


## مجلة التربوي

## مجلة علمية محكمة تصدر عن

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العدد الثانج والعنانورن يناير 2023م

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|  | مجلة التربوي <br> Journal of Educational ISSN: 2011-421X Arcif Q3 | معامل التأثير العربي 1.63 العدد 22 |
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# Teachers' and Students' Attitudes towards the Impact of Class Size on Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language 

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#### Abstract

This paper is devoted to investigate the attitudes of English language teachers and students towards the impact of class size on the process of teaching /learning English as a foreign language. The researchwas conducted at the department of English at the Faculty of Education, Elmergib University. The aim of this study is to knowhow class size affects the process of teaching and learning English as a foreign language and how teachers and students view the relationship between class size and the teaching/learning process. The tool used for data collection was a two forms questionnaire. One form for teachers and the other one for students. The sample of the research consisted of 30 students enrolled at the English language department and ten teachers from the same department. The findings of the study showed that large classes have a negative effect on the teaching/learning process of English as a foreign language. Additionally, both teachers and students have negative attitudes towards the relationship between class size and the process of teaching/learning English.


## 1. Introduction

English language teaching and learning is not an easy process for both teachers and learners. It needs much effort to be obtained. Several factors might affect English language teaching and learning process. One of these factors is the number of students inside the classroom or the class size. Class size is a topic that has been observed and tested for periods. It does as far back as the early 1900s. It is a well-known concept in educational research. Numerousinvestigators have documented its strong association with students' academic performance (Yusuf et al, 2016).

All over the research that has been conducted on class size in preceding and current centuries, several different interpretations have been brought about. Research has struggled with both advantages and disadvantages that follow the implement of large class sizes. It has been supposed that large class sizes have negativeimpact on both learners and educators. Most teachers think that it is difficult for them to be effective inside the classroom, because they are enforced to devote more time controlling students than teaching them. Although some researchers did not find any relationship between small classes and high student's performance, most of the investigations illustrate that when the number of students inside the class is decreased; students' achievement rises and is higher.

## 2. Significance of the Study

In spite of the great number of studies that conducted to examine the effect of class size on students' achievement, there was little research on teachers and students attitudes towards the relationship between class size and the learning process in Libyan universities. Furthermore, there is no idea whether or not the number of students in the classroom affects the learning and teaching process. Therefore, the current research seeks to investigate English language teachers' and students' opinions about the negative effect of large class size on the

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teaching/learning process. The results of this study will have important implications for language learning and teaching.

## 3. Research Question

The studyseeks to answer the following research questions:

- How does class size affect the process ofteaching/learning English as a foreign language?
- How do teachers and students view the relationship between class size and teaching/learning process?


## 4. Literature Review

### 4.1. The Definition of Class Size

What does class size mean? Actually, the academic term class size is defined in different ways in the educational research. It indicated to as the typical number of students in a class, calculated by dividing the number of students enrolled by the number of classes. Class size is often considered as the particular population of pupils in each class. It has been normally defined as "the number of students for whom a teacher is primarily responsible during a school year. The teacher may teach in a self-containedclassroom or provide instruction in one subject" (Lewitt\& Baker, 1997, p: 2).

According to Hanushek, (1999, p: 140),"class size is generally best defined in the traditional elementary school grades, where a single teacher is responsible for a self-contained classroom, and the definition gets progressively more problematical as the instructional program becomes more complex".Nevera and Greisamer (2011) state that situation is crucial in deciding whether a class is small or large. They suppose that in private schools classes that contain 10-15 students may be considered large whereas in public schools a class contains more than 40 students is considered large. On the same topic, Hayes (1997) stated that it is difficult to find a measureable definition of large classes. He supposed that the best size of language class size must be less than 30 , which provides learnerssuitable time to participate in classroom activities. To decide the size of class whether it is large or not, there are several factors to be taken in consideration such as location and purpose.

In reviewing most related literature, it is apparent that there is no obvious cut when a class is large or not. "There can be no quantitative definition of what constitutes a 'large class', as perceptions of this will vary from context to context" (Hayes, 1997, p: 4). As Heever (2000) claims, large classes differ from one country to another. For instance, in Japan classes contain from 40 to 50 learners are considered large, whereas in South Africa large classes are the ones contain between 45 and 109 .

