

Suitable ESL Classroom Size and Environment for Effective Learning at Tertiary Level in Bangladesh

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2023.7506>

Received: 11 April 2023; Revised: 25 April 2023; Accepted: 01 May 2023; Published: 19 May 2023

ABSTRACT

Creating an effective learning environment in tertiary-level classrooms in Bangladesh can be challenging. The size of the classroom and the atmosphere within it can have a significant impact on the learning experience and outcomes of students. Classroom size is an important factor to consider when creating a space conducive to learning. The study sights on the consequence of ESL (English as Second Language) classroom size and environment at the tertiary level in Bangladesh. The study is qualitative in nature. It is consisted of a review of the extensive literature in the respective field, interviews with twenty English teachers from two renowned private universities in Bangladesh, and the observation of twenty classrooms from those universities. It has been found from the cross-checking of teachers' interviews and classroom observation that most of the universities do not have suitable classroom size as well as the environment negatively impacted on ESL learners. A classroom that is too small or too large can make it difficult for students to learn effectively. Ideally, class size should be between 25-30 students for optimal learning outcomes. Besides, larger class sizes may require additional materials and resources to ensure that each student has access to the necessary materials. Furthermore, the classroom must be well-lit and ventilated so as to create a comfortable environment for learning. Finally, it is important for teachers to consider the physical layout of the classroom and ensure that it facilitates an atmosphere conducive to effective instruction. By taking these considerations into account, teachers are able to create an environment where students are able to learn effectively and reach their full potential.

Keywords: Classroom Size, Classroom Environment, English as Second Language (ESL), Effective Learning, ESL Learner, Tertiary, Consequence.

INTRODUCTION

The size of an ESL classroom is a critical factor in ensuring effective learning takes place at the tertiary level in Bangladesh. Classroom size can affect the overall learning environment and therefore, the quality of instruction and student engagement. It is important to consider the size of a classroom when designing an ESL curriculum in order to ensure that all students have sufficient space to work and are able to interact with each other. In addition to classroom size, the atmosphere of the classroom also plays an important role in providing an effective learning environment. Classrooms should have adequate lighting, space for movement, comfortable seating and desks, and a stimulating yet calm atmosphere. The presence of audio-visual aids such as projectors and interactive whiteboards can also enhance student engagement and facilitate more interactive learning experiences. Additionally, having a teacher who is engaging and encouraging can help to create an atmosphere of enthusiasm and motivation for learning.

In Bangladesh, tertiary-level English language instruction is becoming increasingly popular, and it's essential that the classroom size is suitable for effective learning. By having the right size classroom,

educators are able to ensure that students are able to receive the individual attention they need to understand and master the language. The ideal classroom size will also allow for plenty of student-teacher interaction, fostering a more engaging and interactive learning environment. With the right classroom size, educators can ensure that their students have access to all the resources they need to excel in the English language. The right classroom size can be a major factor in helping students to reach their full potential!

LITERATURE REVIEW

In Bangladesh, to ensure effective learning for tertiary-level students, classroom size is a key consideration. While there is no set rule for the ideal size of an ESL classroom, research suggests that for the most effective learning environment, smaller class sizes of between 20 and 30 students are preferable. With smaller groups, more individualized attention can be given to each student and it is easier for the teacher to identify and address challenges that the student may be facing. Moreover, classes of fewer than 20 students can be even more beneficial, as the students develop a sense of community within the group and feel more comfortable engaging in dialogue and creative expression. Ultimately, while there is no 'one size fits all' solution, smaller class sizes are preferable to ensure the best learning experience for students at the tertiary level in Bangladesh.

The seating arrangement is a very imperative issue for learning (Harmer, 2001). It depends on class size, group size, the style of the furniture, and the type of activity (Harmer, 1998). Again, another vital aspect of classroom management is the class size. The large class generally builds up adverse implications of unacceptable results and problems (Harmer, 2001). The challenges in large classes are noise and behavior, feedback and assessment, blended intelligence, personal concentration, and the practice of the first language (Jones, 2007). According to Evans and John (1998), a large classroom can be managed following some strategies such as engagement, communication, individualization, and liberty. Unfortunately, almost all language classes are significantly larger in Bangladeshi colleges (Rahman, 2015). (Fisher, 2008) mentioned that physical classroom environment refers to the physical room in which the teacher and learners are the main elements including its spatial elements i.e., floor, windows, walls as well as other classroom equipment i.e., desks, chairs, rugs, chalkboards, tack boards, easels, counters, and computer equipment but not limited to these things. Taylor and Vlastos (2009) examined the relationship between environment and design within the classroom from a theoretical perspective. They found that the physical environment of the classroom acts as a "Silent curriculum". It means that classroom environmental design can facilitate and improve the learning process like the overt curriculum. MacAulay (1990) and Walker et al (1995) explored that a well-structured classroom can enhance students' academic and behavioral outcomes.

