THE CORRELATION BETWEEN EFL COLLEGE STUDENTS' LARGE CLASSES AND THEIR ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

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Abstract

Large classes are a problem that faces specifically educational institutions which provide a high quality type of education to its students. According to this study, the term large class applies usually to classes with more than 60 students. This study shed the light on the correlation between class size and students' academic performance as one of the contemporary problems that need to be under investigation. It aims at determining the correlation between large class size and academic performance of students, and determining the highly percentages problems determined by students in relation to large classes. The population of this study is university students, and the sample consists of eighty students as a main sample. The researchers construct scaled questionnaire to measure large class size problematic areas to correlate it with students' final rates that are dependent by the researchers as their academic performance. Person correlation coefficient was used to find this relation.Initial correlation analyses indicate a negative relationship between class size and students' academic performance.In the light of the results obtained, recommendations which are concerned with teachers and students are put forward.

Keywords

The Correlation, FFL College Students, Large Classes, Academic Performance

1. Introduction

1.1 The problem and its Significance

Large class size is one of the factors that affect directly the teaching process. Hoffman (1980:30) described it as "the number of students per teacher in a class". Different viewpoints deal with this problem differently. Some countries consider 25-30 students per teacher are large, while others consider that quite small. So, it is as (Hargreaves, Galton, and Pell, 1998: 12) state "the definition of a "small" or a "large" classroom might differ indifferent contexts". For this study, a class with more than 60 students considers large.

Unfortunately, very few large classes are ideal settings for learning. They are usually hot, crowded, and noisy. In addition, this kind of classes affectsstudents' interaction with each other's and with the teacher. Svinicki & McKeachie (2010: 273) state that "one of the most critical problems faced by instructors of large classes is that students feel isolated and are often anonymous to both the instructor and to one another". Hayes (1997: 6) states that the problems associated with teaching in large classes can be "physical, psychological and technical". He adds that "the problems associated with teaching in large classes can be identified as the following:

1. Discomfort: Many teachers worry about the physical constraints imposed by large numbers in confined classrooms.

2. Control: Some teachers feel worried by the discipline aspects of large classes.

3. Individual attention: Many good teachers are concerned that they are neglecting the needs of their students as individuals.

4. Evaluation: Teachers feel a responsibility for checking all of their students' work.

5. Learning effectiveness: All teachers want their students to learn. They are understandably worried if they do not know who is learning what".

Fortes & Tchantchane (2010: 272) consider the problems that faced by teachers in dealing with large classes as real challenges. They state that "Dealing with large classes constitutes a real challenge to every teacher: diversity of students, lack of flexibility, class climate management, difficulty of setting and enforcing classroom behavior (crowd control), minimum attention to students, limited monitoring of students' learning and difficulty in engaging students to activities".

As far as English language teaching classes is concerned, Christensen (1994: 122) discusses many problems that language teachers' face in large classes such as "the effects of a large language classroom can lead to a very challenging and ineffective teaching environment". He adds that "Concentrating on an evaluation of problem areas raises the danger that large classes may be perceived as limiting language learning environments, and that positive aspects get insufficient

attention". Zhao (2004: 13) states that many activities were avoided by language teachers because the environment of large class size is not suitable.

Academic performance according to the Cambridge University Reporter (2003:3) is frequently defined in terms of "examination performance". In this study, students' educational outcomes were used. In other words, the researchers used final rates of students as their academic performance.

The primary purpose of this study is to investigate students' difficulties in joining large classes to determine its correlation with their academic performance. This kind of relation has important effect on teaching process as suggested by Latief (2010: 114) who states that one benefit of a correlation study was to predict a variable from another variable which has a strong and positive correlation with each other, but it is difficult at the same time since finding empirical evidence for this assumption isconsidered more challenging.

So, this study intends to answer the following questions:

1. What is the kind of relationship between class size and students' academic performance?

2. What are the main difficulties that Iraqi EFL college students faced in joining large classes?

1.2 Literature Review

This topic is very wide so various methods of data collection and analysis by different writers were used to investigate it. Some writers apply it on primary and secondary students while others used higher education classes. All in all, though the situations were differ; all previous studies reach approximately the same endings which are large class size impacts on students' performance in one way or another.

