

## **Class Size Reduction: A Necessity or a Luxury ?**

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### **Abstract**

Iraqi EFL large classes are problematic and harmful for both teachers and students as concluded from the responses elicited from the subjects who participated in answering the questionnaire of this study. This finding necessitates taking serious and immediate decisions so as to remedy the unhealthy present situation. One of the possible and effective remedies is the use of the Class Size Reduction strategy which seems to be, in our case, a necessity rather than a luxury.

### **1.Introduction**

Class Size Reduction (henceforth CSR) is considered as one of the most important strategies used in modern educational reforms. It is widely researched and implemented by educators, policy –makers and economists, among others. CSR has two related , yet different senses. Firstly, it is used by some researchers to mean a student/teacher ratio which reflects the total number of students in a certain academic institution as related to the total number of teachers , administrators ,counselors and additional support staff who do not systematically provide instruction to students. This ratio does not show the actual class size in question. It is a ratio of equitable distribution of funds ;it has nothing to do with academic achievement, teaching and learning in individual classrooms. Secondly, CSR is utilized by some other researchers indicating the exact number of students for whom a teacher is primarily responsible .The central idea here is educational output. This latter sense of CSR is adopted in the present study.

This study attempts to answer one main question that is spelled in its title , namely :does CSR represent a necessity that is urgently needed in our English as a foreign language (EFL)classrooms or is it only a matter of luxury ? In order to

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answer this question, one needs first to review the available literature on CSR. This is displayed in the following section.<sup>1</sup>

### **2. Review of Literature:**

Most of the main studies and initiatives which are devoted to CSR investigated the benefits of this reform strategy in the early learning grade levels. Such studies started about fifty years ago in the U.S.A. One of those serious studies on American education is Coleman Report(1966).Biddle and Berliner(2002:3)state that "This massive federally funded study involved a national sample and took on many issues then facing educators and politicians in the country ..."However, it was criticized for its seriously flawed methods and findings .

In (1979)Smith and Glass published a meta-analysis combining the results of(77) empirical studies pertaining to the relationship between class size and achievement. They (ibid: iv, v) concluded that "reduced class size can be expected to produce increased academic achievement...(and) the major benefits from reduced class size are obtained as the size is reduced below 20 pupils. "However ,Robinson(1990:90)argues that Glass and Smith's findings concerning the effects of CSR on students' achievements cannot be understood as results of only smaller classes because grade level ,pupils' characteristics , subjects areas ,teaching methods and other learning interventions have tremendous impact on academic achievement.

After one year, Smith and Glass conducted a second meta-analysis analyzing the relationship between class size and other outcomes .AL-Jarf (2006:4) postulates that "small class size was associated with higher quality classroom environments, better student attitudes, and greater teacher satisfaction." They also indicated that there was a relation between class size and age of pupils. Pupils of (12) years and under were under a greater impact of CSR than pupils of (18)years and over.

A pilot imitative that began in (1984) and was mandated in (1985) is Tennessee's Student Teacher Achievement Ratio project (STAR).Major persons involved in organizing and promoting the STAR project have included Charles Achilles, Jeremy Finn, Frederick Mosteller, and Alan Krueger. This four-year longitudinal study aimed at examining the effects of CSR on kindergarten , first , second and third grades. Seven thousand students from (79) schools participated in the STAR program. In this project, smaller classes (of 13-17students )were

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compared with larger classes (of 22-26 students), which are normal-sized ones. Advocates of CSR being very much impressed by the STAR findings, concluded that "bringing class size down in the primary grades in and of itself has positive effects on student achievement in all subject areas" (D.E.,1990:4).The STAR test scores proved that students from smaller classes

significantly outperformed students from normal-size ones in all academic subjects. Biddle and Berliner (2002:8-11) believe that this study has many positive effects on educational output, such as :

- 1.The long-term exposure to small classes(in the early grades)had generated substantially higher levels of achievement.
- 2.The extra gains associated with long-term exposure to small classes (in the early grades) were greater the longer students were exposed to those classes.
- 3.Although all types of students experienced extra gains from the long-term exposure to small classes(in the early grades), those gains were greater for students who are traditionally disadvantaged in education(i.e., impoverished students, African-American students , and students from inner-city schools).
- 4.The extra gains found for long-term attendance in small classes(in the early grades) continued to appear when students were returned to standard classes in the upper grades.
- 5.Extra gains associated with long-term attendance in small classes(in the early grades)appeared not only for tests of measured achievement but also for other measures of success in education.
- 6.Initial results indicate that the greater gains experienced by students from groups that are traditionally disadvantaged for education were retained when those students were returned to standard classes. Graue et al(2005:6) report that "while there was no evidence that smaller classes improved student motivation, small classes had fewer discipline problems, more questions and greater participation and concentration."

In(1989), the Lasting Benefits Study, which is a follow-up to the STAR study, began to examine whether the effects of the smaller class size experience persisted when students were returned to normal size classes. This study ended in (1996).The U.S. Department of Education (1998) affirms that two main results of this follow –up study can be captured. First, smaller classes students outperformed their counterparts in larger classes in all academic subjects. Second, smaller classes students expended more efforts in the classroom and took a greater initiative in learning activities. The design of STAR, together with its magnitude and the follow-up research conducted after the 4-year period, let Harvard's Frederick Mosteller to term the STAR project a "controlled experiment which is one of the most important educational investigations ever carried over" (1995:113).