In the current research, small classes were defined as those with 20 or fewer students per teacher, and large classes as those with 30 or more students per teacher.

### 4.2. The Challengeof Class Size

There is a noticeable argument among scholars about the effect of class size on the teaching/learning process of English. The challenge is about the negative effect of large class size on both teachers and students in English language classes. For instance, Pritchard (1999) suggested that,in large classes teachers have nomore time, resources, and inspiration to makeimproved lesson approaches with better levels of differences. Teachers are not able to make a distinctionto individual students and distinguish individual student progress. In turn, students cannot become more involvedfor this developed, modified learning environment.

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Furthermore, teacher's spendgreat time on classroom controlling, which affects the instructional time for all learners in the class. On the same topic, Biddle and Berliner (2002) state that,as there isno more one-to-one communication in large classes, teachers cannotdistinguish more information about each individual student. This prevents students developtheir habits and thoughts. Additionally, teachers in large classes do not have higher self-confidence and thereforethey are unable to create a more cooperative learning atmosphere.

According to Ready (2008), the effectiveness of class size reduction is proven on the impression that reducing the number of students in a classroom adapts the whole classroom setting, creating a more advanced learning environment. Blatchford, et al (2011) conducted a survey at both the primary and secondary school levels and discovered that in larger classes, student communication with teachers decreased, which led to a lower level of student involvement approving Pritchard's theory.In addition, smaller classes improve student achievement because instructors in small classes paymore attention to each individual learner. Learners in small classes have the opportunity totake part in learning activities and develop themselves. However, in large classes educatorscannot do most of these things (Resnick, 2003).

According to some English language teachers' experiences, it seems that in large classes teachers actually deal with controllingdifficulties, such as the high noise level that exists, the need for using a loud voice is tiring, impossibility to attend to all students, discipline problems, and difficulties giving back homework quickly after tests. In addition, they deal with affective concerns that include, difficulty in learning students names, establishing affective rapport with students, attending to weaker students, and assessing student interests and moods.On the same topic,Pedder (2006) argues that class size mightaffectthe progressesof classroom and learners'instruction. He believes that in smaller classes, teachers can cover more syllabus and students can be more involved. These two characteristics lead to increasing student achievement. Consequently, it is obvious that smaller classes arebeneficialfor all learners in terms of individual, active attention from teachers.

Class size is very important in the teaching-learning process especially in higher education. Some scholars such as Arias and Walker (2004), Fischer and Grant (1983) claimed that, to have a good influence on improving students 'presentation and achievement, public universities require smaller classes in all courses. They also claimed that if the class size in the college context is small, success is more likely. On the same topic, Horning (2007, p: 17) supposes that large classes have harmful influences on professors in the university context; because professors in large classes are unable to give their learners personalized care or complete responses.According to Hornsby et al. (2013, p: 8) "In higher education, education goals move beyond simple knowledge acquisition to promoting student engagement and higher order cognitive functions - characteristics of deep learning. Here, class size does matter and can affect the quality of student learning."

To sum up, the investigations demonstrate that large classrooms offer a challenging learning environment for both learners and teachers. The current study aims to investigate the attitude of both English language teachers and learners towards the influence of class size on the teaching/learning process of English. A case study at the Faculty of Education, El-mergib University in Alkhoms.

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### 4.3. Related Studies

There are a number of studies that have been conducted to investigate the effects of class size on the teaching/learning process. The following are some of these studies.

A study aimed to examine teachers' attitudes and insights about teaching in large classes conducted by Bahnashal (2013) at King Abdul-Aziz University, Saudi Arabia. The researcher used a semi-structured interview with six Saudi English teachers from two public schools. They have taught large classes for at least fifteen years at public schools. The results showed that all participants find it difficult to teach large classes. Furthermore, the teachers observed that despite of all attempts to measure students' level, the consequences of their students were insufficient.

Bamba (2012) conducted a study about the effective approaches to teaching large EFL classes. She first studied the impacts of large classes on teachers and students,and thenshe interviewed five Ivorian English teachers who teach large classes. The interview aimed to realize theiropinions towards teaching large classes and the approaches they have applied to improve effective teaching and learning. The outcomes of the interview indicated that large classes form adifficulty to improve effective teaching and learning. They also demonstrated that teachers play anessentialpart in including students in large classes by the method they use and that encourages them to learn moreindependently inside and outside the classroom.