Correa (1993) provides a theoretical review for the importance of class sizethat focuses on the role of individual faculty-student interaction. His final results revels thatthe larger the class the greater the instructor effort devoted to class-wide activities at the expense of individual attention.

Keil and Partell (1997) study the impact of class sizein two important areas: performance and retention of the students. First, theyconcluded that large classes have a negative effect on student achievement. Second, they concluded that increasing average class size decreases the likelihood of a student returning.

Krueger (1999) focuses the idea that classes with small number of students performed approximately .2 to .3 standard deviations better than students in the larger classes at the beginning of their primary stage.

Leahy (2006) applied a studyon 20 middle school teachers between the ages of 25 and 55. The final results show that most teachers strongly agreed that classes with small number of students increase their achievement.

Bedard and Kuhn (2008) examine the assessments of studentsin economics courses at the University of California at Santa Barbara, from 1997 to 2004. They find a large, highly significant, and nonlinear negative impact of class size on student evaluations of instructor effectiveness.

Bandiera et al. (2009) examine administrative records from a leading UK university and find a significant negative, but highly non-linear effect of class size on student tests results. Their final results show that class size effects students' performance but only if they are very large or very small.

From all the above, it is clear that each one of these studies have some sort of similarity with the present one since all of them working on the same axis.

1.3 Objectives

The main objectives of this study are:

1. Determining the correlation between class size and students' academic performance, and

2.Identifying and classifyingthe main difficulties that Iraqi EFL college students faced in joining large classes.

1.4 Scope

This study is limited to:

1. Determining students' difficulties in joining large classes.

2. Measuring students' academic performance, and

3. Iraqi EFL college students of English department, University of Bagdad, evening studies.

1.5 Procedures

To achieve the objectives of the present study, the following procedures will be adopted by the researchers to collect data:

1. Choosing a number of Iraqi EFL college students (at random) to represent the study sample.

2. Distribute open questionnaire among students to elicit their main difficulties in joining large classes.

3. Constructing scaled questionnaire (based mainly on the results of the open questionnaire) under the supervision of a number of specialists who examine its validity and make any comments, suggestions and modifications if necessary.

4. Interpreting the results in the light of the objectives by using the proper statistical means that suit the study.

2. Methodology
2.1 Population & Sample

The population of this study comprises the students of English departments in Iraqi universities. The choice is intentional (in the selection of the University of Baghdad) and random (in selecting a representative number of students). Eighty students were chosen randomly from the second and third stages, English department, college of Education, University of Baghdad, evening studies to represent the study sample.

2.2 The Instruments of the study

In order to fulfill the aims of the present study, which are determining the correlation between large classes and students' academic performance, a questionnaire was constructed by the researchers, as shown in appendix (1).

The items of the tools have been collected on the basis of the open questionnaire, related literature, previous studies, and experts' opinions.

2.3 Face Validity

Face validity is the best type of validity in the case of self-rating (Nunnaly, 1972:353). It is secured if the list of items appears to be measuring what is intended to bemeasure(Ebel,1972:78).

After constructing the research instrument, it was submitted to the jury to assess their validity. *Jury members were selected on the basis of their specialization and experience in the field of education, psychology, and EFLT. Each member of the jury was requested to point out his/her remarks and suggestions about the suitability of the instruments items. Accordingly, some items have been modified and others excluded. The majority of jury members have verified the validity of the questionnaire items.

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*The jury of experts was:
-AmthalMohamme,Ph.D. University of Diyala, College of basic Education.
-ArwaAbd Al- Karim, Ph.D. University of Diyala, College of Education for human sciences
-Fatima Raheem, Ph.D. University of Mesan, College of basic Education.
-Ghazwan Adnan, Ph.D. University of Diyala, College of Education for human sciences
-Zainab Abbas, Ph.D. University of Diyala, College of Education for human sciences

2.4 Final Administration of the Instruments

The final version of the questionnaire was distributed to the participants at the end of October, 2015. The students were asked to give their views on the items according to scale of three dimensions. Students' responses have been utilized by the researcher.