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The second initiative began in Wisconsin in (1996-97). It was called the Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE). This initiative was headed by Alex Molnar. Its main objective was to target CSR in kindergarten through third grade in schools serving low-income populations. Boze (1999:5) contends that this "program was intended to reduce class sizes in targeted schools to a student/teacher ratio of 15 to 1 or less". The CSR was accompanied by "additional reforms including a revised, rigorous academic curriculum, professional development and accountability initiatives. "The SAGE findings have indicated that students in smaller classes had higher achievement scores in language arts, reading, and mathematics compared to achievement scores of students in larger classes. Thus, the SAGE findings are consistent with the STAR findings.

At the same period of the STAR program, there was another CSR initiative born in California. It was inspired by the great success achieved by the Tennessee STAR project. Graue et al (2005:11) state that the CSR gains earned in California include :high scores in achievement tests, an increase in teaching-time and a decrease in discipline-time, and a better parent-teacher contact. However, "the CSR effects are coupled with teacher quality, instructional strategies, curriculum, student-teacher interactions, family background and economic situation (of students)" (ibid:12).

Other studies of CSR in the elementary level have revealed almost similar results. Halback, Ehrle, Zahorik and Molnar (2001) report that CSR manages to decrease discipline problems in grades(1-3). Smaller classes witnessed more individual instruction , varied instructional strategies , and more content and in-depth coverage. Moreover, Achilles, Krueger, Finn and Sharp(2003) maintain that CSR in grades(k-3) positively affects both students' performance in all academic subjects as well as their behavioural conduct.

In Great Britain, teachers and the public also demanded CSR, however in (1990s)the British government claimed that teacher quality and not class size is the decisive factor for educational attainment .This situation necessitated conducting studies that can properly and thoroughly uncover this educational dilemma. Blatchford's(2003) is one of those studies. Blatchford's study is a three-year longitudinal study that followed students from school entry, i.e. (4years).It aimed to see whether or not CSR has an impact on students' achievements, and to study the relationship between class size and classroom processes. Graue et al (2005:14) mention the main findings of Blatchford's study. They are given below:

1. In larger classes, students were more likely to be off task, distracted, and to spend more time with their peers. In smaller classes, students had more interaction with their teachers-child initiation and answering the teacher.
2. As class size increases, teachers perceive less time for individual reading support and rarely mention guided reading groups as an instructional option.

They felt that the quality of interaction was better in smaller classes; with teachers knowing and supporting their students better. Teachers used more procedural talk in larger classes , and more social or personal interactions to manage the group in smaller classes.

3. There was less differential instruction with larger classes and questioning was used for controlling rather than to teach.

4. The feedback in smaller classes was more immediate, but such feedback takes time from lessons and disrupts the flow of activities and instruction.

5. It was harder to extend reading strategies with larger classes and there were fewer individual reading opportunities, monitoring and checking for understanding.

6. More time was used for teaching in smaller classes including more one-to-one teaching , more teaching in groups, more time when students were the focus of teachers' attention , more students-teacher interaction, and more participating interactions between students and teachers.

Class size was also studied in large secondary schools. Fowler (1992) found that graduating classes above (750) students in large secondary schools have very negative effects on the students' attitudes, achievement, and voluntary participation.

At the college level, students' aptitudes and attitudes were examined under the influence of large (121-129 students) and traditional-sized(30-40students)remedial mathematics classes (Edgell,1981). Students in larger classes experienced more negative attitudes than students in traditional classes.

Locastro (1989) examined the influence of larger classes on teacher and students' attitudes toward second language instruction at the secondary and university levels. She concluded that large classes caused teachers more pedagogical , managerial and affective problems .Classes of (40)students and above were mostly problematic for both teachers and students. On the other hand, classes of (11-20) students were preferred by College students.

In(1994), Gunter and Gunter conducted a study focusing on the relationship between class size and college students' attitudes toward computer usefulness subscale. They indicated that smaller classes displayed more computer usefulness than larger ones.

Gilbert(1995:2)postulates that :

*The impact of class size,....,depended in part upon the educational goal. If the acquisition of factual knowledge was the primary objective, then size was not of great consequence. If higher level thinking, application , motivation and attitudinal change were primary , the smaller classes were best.*

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According to him factors like teaching effectiveness, instruction practices, and course organization tend to be more important than class size for higher rates of learning.

The relation between class size and students' achievement was the central topic of two other studies: Kennedy and Siegfried (1997) and Borden and Burton(1999).The former study concluded that class size has no impact on students' achievement scores. The latter, however, found that there is only a "small, negative impact of increasing class size on student grades and course completion rates"(ibid:1).

Lesser and Ferrand (2000) considered the opinions of community college students concerning instruction. Like Gilbert (1995), they found that class size is not correlated with those students' opinions about instruction quality

Locastro (2001) revealed that the negative effects of large classes on language teaching and learning can be displayed in three categories, namely:

### **Pedagogical**

- More difficulty in carrying out speaking, reading and writing tasks
- Difficulties in monitoring work and giving feedback
- Problems with individualizing work
- Difficulties in setting up communicative tasks
- Tendency to avoid activities that are demanding to implement

### **Management –related.**

- Correction of large numbers of essays virtually impossible.
- Pair and group work often cumbersome to execute.
- Noise level high ,affecting neighbouring classes
- Difficulties in attending to all students during class time
- Discipline problems more acute

### **Affective**

- Difficulties in learning students' names
- Impossibility of establishing good rapport with students
- Concerns for weaker students who may get lost
- Crowd phenomenon: students' not listening to teacher and other students
- Problems in assessing students' interest and moods (as cited in Zhao and Grimshaw,2004-5:18-19).

