



英语大班教学： 问题 与 对策

—— 古 明 著 ——



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前言 Preface

The purpose of this present research is to investigate high school English teachers' perceptions and their practices of teaching English in large classes with statistical evidence so as to reveal teachers' attitude towards teaching large EFL classes, advantages and problems they encounter, and strategies they use to cope with large classes. A large class is a vague concept influenced by multi-numbered factors such as culture, people's perceptions, etc. Teaching English in large classes is a common phenomenon, which has attracted increasing attention worldwide. Researchers have been trying to define large classes, identify problems caused by the large class size, and put forward strategies to handle these problems. Not an exception, China faces the same, if not more, severe situation of teaching English in large classes. However, research on this issue in China is relatively rare, especially empirical ones. Therefore, this present research intends to make up for the lack of literature on this issue.

Both quantitative and qualitative approaches are used in this research. Data are collected via questionnaires, classroom observations and interviews. Four hundred and fifty-six high school English teachers participate in the questionnaire survey to gain the quantitative data. Seven teachers' lessons are observed and six teachers are interviewed thereafter to gain the qualitative data. Quantitative data collected through questionnaires are processed with the help of SPSS, while qualitative data collected via classroom

observations and interviews are transcribed for detailed analysis with the help of EXCEL 2010.

Main findings show that even though teachers admit that there are certain advantages of teaching large EFL classes, such as providing more opportunities for collaborative learning, 92.6% teachers still hold negative attitude towards teaching English in large classes. Pedagogical problems, management-related problems and affective problems emerge in teaching large EFL classes, such as difficult to attend to individual student, heavy workload and teachers' low degree of professional satisfaction etc. Having identified these problems, teachers actively seek for effective strategies to reduce the bad influence of these problems to its minimum in their daily practices. They enhance collaborative learning, cultivate students' independent learning ability, set different objectives for students with mixed abilities, integrate multi-media into their teaching, mark students' work in different ways, establish good rapport with students and other strategies to cope with large classes. In general, this research presents a comprehensive and complex landscape of teaching English in large classes, which is expected to provide implications for promoting the current situation of teaching English in large classes.

本书旨在调查中学英语教师对英语大班教学的态度和中学英语教师的大班教学实践,通过实证研究的方法揭示中学英语教师对英语大班教学的态度,英语大班教学的优势和问题以及中学英语教师在教学实践中为了解决大班教学的问题所采取的策略。大班教学是一个模糊的概念,受到不同文化的影响,因此不同的人对此有不同的观点。英语大班教学是一个常见的现象,日渐引起了人们的重视。研究者试图通过研究去界定大班教学的概念,探究英语大班教学的问题和解决大班教学问题的策略。中国作为最大的发展中国家且人口基数大,英语大班教学更是普遍存在,但是国内关于英语大班教学的相关研究很匮乏,相关的实证研究更少。因此,本书采用实证研究的方法,试图弥补这部分文献的不足。

本书主要采用了量性研究和质性研究结合的方法,利用问卷调查、课堂观察和访谈的方式收集数据。456名中学英语教师参与了问卷调查,所得数据进行统计后用SPSS统计软件进行了分析;同时,对其中的7名英语教师的课堂进行了观察,对6名教师进行了访谈。课堂观察和访谈所得数据进行了仔细的转录并用EXCEL 2010进行了分析。

本书发现虽然中学英语大班教学存在一定的优势,如大班教学能为合作学习提供更多的机会,能够节约教学资源等,但是92.6%的中学英语教师仍然对英语大班教学持消极态度。英语教学相关的问题、教学管理相关的问题和教师的情感问题是大班教学中存在的主要问题。班级学生人数多、能力差异大,加大了课堂设计和活动设计的难度;教师也不能及时有效地给学生提供

课堂和作业反馈,这在一定程度上也降低了学生的课堂参与度。另外,课堂纪律问题严重,教师的工作量随着学生人数增多而增大,工作压力大导致了教师的专业成就感低,教学热情不高。针对这些问题,中学英语教师积极寻求有效措施,试图将这些问题的不利影响降到最低。教师主要采用小组合作学习的方式让更多的学生参与到课堂中,注重培养学生的自主学习能力以应对学生人数多、层次差异大的问题。同时,教师对不同层次的学生设置不同的教学目标,给定不同的课堂任务,采用不同的反馈方式以确保不同层次的学生都能有所得。对于英语大班教学中的纪律问题,教师多采取事先制订英语课堂纪律和要求的方式来约束学生,学生一旦违反规定将会受到一定的惩罚。除此之外,在解决教学中的情感交流问题时,他们通过与学生建立良好关系,与同事谈心、写日记等方式增加自己的专业成就感和教学热情。总之,本书的研究结论展现出中国中学英语大班教学的一个概括性的图景,也反映出中国中学英语大班教学的复杂性。希望本书能给中学英语大班教学提供一定的启示,以更好地解决中学英语大班教学中出现的问题。

作者

2019年8月

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Chapter 1 Introduction

In this chapter, the background information of this research is introduced in the first place, followed by the objectives and significances of this research; meanwhile, the organization of this thesis is also presented.