Haertel, et al (1981) believed that students' perceptions of the classroom environment as an important factor that show some aspects of students' outcomes i.e., achievement, motivation, and satisfaction. They further concluded that achievement in cognitive and affective learning outcomes was repeatedly associated with the classroom environment, which was perceived as having greater cohesiveness, satisfaction, goal direction, organization, and less friction. On the other hand, Rasheed (2012) states that there are massive challenges to both students and teachers in Bangladeshi conventional classrooms.

A research study in Bangladesh by Umme Sharmin Kabir (April 2014), found 'the average number of students in most classrooms ranges from 70 to 90'. She claimed that effective teaching was not possible in overcrowded classes and a majority of the teachers were facing instructional, discipline, physical, and evaluation problems. National and international literature has established that students gain positive knowledge and skills through effective learning activities in a classroom that is conducive to learning. Effective learning produces quality education through knowledge and skills gained. The word is effective can be translated as 'something that works well and produces results that were intended' (Sinclair, 1987, p. 451). The impact of overcrowded classrooms on students' learning is of interest to educators, parents, and

the general public. The research literature on large class sizes has highlighted issues that were also found in this research study. For example, according to one research report, (Earthman, 2002, p. 10), ‘an overcrowded classroom has more students assigned to a classroom-building than the number of students it was designed to accommodate’. When the capacity of the classrooms is exceeded, it places greater demand on the schools’ existing resources and infrastructure that need to be used for effective learning. According to Ijaya (2000), when poor planning is done, population increases in classes can happen.

Objectives of the Study

Large class size is a great challenge for lecturers to give direction to diverse students. Besides, Walberg (1974) said that the classroom’s psychological or social environment refers to the climate or atmosphere of a class as a social group that potentially influences what students learn. However, the objective of the study is to find out the challenges and solutions of suitable ESL classrooms for effective learning through the case study of the tertiary level in Bangladesh. With this determination, firstly, the study looks over the current practices of ESL classroom size and environment at the tertiary level in Bangladesh. Secondly, it finds out the challenges of the ESL Classroom atmosphere. Finally, the study investigates a way of a solution to ensure the best practice of classroom size and environment.

METHODOLOGY

The present study has been undertaken based on qualitative methods including an extensive review of literature in the respective arena, in-depth interviews, and classroom observation. The researchers have chosen two leading private universities in Bangladesh to conduct the study. A total of twenty university teachers teaching English were interviewed to have their opinion regarding the impact of classroom size and environment on ESL learners. Teachers’ Interviews were recorded with an audio recorder and noted on paper as well. The researchers have also observed twenty different classrooms from those universities and cross-checked the data obtained from teachers’ interviews and classroom observation as well. Recommendations have been made by connecting teachers’ opinion, classroom observation report, and the researchers’ personal experience as a teacher.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

When it comes to effective learning in tertiary-level education, classroom size is an important factor in ensuring quality education. In Bangladesh, the size of an ESL classroom has a direct impact on the quality of learning. A smaller classroom size allows for more one-on-one attention from the instructor and creates an environment where students can more easily engage with each other and the material being taught. It also creates a more intimate atmosphere that encourages students to ask questions and participate in class discussions. On the other hand, larger classrooms can be more difficult to manage and may result in students feeling overwhelmed or discouraged. The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the data collected from teachers and classroom observation to find out the current practices of ESL classrooms at the tertiary level in Bangladesh. The findings are also discussed according to the survey, interview, personal observation, and review of the literature.

a) Findings and discussion of the teachers’ Interview

While taking the interview, regarding the issue of class size and environment, most of the teachers mentioned that they have to deal with a large class of 50-60 students where every student cannot be involved in EFL speaking and listening practice, and there is no scope of having any fruitful interaction. Only the teacher delivers his lecture and students act as passive listeners. Every student cannot be involved in all the activities and teachers fail to check their classwork due to a large number of students. On the other

hand, a few teachers mentioned that their class sizes are small with 20-30 students in a few courses which is rare. In answer to the question related to the seating furniture, most of the teachers said that they provide education to their students with decorated and comfortable furniture, enough lighting, a fan, an air conditioner, and some modern teaching materials. It is opined most teachers that use handouts, referred books, audiovisual materials, and PowerPoint slides as teaching materials.