In (2001), there was also another study conducted by Becker and Powers that examined the impact of class size, among other variables on the learning of college economics. They showed that the larger the class size, the less the learning of economics.

Dillon, Kokkelenberg and Christy(2002)identified a negative relationship between class size and students' grades; the larger the class size the lower the grades.

In (2003), Wetstein and Mora studied the relation between class size and students' performance in a community college setting. Their study aimed "to examine whether certain course characteristics like class size, time of the course offering, and a time trend variable might have an impact on student achievement" (ibid:5). This study focused on one professor's courses over a five-year period. The main findings of the study are the following ones.

1.If class size is an institutional factor that can influence performance levels, there is little in this study to suggest it has an impact when controlling for other variables.

2.Indeed, class size mattered little in the likelihood of success for students enrolled in the particular courses taught by one instructor.

3.The results do not fit with the literature on primary schools size reductions. There is no apparent connection between class size and student achievement when controlling for instructor and class specific variables in the community college analyzed here.

**(Ibid:14)**

Class size in higher education was found to have little influence or never on students' acquisition and intention of basic course material by Schiming (2007).He (Ibid:3), however, affirms that "when it comes to the attainment of higher-order academic skills such as problem solving ,written expression, and critical thinking, students in smaller classes do acquire more of these skills than do students in larger classes." He adds that a more positive attitude toward the subjects characterizes smaller classes.

### **3.Class Size and Teacher Quality :**

Out of the preceding literature review, one can conclude that class size reform cannot be studied accurately without considering other important variables such as teacher quality, teaching methods and strategies , curricula characteristics, funding policy, and students' aptitudes. Hanushek and Rivkin (1999) postulate that teachers are the most important determinants of educational output. When teachers are well-trained, small classes make the greatest difference. Hence, small classes with qualified teachers lead to high student achievement, more individualized attention for students and fewer classroom disruptions. "The central qualities that make for successful teaching" are stated by Boyer(1987:154) as follows:

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Command of the material to be taught, a contagious enthusiasm for the play of ideas, optimism about human potential, the involvement of one's students, and –not least– sensitivity, integrity and warmth as a human being. When this combination is present in the classroom, the impact of a teacher can be powerful and

Such central qualities of a successful teacher can flourish when existing in a class size that is reduced below the traditional, standard limit. That is to say both CSR and teacher quality are considered necessary to achieve the most meaningful, lasting gains in student achievement and to close the achievement gap. Gilbert(1995:8)believes that:

Good teachers encourage contacts with students ,stress active learning, have students reflect on their learning and try to relate it to their daily lives, provide prompt feedback on performance and respect diverse talents and ways of learning.

It is said that students prefer experienced, enthusiastic, dynamic, and caring instructors who speak well, maintain attention and hold interest .Organization, conducting and evaluating a class are usually smoothly done by good, experienced teachers who know how to teach effectively , how to prevent students from feeling insignificant and anonymous, and how to maintain a successful instructor-student interaction. As a matter of fact, experienced, knowledgeable and qualified teachers work successfully with large classes. They can adapt their delivery and course organization to the larger numbers, thereby removing the impact of size by itself (ibid:4). So, if they can do this with large classes, what can we expect from them in smaller classes?! Definitely, there will be extra gains and benefits.

Advocates of CSR reform agree on a number of smaller classes benefits for both students and teachers. These are some of them:

1. Smaller classes represent a preventive, rather than a remedial approach.
2. The small class environment is structurally different from that of the large class and this structural difference generates conditions favouring education.

3. Small class sizes equal more individual attention and better education.
4. Smaller classes allow for the kinds of activities that promote motivation as well as achievement.
5. Smaller classes encourage the enforcement of positive self-discipline habits and promote student self-confidence.
6. Reduced class size reduces the level of noise in a class; there are fewer students to distract each other .
7. Smaller classes result in improvements in the expenditure of effort, initiative taking, and reduced disruptive and inattentive behaviours.
8. Smaller classes encourage more creative and more successful teaching.
9. Teachers can plan more effectively with smaller classes, and can give more individualized instruction .
10. Small classes produce a time efficiency by reducing the need for discipline and classroom management and delivering effective instruction in a shorter amount of time.
11. In small classes, one –to-one interaction allows teachers to learn more about individual students and their needs, thus helping students develop more useful habits and ideas about themselves and their abilities.
12. Teachers in small classes have higher morale, and this enables them to provide a more supportive environment for initial student learning.
13. In small classes, one should expect to find less time spent on management, higher levels of student participation , more time spent on instruction, more teacher support for learning and more positive relations among students .And these processes should lead both to greater subject-matter learning and to more positive attitudes about education among students.
14. Teachers report that the classroom atmosphere with small classes is better, that students can receive more individualized attention, and that teachers have more flexibility to use different instructional approaches and assignments, and more classroom space to work with.
15. In small classes, teachers know each of their students better, and can keep track of how each student is doing on the learning task of the moment. This knowledge enables the teacher to intervene more effectively to help the individual student make progress.
16. Small classes create a more personalized environment for teachers and students.

Then, it seems that classroom problems decrease proportionately with class size and that the smaller the class, the harder it is to escape the positive influence of the classroom educational experience when led by an experienced teacher.