There is a study carried byBlatchfordet al (2002) to examine the relationship between class size and student achievement, and whether or not the effect of class size actuallytake place through the examination of student achievement. The consequencesshowed thatthe increase of class size led to a decrease in learning levels. Additionally, theysaw that smaller class sizes exposed a positive influence for some learners, speciallyfocusing on lacking learners. The resultspreservedthe theory of smaller classesrefining learner'sachievement.

Another study conducted by Thaher (2005) in which he investigated the instructional, emotional and social influences of large classes on EFL students at An-Najah National University. A questionnaire and an interview with 230 non-English major EFL students were used as a method for data collection. The results illustrated that, although it had negative effects, large classes had some features of luminous on the emotional and social faces.

Furthermore, a study conducted by Yusuf, et al (2016) indicated that class size has a straightimpact on students' attitudes. They noticed that when class size is large, the likelyinfluence is negative and vice versa. The students in small classroomsare found to expose better learningattainment than students in large classroom. This outcome is similar to thatgained by Blatchford et al. (2002).

## 5. Methodology

### 5.1 Participants

Two groups of respondents participated in the current research. The first group contained ten specialized English language teachers with different teaching experiences who have been chosen randomly from the English language department at the faculty of Education - El-mergib University. The second group, on the other hand, consisted of thirty students chosen randomly from English language department on the same faculty. They were mixed males and females. They were from different grades and their ages were between twenty and twenty-two.

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### 5.2 Instruments and Data Collection

As the current research seeks to investigate English language teachers' and students' opinions about the negative effect of large class size on the teaching/learning process of English as a foreign language, aquantitative method was used as a tool for data collection. The quantitative instrument used herewas a two forms questionnaire. One questionnaire formwas given to group from the third and fourth year students studying at the English language department at the Faculty of Education. Another questionnaire formwas givento ten teachers working in the department of English at the Faculty of Education. Both questionnaires used the Likert five-point scale of strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree.

### 5.3 Analysis and Discussion of Results

The table below illustrates the outcomes reduced to statistical data, obtained from the response of the students on the questionnaire items.

Table 1: Students' Responses on the Questionnaire.

| Statement | Strongly <br> agree | $\mathbf{a g r e e}$ | Neutral | disagree | Strongly <br> disagree |
| :--- | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| 1. I prefer to study in large classes. | $\mathbf{0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{2 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{1 7 \%}$ | $\mathbf{4 6 \%}$ | $\mathbf{1 7 \%}$ |
| 2. In large classes, I feel relaxed <br> because I know that the teacher will <br> not notice my absence. | $\mathbf{7 \%}$ | $\mathbf{1 7 \%}$ | $\mathbf{7 \%}$ | $\mathbf{4 6 \%}$ | $\mathbf{2 3 \%}$ |
| 3. Cheating in large classes is easier. | $\mathbf{1 7 \%}$ | $\mathbf{5 3 \%}$ | $\mathbf{3 \%}$ | $\mathbf{1 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{1 7 \%}$ |
| 4. More students mean more ideas and <br> this environment helps me to learn <br> more. | $\mathbf{1 3 \%}$ | $\mathbf{3 3 \%}$ | $\mathbf{2 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{1 7 \%}$ | $\mathbf{1 7 \%}$ |
| 5. Large classes give troublemakers the <br> chance to make troubles. | $\mathbf{1 7 \%}$ | $\mathbf{4 3 \%}$ | $\mathbf{2 7 \%}$ | $\mathbf{1 3 \%}$ | $\mathbf{3 \%}$ |
| 6. In large classes, I feel frustrated and <br> this affects my motivation negatively. | $\mathbf{2 7 \%}$ | $\mathbf{4 3 \%}$ | $\mathbf{1 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{1 7 \%}$ | $\mathbf{3 \%}$ |
| 7. I feel anonymous in a large class. | $\mathbf{3 3 \%}$ | $\mathbf{3 7 \%}$ | $\mathbf{2 3 \%}$ | $\mathbf{7 \%}$ | $\mathbf{0 \%}$ |
| 8. I feel shy to participate in <br> overcrowded classes. | $\mathbf{2 6 \%}$ | $\mathbf{4 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{2 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{7 \%}$ | $\mathbf{7 \%}$ |
| 9. The quality of instruction is lowered <br> with increasing class size. | $\mathbf{3 7 \%}$ | $\mathbf{2 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{2 3 \%}$ | $\mathbf{1 7 \%}$ | $\mathbf{3 \%}$ |
| $\mathbf{1 0 .}$ Large classes limit the number of <br> exercises given to students. | $\mathbf{1 3 \%}$ | $\mathbf{3 4 \%}$ | $\mathbf{2 3 \%}$ | $\mathbf{1 7 \%}$ | $\mathbf{1 3 \%}$ |
| 11. Teachers in large classes hardly <br> give immediate feedback. | $\mathbf{1 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{5 6 \%}$ | $\mathbf{7 \%}$ | $\mathbf{2 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{7 \%}$ |
| 12. My attitudes towards learning <br> English are affected negatively by <br> large classes. | $\mathbf{2 3 \%}$ | $\mathbf{3 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{2 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{1 7 \%}$ | $\mathbf{1 0 \%}$ |