Regarding the question of teachers' steps when the student attends classes in extremely hot/ Cold weather, all of them opined that they try to be friendly and liberal with their students to make the students happy and comfortable but that also is difficult to make them attentive. Even, sometimes they need to stop teaching in such cases. Interestingly, they mentioned that extremely hot weather is the main challenge rather the cold weather. In answer to the question of dealing with noise, all of them assured that they do not face any difficulties or noise from the outside of their classroom as most of them are well equipped with air conditioners. They claim that some internal noise for large class sizes but they try to manage those strictly.

b) Findings from Classroom Observation

It is explored from the classroom observation that in most cases, the teachers cannot teach the students well due to a huge number of students and the students also fail to learn well, especially when they do ESL listening and speaking practices. Even, in the case of writing, it is quite impossible for the teacher to check all the scripts. Seating furniture is not suitable for group work as most of the universities follow the traditional way of teaching rather than Communicative Language Teaching. They use projectors and multimedia to conduct their class smoothly and undoubtedly all the teachers are highly educated as well as qualified in their respective subjects. The projector sometimes makes a disturbance while university authorities try to solve the issue with help of their IT team. To deal with hot weather they have an electric fan, and air conditioner in their classroom which are sufficient for the students. It is observed that lighting facilities are up to the mark in most of the cases and in time of load-shedding they have a sufficient backup like a generator or IPS. It is common seen in large classes that teachers try to stop the internal noise starting an interesting story related to their text and motivating them. Sometimes the teachers try to involve the students in learning to stop the noise but those techniques are not fruitful all the moments. On the contrary, it is also seen that external noise was sometimes beyond their control while teaching English. Moreover, students who sit at the back benches face difficulties to view class lectures which are demonstrated on the whiteboard or projector. In fact, sometimes they cannot hear teachers' lectures properly.

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

To sum up the findings of the study, it can easily be said that the findings from teachers' Interview and classroom observation are almost the same. Most of the cases, it has been explored that the present classroom size at the tertiary level has a negative impact on ESL education especially on ESL learners. Though this core phenomenon has been overlooked for a long period of time, it is time to pay much attention to improving the classroom size and environment for true English education of our future leaders.

In Bangladesh, to ensure effective learning for tertiary-level students, classroom size is a key consideration. While there is no set rule for the ideal size of an ESL classroom, research suggests that for the most effective learning environment, smaller class sizes of between 20 and 30 students are preferable. With smaller groups, more individualized attention can be given to each student and it is easier for the teacher to identify and address challenges that the student may be facing. Moreover, classes of fewer than 20 students can be even more beneficial, as the students develop a sense of community within the group and feel more comfortable engaging in dialogue and creative expression. Ultimately, it is essential to create an environment where learners are able to interact with each other and receive the support they need in order to succeed. Not all students learn best in a large classroom setting. Some students may prefer a smaller, more

intimate learning environment, which may be more conducive to their learning. Additionally, the size of the classroom may not be the only factor contributing to effective learning in a tertiary setting. Other factors, such as the quality of instruction, the availability of resources, and the level of engagement of students, may also play a role.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Based on the review of the extensive literature in the respective area, teachers' interviews, classroom observation, and the researchers' experience some recommendations are:

1. Authorities of such universities should ensure a healthy, modern, safe, and joyful classroom environment with the proper number of students providing the amenities of proper ventilation, temperature, lighting, suitable furniture, and teaching-learning materials for smooth learning and teaching.
2. Modern equipment should check regularly and make the learners feel at ease and enchanted in the classroom.
3. Universities should create a committee for looking after this issue and should continuously monitor the classroom environment and take proper initiative to improve the environment.
4. Teachers should observe the classroom size and environment regularly and reverse different phenomena according to the learners' needs.
5. Classroom size should be determined by the type of learning activities being conducted and classroom size should be adjusted to accommodate the number of students enrolled in a course.
6. Teachers should create more fascinating opportunities for students to speak English in the classroom setting to overcome their fear of the English language. Furthermore, the number of English language laboratories should be increased which might be a great help to reduce students' tension, nervousness, and fear of the language or target language.

Finally, students should be made aware of keeping their classroom more clean and healthy. So, based on the findings and recommendations, it can be summed up that, classroom size and environment have a great impact on ESL learners at every level of study, especially at the tertiary level of education as the learners are in the last stage of learning and moving towards their professional life. Proper consideration of the findings of the study and the implantation of the recommendations will surely contribute to the development of the whole system and encourage more research in the respective field.

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