#### **4. CSR and the Iraqi EFL Classroom:**

In an attempt to uncover the opinions of the staff members at the Department of English/at the College of Education/the University of Basrah about the advantages and disadvantages of teaching EFL large classes, a

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questionnaire survey was distributed to them(see the appendix).Those instructors acted as the subjects of the present study .They are (17) in number (11) of them are specialized in teaching linguistic courses, whereas the other (6) are specialized in teaching literary courses including the head of the department .Their responses constitute the data of this investigation.

Before examining the responses, it is important to mention that in order to get the Bachelor Degree in English from this department, students have to pass four academic stages successfully. Each stage is composed of , at least, two sections ,and each section contains an average of (50-60) students. First stage practical English phonetics ,Second Stage Practical English Phonology, and the English Conversation Courses of the first three stages are taught to smaller groups that constitute sections. Every new academic year, no less than (100) freshmen students are enrolled in the department. However their exact number is far from being systematic. A quick look at their numbers for the last seven academic years will clearly reveal this fact. In(2000),(116) freshmen students were enrolled in the department. In(2001),(152) freshmen were accepted; that is having(36) extra students more than the preceding year. One hundred and twelve students were accepted in the department in (2002).This means that this time their number was less than the two years before. In(2003),(164) freshmen students composed the first stage sections of that year, beside some repeaters. So,(52) extra students were accepted that year than the preceding year. Almost half this number of freshmen were enrolled in the department in (2004).Only (86)students were accepted .In (2005), the number of freshmen students accepted in the department reached to (107)students .And, in (2006,127) students were accepted in the department.

One can see, then , that freshmen students' numbers accepted during the last seven years was never constant or systematic. Still, such numbers were large enough to be problematic .Enrolling large numbers of students in the department, of course, necessitates the availability of pedagogical and academic resources and facilities, some of which though available, they cannot be said to cover large classes needs.

Now, in order to expose the subjects' opinions concerning teaching large classes, we need first to describe the eliciting tool , namely the questionnaire used in this study. It is basically adopted from Al-Jarf's (2005), with slight modifications. It comprises(5) items .The first item asks the subjects to state the advantages and disadvantages of teaching linguistic and/or literary subjects to freshmen students in large classes(above 50 students).The second item, however, asks them to mention the positive and negative effects of teaching large classes on managerial , evaluative , behavioural and facilities usage aspects which comprise (17) sub-items. The third item requests them to state the things that they cannot do with large classes. The kind of feeling caused by teaching

large classes is exposed when answering the fourth item. The last item requests the participants to denote the optimal class size for them,(see the appendix).

The subjects were addressed with this questionnaire survey in the second semester of the academic year 2006-2007.They submitted their responses within different periods during the same semester .After examining their responses regarding the first item, it can be noticed that (9)of the subjects,(7) of whom are specialized in linguistics and the other (2) are specialized in literature, identified some advantages of teaching freshmen large classes. These advantages are quoted at length below:

- The students get the same information and the chance of the teacher to forget certain points is lessened. That is , the teacher sometimes does not balance the material she gives to the classes. We hear about such instances from the students after certain exams where the teacher makes questions of materials taught to certain groups whereas other groups are not exposed to.
- a .Linguistic subjects make students familiar with the importance of linguistics to analyze language for the application in different fields related to language , particularly , language teaching .(b) Literary subjects make students familiar with the foreign culture by studying some literary genres. These subjects increase the students' wealth over the vocabulary items of language.
- The only predictable advantage is to get freshmen to be accustomed to a large group of new words and terms, for it is improbable that freshmen can really master or manipulate the 'content' aspect of linguistic and literary courses.
- Teaching large classes is less time-consuming in terms of the time-table. The teacher is not compelled to repeat the same materials over and over again, and in the long run , boredom is definitely decreased.
- 1.Sharing information between students(many view points).  
2.Guarantee that the same material provided by the tutor is delivered to all students with no differences.
- A .Providing the teacher with an intensive and wide experience in a real classroom situation.(b).Getting the learners to participate in different learning situations.
- 1.They are time-saving.(2) Practical in terms of requirements .(3) Suitable for lecturing as a teaching technique .
- The main advantage is that the teacher does not need to repeat the material too many times.
- I think the only advantage is to make use of the available rooms in the department.

On the other hand, all the subjects agreed that there are various disadvantages of teaching large classes. Only (3)of them did not clearly state those disadvantages. The other(14) subjects identified different disadvantages. They are stated below:

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- For the teacher:
  - 1.He cannot determine exactly the number of language items to be covered in one lesson.
  - 2.The whole class will be teacher-centred.
  - 3.He needs various teaching methods and techniques within the framework of more than one pedagogical approach to deal with the individual needs of the learners.
  - 4.Difficulties in managing the class.
- b. For the learners:
  - 1.No much time will be given to practice the language.
  - 2.No much time will be allotted to correct the learners' mistakes when practicing.
  - 3.Difficulties in getting learners to participate in different collaborative activities since this requires much time and effort.
  - 4.No way to promote natural communication activities such as free conversation, discussions, etc.
  - 5.No or little opportunity to use English.
  - 6.No chance to promote learners' autonomy.
- The disadvantages are much more than the advantages. Both linguistic and literary subjects need the attention of the learners and it is challenging to get all these (50) students to understand every word in the lecture. Thus, the lesser the number, the more opportunity would be for the learners to cooperate with the lecture. There would be much time for the teacher to explain the material and encourage the students to participate and ask questions if they don't understand a certain material.
- It is tiring to teach such a number, it needs sharpness, strictness, awareness of each and every moment as well as providing information. This makes the task harder because students tend to make use of any opportunity to have side-talks or engage in anything other than the lesson. This especially happens when their number is large. If it is small, not much effort is needed; only the personality of the teacher will decide that of course.
- The disadvantages can be summed up in having less interaction of the student-student and the student-teacher or the teacher-student ones. Moreover, most of the students would prefer to keep silent leaving the active ones to answer questions and discuss. In other words, it doesn't give the teacher the opportunity to focus on all the students and make them engage in the classroom activities.
- There are several disadvantages of teaching students in large classes:
  - a. The difficulty of managing the class because of the large number of students.
  - b. The teacher will not be able to ask and evaluate all the students.

c. The attention of the teacher will split between the topic of study and classroom atmosphere.

d. The large number of students is a burden for the teacher during exams and assignments.

