha, 2022). By adapting teaching strategies and being proactive in addressing the unique needs of a large group of learners, instructors can create a more engaging and conducive learning environment.

The importance of positive teacher-student interactions characterized by open communication and active engagement is consistent with established pedagogical principles (Shamim et al. 2007). However, maintaining such interactions in large classes presents significant challenges, as evidenced by the students' feedback.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMENDATION

Conclusions

This study provides a comprehensive overview of students' perceptions and experiences in large EFL classrooms. While students generally express satisfaction with the physical environment, teacher presence, and various teaching strategies, significant challenges remain, particularly in the areas of experiential learning and student-teacher interaction. The findings highlight the complex dynamics of large EFL classes and the need for continued efforts to adapt teaching methodologies to meet the unique demands of these environments.

Recommendations

1. Invest in classroom technology and infrastructure to maintain high-quality learning environments.
2. Develop innovative teaching strategies that facilitate experiential learning in large groups.
3. Provide ongoing professional development for teachers to enhance their skills in managing large classrooms effectively.
4. Implement alternative feedback methods to ensure students receive adequate individual attention.
5. Establish clear codes of conduct to maintain discipline and create a positive learning atmosphere in large classes.

FURTHER STUDY

1. Specific interventions designed to address the challenges of experiential learning in large EFL classes.
2. Comparative studies examining the effectiveness of different teaching strategies across various class sizes.
3. The impact of technology integration on student engagement and learning outcomes in large EFL classrooms.
4. Long-term effects of learning in large EFL classes on students' language proficiency and academic performance.
5. Cross-cultural comparisons of large EFL classroom dynamics and effective management strategies.

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