

Data collected by Prem Phyak (Tribhuvan University, Nepal) (1)

The following was written recently by Mr Bhajan Pradhan, one of Prem's MA students. He teaches in a public school of Sindhupalchok district. Now he is writing his dissertation, on 'Best Practices of Teaching English in Large Classes' (at Prem's suggestion).

Discomfort

The number of students in Grades 4, 5 and 7 (I teach in these Grades) is 70, 76 and 80 respectively. I cannot find the way to reach back benchers. Four students sit in one congested desk. I always have to stay front of the class. I cannot interact with the students.

Control

In my class, I cannot see what is happening with students. They do not always pay attention to what I am talking about. They do a lot of side talks. Weak students do not participate in classroom activities. They deviate their mind; start talking about other things and classroom becomes noisier. Sometimes I become hopeless as I am not able to control the classroom.

I cannot pay much attention to individual student. I cannot listen to their feelings and ideas. I ask them to work in pair and group, but the classroom becomes noisier.

Evaluation

It is always difficult to check every student's works due to large class size. I cannot provide feedback to individual student. I ask some representative students to read out their tasks and ask other students to discuss whether they have done right or not.

Student-teacher relationship;

Students cannot share their views with me. I also do not ask what they want to learn, and what they have not understood. Students never come closer to me. The classroom becomes simply a ritualistic.

Anxiety

I sometimes become so anxious about how to teach such large students effectively. Students are afraid to ask questions because I always try to control the class to maintain peaceful environment. I hardly ask questions to the students. Since there are students having various ability, it is very difficult to make all students understand what I teach.

Data collected by Prem Phyak (Tribhuvan University, Nepal) (2)

My personal experience of being in crowded class and having crowded class

‘Written by Mr Madhav Prasad Timilisia, who teaches in a rural public school of Kavre District’

After successful completion of my primary grades, my father admitted me to a nearby secondary school of my village. It was, of course, a good news for me to be in that big school. My father gave me a slip as conformation card and I was quite surprised to learn my class roll number. I felt uneasy not only for the matter that my roll number was eighty-nine but also for the matter whether I could get any seat in the room or not. When I first attended the class, I came to know that there were twenty more roll numbers after mine. All my friends had competition to reach school early to get the seat. Once or twice, I had to sit at the back rows and could see the moving lips and hands of the teachers. All teachers used to teach us exactly in the same way i.e. placing themselves by the board, reading the book loudly and writing on the board. It was monotonous for teachers as well as the students. Each year five to ten students either left the school or repeated the class. Twenty new comers joined grade eight with us from other lower secondary schools and we were nearly eighty again. The total number of examinees appearing S.L.C. examination in our batch was seventy-two and only six of us passed the exam regularly. Most of my friends who dropped their study might have many reasons to say but one of the reasons, I think, is crowded class.

Now, I am a teacher and I have been teaching different subjects for more than a decade. I am also facing similar problem as my teachers faced. I have to teach more than sixty students in the same class and I know that some of my friends are teaching more than hundred students in the same class. Issues of multicultural education, quality education, sustainable education etc. are in the debate and World-class education has been a felt need but we have crowded classes with lack of resources. However, I am not satisfied with what I have done to solve my problem; the steps I have taken in the class have at least reduced dropout and repetition to some degree. I am going to mention them with reference to burning issues and the limitations that I have found:

1. Multilingual and multicultural issues

Nearly four different ethnic communities are available in the catchment area of my school. Students from Newari community speak Newari language as their first language and Paharis, Tamangs and Magars have their own language (except Paharis) and culture. Using some tit-bits of their language and talking about their feasts and festival in the class, I address their linguistic as well as cultural identity. As a result, they all feel welcome in the class even if it is crowded. They never feel that teachers do not about them. It helps me make my students supportive during my class. I find students working vigorously when I make groups mixing all ethnic identity. Here, I mean to say that understanding multicultural issues is useful and beneficial.

2. Issue of multi-intelligence

A few talented students generally dominate the large size classes. They can help the teacher to teach effectively. My way of mobilizing them helps me. I place them in different benches and assign them to help other weak students. Another way that I use is to administer

Proficiency test before I start the course. According to the score they obtain, they are placed in such a way that the weak students will get helping hands.

3. Issue of Individual care

It is, of course, a troublesome job for the teacher to have individual care in a large size class. A student hardly get half a minute within 40-45 minutes' class. After the presentation of the lesson, the students are supposed to do some class work. It is not possible to reach up to each individual. To solve this problem, I just go through the answer of a student per bench and ask him to help his friends. I have found peer correction and self- correction techniques useful in such classes.

4. Issue of promoting learning achievement

If we have a large size class or crowded class, we will not enhance as much learning achievement as in small size class. Frequent tests can help sustain achievements. I have found that weak students learn better from their peers in crowded class than in a different section.

Limitations

1. Understanding multicultural issues may not ensure controlled class situation.
2. The use of talented students as monitor may sometimes create problem of superiority and inferiority in the class. Frequent supervision of the monitor's role is essential and it creates unequal treatment among students.
3. For peer and self -correction techniques, it is difficult to be sure that the things are going on well.
4. Frequent tests may reduce the time of material production.

Conclusion

Large size class is not only a problem or burden of teachers but also an opportunity to explore new techniques and tools. Multicultural issues in education, world-class education, sustainable education are other factors to link to the issue of Large size class. Action researches, socio-cultural orientation, discussions with experts and workshops on this issue can help a teacher to face the challenges. Let us think globally and act locally.