- 1. There is no chance to test the students' ability to use English in the classroom.
- 2. There is no room to discussion during the lecture.
- 3. It is difficult to distribute the questions among the students equally.
- 1. Large classes mean large rooms. You cannot control the issue of having the tutor's voice reach the students' ears equally.
- 2. Psychologically, narrower rooms (i.e. crowded ones) reflect bad impressions on the students
- Large classes are often hard to manage. The teacher can hardly have the right feedback for he can't check the progress of every student during the same lecture. Large classes give unfair chances to the silent or reticent students for talkative students dominate no matter what.
- Teaching literary and linguistic subjects requires analysis, explanation, discussion,.....etc. Large classes cannot offer the educational setting in which it is easier and more applicable for analysis, explanation, discussion, etc.
- The teacher will find a difficulty in evaluating each student's achievement and in getting all the students involved in the classroom activities and practicing the four language skills.
- Freshmen students in large classes have no or lack the suitable background. Therefore, this may discourage them to continue their studies.
- Students do not have the opportunity to participate in classroom activities properly.
- Large classes are difficultly controlled and are effort-consuming.
- In large classes less achievement is attained.

As for the second item of the questionnaire, only (4) subjects identified some positive effects of teaching large classes on some of the (17) sub-items, and (1) subject recognized one general positive effect of teaching large classes. Here are their responses presented according to the sequence of the chosen sub-items:

- 3. Classroom atmosphere: A teacher may be urged more if he feels that many of his students listen to him attentively and with real participation.
- 4. Classroom management: It is sometimes easy if students feel obliged to behave well when they find themselves among many students.
- 5. Classroom interaction and participation in activities: Much is attained through group-work activities.

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7. Language activities and practice: Much comprehension is achieved if these activities are practiced on many students. The more the students practice, the more they acquire.

14. Student-student relationship: It is good. It creates more cooperative activities.

15. Teacher-student relationship: It allows for familiarity with more students, if the teacher wishes to be social with his students.

- 1. Attendance: Absence is not very much noticed in large classes and normally is ineffective.

2. Attitude, enthusiasm and morale: Crowded classes could provide less active students with an attitude towards participation, i.e., they could be encouraged but the other way round is also plausible; enthusiasm is rather high in larger classes when as many participants as possible are allowed to participate and show knowledge.

3. Classroom atmosphere: Larger classes may be very energetic.

5. Classroom interaction & participation in activities:

Interaction could reach its highest level.

17. Availability and use of college equipments (e.g.: cassette players, overhead projector, data-show ...etc.): If one tape recorder is used for the whole class and when the overhead projector or data-show are installed in big rooms, large classes are no inconvenience.

- 5. Classroom interaction and participation in activities:

Large classes are more interactive.

6. Teaching techniques used: Large classes are suitable for a variety of teaching techniques.

7. Language activities and participation: Large classes are suitable for a variety of language activities and practice.

13. Students' achievements: They are active class dependent.

14. Student-student relationship: It is more intimate.

- 2. Attitude: Large classes encourage publicity spirit.

3. Classroom atmosphere: It seems active.

5. Classroom interaction and participation in activities:

They have more interaction.

14. Student-student relationship: Large classes increase teamwork spirit.

- The only general positive effect of teaching large classes is the reduction of the financial burden of employing new teachers.

Regarding the negative effects of teaching large classes on the (17) sub-items, all of the subjects agreed that teaching large classes negatively affects the (17) sub-items. Many of them, however, stated clearly the negative effects, whereas some of them only said that there are negative effects

without mentioning them. Below are the subjects' opinions concerning the negative effects of teaching large classes on each of the (17) sub-items:

1.Attendence :

- It takes time to take their attendance, it is either at the expense of the lesson , the students' break time, or goes against policies by not taking it at all.
- The student will not feel the importance of his attendance because s/he will not have the chance to participate in the language activities.
- It is really annoying to check the attendance of over (50) students because it takes about ten or fifteen minutes of the lecture time.
- Large classes provide a greater opportunity to lose time. The larger the class is the more the teacher loses time in checking students' absentees
- Students do not like attending large classes due to the fact that they are less comfortable and less beneficial .
- The attendance of a lot of students may slow down the teaching process.
- Large classes enable students to be absent without being observed.
- Large classes are a good environment for truants .
- Listening knowledge is less achieved.
- Large classes are over crowded classes.
- It is difficult to follow up.
- A high absentees' number.
- It is time-consuming.
- Less encouraging.

2.Attitude , enthusiasm and morale:

- Weak students can hide easily among the crowd. The class could depend on the enthusiasm of the best participants and if a teacher has (25) of his (50) participants , the other (25) are hardly noticed.

Students feel that they are not given their real share and attention from the teacher, so their attitude, enthusiasm and morale shall be negative.