According to the information presented in the table above it seems that, the majority of students ( $46 \%$ disagree and $17 \%$ strongly disagree) did not prefer to study in large class size. It means that students favor to study in small classes rather than large ones.

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Approximately $43 \%$ of students reported that large classes give the chance to troublemakers to make troubles inside the class, which is not good for other students and that may influence their understanding. In addition, the vast majority of participants ( $53 \%$ agree and $17 \%$ strongly agree) supposed that large classes give the chance to lower students to cheating and this may affect the level of good students.

According to the respondents' responses, it is clear that large classes are not preferred because most students (43\%) stated that they feel frustrated when studying in overcrowded classes and that affect their motivation in a negative way. Additionally, most of the participants ( $33 \%$ strongly agree and $37 \%$ agree) felt anonymous when studying in large classes. This agrees with Hasan (2012) findings that large classes are challenging to both teachers and students at the same time and students in a large class fell anonymous and passive.As well as, many students reported that they feel shy to participate in most of the class activities ( $26 \%$ and $40 \%$ respectively).

Surprisingly, the statistical data showed that some students preferred studying in large classes, where $33 \%$ of learners stated that if there were many students inside the class, there would be more ideas and thoughts that make the learning environment suitable for learning and educating. Furthermore, most students ( $46 \%$ and $23 \%$ ) disagreed that large classes help them to feel relaxed, as the teacher could not notice their absence.

Concerning the negative effect of large classes, some students (37\%) reported that there is a negative relationship between class size and the quality of instruction. They believed that the quality of education is decreased as the class size increased. Furthermore, many learners ( $34 \%$ ) supposed that large class limits the number of exercises given to students, and approximately $56 \%$ of them said that teachers in large classes could not provide students with direct feedback easily. Additionally, many students ( $23 \%$ strongly agree and agree $30 \%$ ) reported that studying in large classes might have a negative effect on their attitudes towards learning English.

Table 2 below demonstrates the percentage of the teachers' responses reduced to statistical data, obtained from their responses on the questionnaire items.

Table 2: Teachers' Responses on the Questionnaire.

| Statement | Strongly <br> agree | agree | Neutral | disagree | Strongly <br> disagre |
| :--- | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| 1. I prefer to teach small class size. | $\mathbf{8 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{2 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{0 \%}$ |
| 2. Smaller classes are easier to manage. | $\mathbf{9 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{1 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{0 \%}$ |
| 3. Large classes affect the quality of <br> teaching negatively. | $\mathbf{1 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{7 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{2 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{0 \%}$ |
| 4. The assessment of students learning <br> is difficult in large classes. | $\mathbf{3 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{6 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{1 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{0 \%}$ |
| 5. Participation is negatively affected <br> by large classes. | $\mathbf{0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{7 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{1 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{2 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{0 \%}$ |
| 6. Large classes have a big effect on <br> student achievement due to the lack of <br> engagement from students. | $\mathbf{1 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{4 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{4 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{1 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{0 \%}$ |
| 7. In large classes, there is a limited <br> space. Therefore, it is difficult for the <br> teacher to move among students. | $\mathbf{1 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{4 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{4 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{1 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{0 \%}$ |