3. Results

3.1 Results Related to the First Aim

Depending on the mean of students' rates (their rates in all subjects in the semester) in the college of Education/ English department, the researchers could correlate between their difficulties

in joining large classes after gathering the data and academic performance .It is found that there is statistically negative correlation at 0.05 level of significance between large classes and students' academic performance. Pearson correlation formula has been used to identify this aim. Final result was (-0.64) indicating that students' problems that stem from large class size affects students' academic performance negatively. This shows that there is inverse relationship between large classes and students' academic performance, i.e. students' academic performance increase whenever problems of class size decrease and vice versa.

3.2 Results Related to the Second Aim

The second aim of the study was to investigate the high percentages problems that students my face in joining large classes. Results indicate that students agree on two main problems in relation to the questionnaire. Both of them have 100% percentage. The first one, item number 2, larger classes have more discipline problems. The other one(item number 7) the motivation of students toward studying affected by class atmosphere**.** The results of other items in the questionnaire revel that students suffer from all types of educational problems in large classes but in different percentages as shown in appendix (2).

4. Conclusions& Recommendations

4.1 Conclusions

The analysis of data leads to the following conclusions:

1. Initial correlation analyses indicate a negative relationship between class size and students' academic performance which means that students' academic performance increases whenever problems of class size decrease and vice versa.

2.Classroomswith large number of students carry a lot of problems in addition to its direct impact on students' academic performance. They are usually hot, crowded, and noisy. Unfortunately, they are notsuitable place for learning.

3. The researcher considered the item that gains weighted mean 100% as an item that gain approvalas a real difficulty. Consequently, two items were gain positive attitude from students and other two items gain high percentages. Conclusion remarks can be clearly pointed out as follows:

a. Items number(2 and 7) which refers to (Larger classes have more discipline problems) and (The motivation of students toward studying affected by class atmosphere.) gain the full positive attitudes from students. They got a weighted mean 100%.

b. Items number (3 and 16) which refers to (Communicative skills receive little time from teachers) and (Large class size affects the quality of teaching aids.) Gain the second positive attitudes from students .They got a weighted mean 95% and 92.5 % respectively.

Finally, though this study is applied on classes with large number of students and in turn suffer from many difficulties and problems but still it is limited since the situation is differ from place to place and also the style of teaching. So, it is suggested that researchers can focus on the same idea but with different variables such as class management and the use of alternative assessment techniques.

4.2 Recommendations

In the light of the results achieved and the conclusions derived, the researchers recommend the following:

1. Active learning is one of solutions that can help teachers and students by engaging students in activities which supposed to attract them.
2. Group work is an ideal environment for students in large classes specifically in daily activities and even in exams. Teachers can provide feedback to the whole group instead of individuals.
3. Establishing polices in managing large class size may help controlling it easily. Each individual should know his/her duty toward class so as to keep it organized and controlled.
4. College instructors must use different teaching styles including the use of technology, various types of learning strategies, and new trends of teaching so as to overcome the individual differences among the large number of students in one class.
5. Classes should havedifferent types of teaching aids that are needed to facilitate the teaching learningprocess.
6. Encouraging instructional planning in lectures toassure best division of time.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1

Items of questionnaire

		Agree	Partially agree	Disagree
	Larger class sizes affects directly on achievement			
	Larger classes have more discipline problems			
	Communicative skills receive little time from teachers			
	Language teachers have difficulties grading the large flow of students' work, Including essays and papers.			
	Smaller class sizes lead to substantially faster gains in reading due to more individualized instruction			
	Quick frustration of teachers			
	The motivation of students toward studying affected due to class atmosphere.			
	Little attention was given to discussion/lab sections			
	Increasing class sizes would likely have a greater negative effect on retention rates of information.			
	Large class sizes create behavioral problems.			
	Large classes increases teachers stress and dissatisfaction			
	Large classes suffer from organizational problems			

Large classes affects the use of effective teaching strategies				
Assessment in large classes became moreformal, time-consuming, and sometimes delayed				
Difficulties in dealing with individuals from different backgrounds				
Large class size affects the quality of teaching aids.				
Difficulties related to mixing of students, ranging fromthe highly motivated to the couldn't-care-less types				

Appendix 2

Weighted Mean of the Questionnaire items

Item (NO)	I Agree	I partially agree	I disagree	Weighted Mean
				87.5%
				100%
				95%
				77.5%
				85%
				70%
				100%
				87.5%
				60%
				42.5%

				22.5%
				70%
				62.5%
				45%
				90%
				92.5%
				85%