- Sometimes, it is difficult to raise them in such large classes.
- Students lose the sense of competition and enthusiasm fades away.
- Students' attitudes and enthusiasm cannot be upraised.
- Students' attitudes and enthusiasm are reduced.
- Students have a little motivation to participate.
- All the time we have passive learners.
- Large classes are discouraging.
- Large classes are depressing.
- They are always down.
- Some students feel shy.
- Less interesting.

3.Classroom atmosphere:

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- It is not comfortable and not very easy to manage. It causes the teacher to be much more nervous than normal.
- Unrestful, and filled with dullness sometimes.
- It is often crowded and students may not feel at ease.
- It could be very noisy and too loose.
- It is crowded and exhausting.
- Choking and too annoying .
- It would be more stressed .
- It is not educational.
- It is never relaxed.
- It is passive.

### 4. Classroom management:

- Students in large classes may misbehave just to receive attention. This will double the teacher's effort to keep an eye on his /her students to have a good control over them.
- Sometimes it is difficult for the teacher to busy himself with controlling his classroom rather than teaching.
- If a teacher does not act strictly and instantly there will be no discipline.
- The teacher faces serious difficulties managing large classes.
- Large classes need much effort on the part of the teacher.
- Large classes are definitely hard to manage.
- It depends on the teacher's qualifications.
- It is very difficult.
- It is laborious.
- Hard to control.
- Hardly controlled.

### 5. Classroom interaction and participation in activities.:

- Most of our students prefer to keep silent leaving the ground to the active students (not more than 5 students only) to participate.
- Only few of the students participate in classroom activities. So, the teacher has less opportunities to encourage many students to participate.
- Time-consuming techniques will have to be avoided, such as discussion in favour of time-saving techniques such as question-asking.
- They will neither be fair nor justly distributed among the students.
- They do not occur as spontaneously as they do in small classes.
- Some students feel shy to participate in activities.
- It is easy for weak students to keep a low profile.
- They depend on the teacher qualifications.
- They are difficult to organize .
- They are time-consuming.

- They are very limited.

#### 6. Teaching techniques used:

- Most of the times only lecturing is the best way to deal with large classes. Practicing games, riddles, group and pair work is not all the times successful with large classes.
- It is difficult , if not impossible, to use most teaching techniques, especially the language lab which only has room for 25 students, whereas even our smallest groups are at least 30!
- Large classes do not offer the opportunity to the teacher to judge which teaching techniques that best suit his students' characteristics.
- The teacher, here has fewer techniques to teach the material. The teacher must adopt the methods appropriate for large classes.
- Techniques that involve the whole class are time-consuming; the larger the class , the less techniques used.
- Of course, teaching techniques will differ to fit the number of the students to make up the draw back.
- Teaching techniques that require individual participation have tremendous negative effects.
- Group-work techniques do not suite large classes.
- They will be greatly less than required.
- Always, they are limited in number.

#### 7. Language activities and practice:

- Only small groups can be of benefit in activities and practice, since all students can join and more than once.
- They are not much used , as it is tiring for a teacher to mark them; but may be only those that are practiced and graded immediately in class.
- They will be distributed according to the time available ,i.e., they will be to the least.
- The number of students limits the type of activities and practice applied in the class.
- These two will be affected negatively ,i.e. less practice will be done.
- Time is not enough to make all the students participate in activities.
- Such a thing is almost absent in large class.
- They are limited in number.
- They are time-consuming.

#### 8. Class work and assignments:

- They will be there actually to the least because the time available to the teacher to read and correct them is not really quite enough , let alone other responsibilities of the teacher in life.

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- Students are dependent in large classes and they assume a passive role in class work. The outside –class assignments have a positive impact on practice.
- They are not much used, as it is tiring for a teacher to mark them; but may be only those that are practiced and graded immediately in class.
- They are time-consuming and require effort , very tiring to check and mark.
- Difficult to achieve and evaluate.
- There is no time to check them.
- They are effort-requiring.
- They are not satisfactory.
- They are time-consuming.
- They will be less.

### 9.Frequency of evaluation:

- Evaluation is not made until the end of the year when we give students their daily marks, or else it is only personal evaluations which do not go beyond the teacher's mind ,and if it does it is by using short comments and no more.
- Evaluation will be highly impressionistic rather than objective and factual.
- Large classes reduce the frequency of evaluation.
- Individual evaluation is neglected.
- Evaluation is less frequent.
- It is time-consuming.
- It is too exhausting.
- It is infrequent.

### 10.Grading of assignments:

- Grading is a tiring, boring , and a frustrating task which makes me hate everything that is related to exams because of their large number (120 students for second stage and 130 students for the first) and a terrible level.
- There will be acceptable grading of exams only, but with some sort of confusion.
- Not only difficult but even less objective.
- It is a heavy burden on the teacher.
- It is time and effort-consuming.
- It is difficult to carry out.
- It is used most of the time.
- It is not practical.
- It is time-consuming.

### 11.Giving feedback:

- It is difficult especially with the writing skill since it is essential to write on the board each student's piece of writing(paragraph, composition, essay, ..etc) to correct it.
- Because of the absence of the real interaction and students participation, so it is rare to get feedback in such a situation.
- It is a must and is made on a daily basis in large groups.
- Individual feedback cannot be checked in large classes.
- It is bad for both the teacher and the students.
- This will not be done all the times.
- It is not applicable in large classes.
- Only in the students exam papers.
- It will be a harder task to do.
- There is little feedback.
- It is always missing.
- It is less practical.