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| 8. In large classes teachers face <br> problems in controlling the classroom. | $\mathbf{5 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{4 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{1 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{0 \%}$ |
| :--- | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| 9. Interaction framework and giving <br> individual attention are easier in <br> smaller classes. | $\mathbf{8 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{1 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{1 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{0 \%}$ |
| $\mathbf{1 0 .}$ Oral exams and presentations are <br> affected negatively in large classes. | $\mathbf{3 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{5 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{1 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{1 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{0 \%}$ |
| $\mathbf{1 1 .}$ In large classes, teachers cannot <br> use more elaborated teaching methods. | $\mathbf{1 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{6 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{3 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{0 \%}$ |
| $\mathbf{1 2 .}$ Taking class size in consideration <br> facilitates <br> process. | $\mathbf{8 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{2 0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{0 \%}$ | $\mathbf{0 \%}$ |

As can be seen in the above table, it is obvious that all teachers who participated in this research preferred to teach small classes rather than large ones ( $80 \%$ strongly agree and $20 \%$ agree). The vast majority of them ( $90 \%$ ) stated that as the size of the class was smaller, it would be easier for them as teachers to manage it. Concerning the quality of education, most teachers $(70 \%)$ supposed that the crowded classes influence thequality of education presented to students in a negative way. Additionally, about $60 \%$ of them assumed that evaluating the students' performance is a hard task in the crowded classes. Approximately $70 \%$ of the participated teachers stated that large classes negatively affected students' participation in the class activities.

However, only $50 \%$ of the respondents said thatlarge classes have a big effect on student achievement due to the lack of engagement from students. Whereas, the other $40 \%$ of them were neutral and $10 \%$ disagreed. Concerning the teachers' movement inside the classroom, it appeared that not all teachers agree that large classes limit the teachers movement among students and managing them (only $10 \%$ strongly agree and $40 \%$ agree), where $40 \%$ of teachers supposed that there is no relationship between the class size and teachers movement and that depends on the teachers ability and experience.Approximately $90 \%$ of the participated teachers ( $50 \%$ strongly agree and $40 \%$ agree) approved that in large classes teachers encounter obstacles in controlling the classroom which has a negative effect on both students and their teachers. This proves Englehart (2007) and Fan (2012) arguments that in small class size, teachers need less time to control the classroom, which results in developing the educational achievement

Concerning the interaction framework and individual attention, it could be seen that the vast majority of participated teachers ( $80 \%$ ) strongly agree that large classes affect the interaction between the studentsand their teacher inside the classroom in a negative way. As well as, they supposed that giving individualized attention is difficult in overcrowded classes. Oral exams and presentations seemed to be negatively influenced by the number of students inside the classroom, where many teachers ( $30 \%$ strongly agree and $50 \%$ agree) pointed out that when there are many students inside the class, much time will be need for oral exams and conducting presentations and that will be not available during the class time.

In addition, most of teachers ( $10 \%$ strongly agree and $60 \%$ agree) believed that large classes might affect the teaching methods used inside the classroom, because in overcrowded classes teachers cannot use more elaborated methods. According to Cooper and Robinson (2000), class size harmfully influenced the methods used by teachers, and the increase of the

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class size leads to a decrease in the teachers' ability to use more elaborate teaching methods, where the traditional instruction tools which is teacher centered are the main ones.Consequently, all of the respondent teachers ( $80 \%$ strongly agree and $20 \%$ agree) stated that to facilitate and manage the teaching/leaning process of English, the number of students in the class should be taken in consideration.

## 6 -Conclusion

To sum up, it is obvious from the results of the current research that large classes carry a challenge for both teachers and students in terms of managing, teachingand comprehending abilities. It seems that teachers consider classes as large when they face troubles dealing with all students and giving an individual attention to each student. Therefore, the vast majority of the participated teachers and students prefer teaching and studying in small classes rather than large ones. It is also apparent that large classes can obstruct class interaction and can have negative influence on classroom controlling. Consequently, as large classes have harmful impact on the teaching/learning process of English as a foreign language, it can be recommended that class size be reduced in order to treat andreduce the influence of overcrowded classes. It is also noticeable in the responses of the respondents that large classes require more consciousness and distinctive techniques to deal with.

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