#### 12. Seating arrangement:

- There is no arrangement of seating in any class. Usually girls sit on one side and boys on the other. Clever and active girls sit in the front mostly. Lazy and careless girls and boys, sit at the back, and try to make use(if in a large class)of their large number to do what they like and not to pay attention. That, of course, is forbidden in my classes; but it happens to some teachers!!
- It makes the teacher more nervous and tiresome to give his lecture if they are not well-seated and principled.
- It does not give the teacher the chance to move into the aisles around the room.
- It is difficult to manage especially with small class rooms.
- Large classes are limited to have their seats in lines.
- It is not very important because they are grown-ups.
- There is no way to arrange learners in small groups.
- Large classes mean tiers and rows.
- It prevents friends from sitting together.
- It is a real problem.
- It is not suitable.
- It is confused.

#### 13. Students' achievements:

- Their achievement is encouraged in large classes, but might not get evaluations since there will be either too many participants or too little, and in either case the good student will not be encouraged. The teacher either praises all or demerits all.

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- Sometimes a student could not get his chance to participate if a teacher is unable to distribute his questions wisely and fairly among his students, particularly with such classes.
- Because of the number, so the weak students may be hidden and that will affect the students' achievement.
- Individual student's achievement is too hard to check considering the lecture limited time.
- It is difficult to assess the achievements of all the students in one academic hour.
- The majority of the students in large classes have a low level.
- It will be low since teaching standards will be low.
- The teacher must do his best to urge all to participate.
- Large classes affect comprehension, they reduce it.
- It is very passive and not clear.
- They are difficult to be checked.
- It is not satisfactory.
- It will not be good.

### 14. Student-student relation:

- Anonymity and distance can exist between the teacher and his students on the one hand and the students with each other on the other hand.
- The relationship between and among students does not rely on whether the class is large or small. It seems to me the same in both cases.
- I tried to make a sort of interaction between students to exchange ideas and make use of one another's information. I think it may work well.
- In large classes students tend to have weak relations with each other. They form groups of four or five friends.
- It is negatively affected because students' attention is distracted to a large number of students than normal.
- It depends. If the teacher allows discussion, student-student relation can be active.
- I expect 'small clusters' to exist, rather than the whole class being one group.
- It may create some problems, particularly group-work activities.
- As the number of students increases, problems increase too.
- It is not clear.

### 15. Teacher –student relationship:

- The teacher might get more tensed in large classes, so this will affect his/her relationship with students. Still, students tend to like teachers who are strict but are friendly with them. That is because no matter how angry or strict you get they will be so much happy if you joke with

them and try their best to do what you want of them. Some might hate you, of course , but many would like you or even tend to admire you.

- The teacher has a little chance of being familiar and having knowledge of all the students in large classes. Moreover, it is a challenge to know the names of sixty or seventy students of a class.
- It is usually a formal one since the teacher cannot behave friendly with a large number of students, otherwise, he would lose control.
- The teacher is the leader, however he cannot establish relations with (50)students in (45)minutes.
- The teacher will not be able to know all the students.
- It is less intimate than the student –student relationship.
- It is little achieved .
- It is superficial.
- It is weak.

#### 16.Using the language lab:

- Unless you divide the large classes into smaller groups you cannot use the language lab effectively.
- It is impossible to use the language lab with such classes; it can fit only(25) students.
- There won't be a chance of using the language lab with such classes.
- It will be impractical or superficial only(sitting in the lab, not using it).
- Language labs could accommodate no more than 20-30 students
- The larger the class, the less lab time.
- The tutor's concentration is shattered.
- It is difficult.

#### 17.Availability and use of college equipments(e.g. cassette players, overhead projector, data-show...etc.):

- The number of students in the class limits or determines the kind of equipment the teacher may use to urge the students and encourage them to participate. Cassette players are best for small groups, whereas the other mentioned equipments are accurate for all kinds of classes.
- Even though they might be available , they cannot be used with large numbers but with small numbers only.
- These aids , if available , may work well with large classes.
- They are difficult to be provided for large classes.
- They are unaffordable.
- They are not available.
- They cost a fortune!
- There is none.

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Concerning the third item, which asks the subjects to state the things that they cannot do with large classes, the following responses were given:

- Some things are too hard to do in large classes:
  - a. Prompting silent students since talkative students prevail.
  - b. Checking the learning progress of each student.
  - c. Class assignments where the marking to takes place in the class.
  - d. Using some usual aids like distributing pictures etc., which are often costly.
- 1.I cannot guarantee the attention of all students in the class.  
2.I cannot make them all participate in the class activities.  
3.I cannot evaluate all of their achievements in the class.  
4.There won't be a teacher-student interaction.
- Participation may be impeded.
  - b. Feedbacks could not be easily checked.
  - c. Assignments and exams may be done with a lot of difficulties,...etc.
- A .Sometimes I cannot make them all participate .
  - b. I engage myself in things other than teaching such as: matters of discipline and attendance.
- I cannot change the way they sit in the classroom. That is , we cannot have group arguments where students sit in circles and discuss topics.
- 1. Identifying individual differences.  
2. Evaluating and assessing students' individual achievements.  
3. Affording the same time to each student.
- I may not be able to maintain interaction , encourage participation , check the students' comprehension and give feedback .
- I cannot ask all the students individually during the same lecture .The participation will be limited to the same students.
- Discussing students' exam achievements and other general information in addition to many other positive things.
- I cannot give suitable assignments and I cannot establish strong relationships with the students.
- Group discussions ,raising all the students' motivation to be active and participate in class activities.
  1. Giving each student the attention needed.
  2. Getting students to work in small groups or even in pairs.
- Make things such as frequent quizzes, group discussions, using the lab, visiting the library ,etc.
- Group- work with its unaffordable requirements such as DVD, data-show ,computers...etc.
- One cannot teach conversation or do class work activities with large classes.

- I face difficulties with all what I do in large classes.
- Using the language lab and the other college equipments.

The fourth item focused on the subjects' feelings about teaching large classes. The participants' responses are given below:

- I do not really feel enthusiastic when I have a lecture at a large class. It is tiring and stressful .It needs, beside giving information, being alert and tensed most of the time so as to make students themselves alert and paying attention.
- I am quite used to it. The large classes are less time-consuming in terms of the time-table. Repetition is minimized .
- It is really annoying and needs much patience to deal with different students especially if they are(80)or (90)students.
- I think teaching large classes is exhaustive on the part of the teacher and unuseful on the part of the learner.
- Sometimes I feel upset if the students are upset and sometimes relaxed if they are polite and interested.
- It depends on the students themselves, whether they have the interest or not.
- Teaching large classes is more than a difficult job that consumes time and effort.
- Large classes are tiresome , yet suitable for lecturing as a teaching technique.
- Tired, exhausted , and sometimes angry.
- I wish that there are no large classes.
- I feel tired all the time.
- Uncomfortable and tense.
- I feel very bad.
- I do not like them
- Exhausted and tired.
- Not comfortable.
- A tiring job.

The last item asks the subjects about the optimal class size according to them. The following numbers were given:

- 10 maximum
- 15
- 15-20
- 15-20
- 15-20
- 20

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- 20
- 20
- No more than 20
- 20-25
- 25
- 25
- No more than 25
- 25-30
- 25-30
- 30
- 30-40

### **5. Concluding Remarks:**

Examining the aforementioned subjects' responses, one can easily conclude that the prevailing academic opinion concerning large EFL classes and their impact on the educational output is absolutely negative and against such classes. Large classes might be time-saving and suitable for lecturing; however, such merits, if they can be considered as such at all, are obtained at the expense of students' achievement and the general pedagogical outcome.

Why accept a large number of freshmen students when many of the pedagogical facilities and equipments are not available? For instance, a large number of freshmen are being accepted into the department of English/at the College of Education every year and are being taught mostly in large classes despite the fact that the available suitable classrooms are never sufficient for such classes. Moreover, large classes, if necessary at all, can never be justified at the expense of academic objectives especially when taught by inexperienced teachers. The issue at hand goes beyond presenting academic information to students. Experienced teachers usually know how to efficiently manage large classes while keeping a high level and quality of student-student and teacher-student interactions. Thus, even knowledgeable teachers who are able to communicate challenging content and who have a good command of course material may not have the academic expertise of handling problems of large classes and will evidently be of limited academic and pedagogical use in these classes.

The two important and urgent questions that are consequently raised and need to be answered are: first, do we really need to have large classes, though we know that they are more harmful to both students and teachers than beneficial? Second, isn't it time for us to replace such classes with smaller ones so as not to escape the healthy and positive impact of the classroom pedagogical and educational experience? We do not claim, here, that we have in mind a certain 'magic' number of students to form a 'small' class that complains of no

academic, managerial , and pedagogical problems, however, examining the present situation of our classes as outlined above by the subjects' responses, we can say that half the number of students making up our large classes(i.e.25 students )would make a healthier pedagogical atmosphere for both teachers and students. Thus, CSR seems to be a necessity rather than a luxury.

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## Class Size Reduction: A Necessity or a Luxury ?

### The Appendix :

### The Questionnaire

#### Dear colleague :

I kindly request you to answer the items of the following questionnaire:

1.What are the advantages and disadvantages of teaching linguistic subjects and /or literary ones to freshman students in large classes(above 50 students)?

2.What are the positive and negative effects of teaching large classes on the following:

1.attendance

2.attitude, enthusiasm & morale

3.classroom atmosphere

4.classroom management

5.classroom interaction & participation in activities

6.Teaching techniques used

7.Lanaguge activities & practice

8.class work & assignments

9.frequency of evaluation

10. grading of assignments & exams

11.giving feedback

12.seating arrangement

13.studnets' achievement

14. student- student relationship

15.teacher- student relationship

16.using the language lab.

17.availablility & use of college equipments(e.g.:cassette players, over-head projector , data-show..etc).

3.What things can you not do with large classes?

4.How do you feel about teaching large classes?

5.What is the optimal class size for you?

I highly do appreciate your participation in this questionnaire –survey, and thank you very much.

## تقليص حجم الصف الدراسي : ضرورة أم ترف ؟

### الخلاصة

تعد الحالية . ان من بين العلاجات الناجعة والمهمة لمثل هذه الحالة هو أستعمال أستراتيجية تقليص حجم الصف الدراسي والتي تبدو ، في مثل حالتنا ، ضرورة أكثر منها ترف . الصفوف الكبيرة لتعليم اللغة الأنجليزية كلغة أجنبية للطلبة العراقيين غير مجدية بل وذات تأثير سلبي على كل من الأساتذة والطلبة على حد سواء . لقد أتضح ذلك من خلال أجوبة عينة الأستبانة المعتمدة في الدراسة الحالية . ان هذا الأستنتاج يجعل من الضروري أتخاذ قرارات فورية وجدية لمعالجة الحالة السلبية