1.1 Research background

Teaching English in large classes is a common phenomenon, which has attracted increasing attention worldwide. Todd (2006:1) notes that “teaching English in large classes is a common reality all over the world, especially in developing countries, and for many teachers, large class size is one of the biggest, if not the biggest, challenge facing them in their work”. Hence, what is a large class? Various researchers have different opinions on identifying a large class. Researchers simply agree that the definition of a large class depends to a large extent on culture, teaching context, teachers' individual experience and other variables. However, researchers do have agreements on the minimum number of a large class, which is between the range from 40 to 60 (Todd, 2006).

Not an exception, English teachers in China also face severe problems caused by the large class size. Classes with more than 50 students are quite common within Chinese contexts, and such a large student number does cause a number of problems for teachers in managing their teaching (Wang & Zhang, 2011).

According to China Education and Research Network (www.

edu.cn), at the end of the year 2010, there are in total 54,900 junior high schools with about 1,020,659 classes and 28,584 senior high schools with around 431,840 classes in China. In the following table, the proportion of large classes with more than 50 students of junior and senior schools is listed with three different geographical areas, namely, urban, town and rural areas.

Table 1.1 Proportion of large classes in China

	Areas	Total number of classes	Number of classes with more than 50 students	Proportion
Junior high schools	Urban	208,399	142,486	68.37%
	Town	426,604	350,138	82.08%
	Rural	385,912	280,232	72.61%
Senior high schools	Urban	162,515	128,790	79.25%
	Town	235,531	211,739	89.90%
	Rural	33,794	28,064	83.04%

As we can see from the above table, no matter it is in the urban, town or rural areas, classes with more than 50 students take up the largest proportion. Obviously, most English teachers in China face the severe situation of teaching large classes. However, questions such as the followings are rarely investigated in China: How do English teachers in China view teaching in large classes? What problems do they encounter when teaching in large classes and how do they cope with those problems?

Teaching English in large classes has attracted a large number of researchers' attention abroad. They have been trying to define how large is a large class (e. g. George, 1991; Hayes, 1997 etc.). In addition, they seek to identify the problems in teachers' daily teaching practices caused by the large class size. Hayes (1997) concludes five categories of problems caused by the large

class size both physically and mentally while LoCastro (1989) makes a list of problems from the pedagogical, management-related and affective perspectives. Todd (2006:3~4) does a literature review and makes a thorough list of problems based on the previous research. Having put forward all these problems, these researchers have also provided possible strategies to deal with these problems (e. g. LoCastro, 1989, 2001; Todd, 2006 etc.). However, in China, although teachers face the same, if not more, serious problems caused by the large class size, there is no sufficient literature to refer to. Most research on this issue in China focuses on teaching English in large classes at college and university level (e. g. Yuan, 2003; Xiong, 2006, Huang, 2006; Li, 2007; Sun, 2008 etc.). Only a few are concerned about teaching large classes in high schools, but they discuss this issue mainly from their own experiences of teaching English in large classes without any statistical support (e. g. Zhang, 2002; Wen, 2003; Yang, 2008 etc.).

Therefore, this present research tries to make up for the lack of literature on teaching large classes in China and uses quantitative and qualitative methods to collect data in order to probe into teachers' perceptions and their practices of teaching English in large classes. This research addresses the issue in two aspects: 1) what is high school teachers' perception of teaching English in large classes? That is, what are the advantages and problems of teaching English in large classes, and 2) what is high school teachers' daily practices of teaching English in large classes? More specifically, how do they cope with these problems in large classes.

Just as Cooper and Robinson (2000) note, "it is safe to say that... large classes are prevalent and will remain so in the foreseeable future", we cannot neglect this phenomenon and its outcomes. To solve the problems caused by the large class size, we

have to know teachers' views about teaching English in large classes within the Chinese contexts and through research, we can generate some possible and effective strategies from teachers' daily practices of teaching large classes, which can be used as references for novice teachers, who lack the experience of managing large classes.

1.2 Research objectives and significance

This research intends to investigate teachers' perception and practices of teaching English in large classes including advantages and problems found in teaching large classes, and strategies to cope with these problems.

As has been mentioned before, teaching English in large classes is a common phenomenon in China, but there has not been sufficient literature, especially empirical ones. Quantitatively, according to China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), from the year 1994 to 2013, there are about 831 articles about large-class teaching. To narrow them to teaching English in large classes, there remain 256 articles and the remaining ones mainly talk about the problems of large-class English teaching found in universities and colleges. Moreover, most of the researchers and teachers talk about large-class English teaching based on their own experiences or through theoretical discussions without statistical support. Therefore, this present research is expected to make an important theoretical contribution to the literature.

As far as practical significance is concerned, we cannot deny the fact that there exist enormous problems out of teaching English in large classes. We have to take measures to deal with this widespread phenomenon. To cope with this situation, the starting

point is to understand what teachers really think about teaching English in large classes and what kinds of problems they encounter in such classes. Furthermore, the strategies found to deal with problems caused by large class size can provide references for novice teachers who may face these problems but may have limited ways of tackling them.

1.3 Organization of the thesis

This thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter One presents a brief introduction to the whole study, including background information, significance and organization of this research. Chapter Two reviews previous research on teaching English in large classes. Definitions of large classes are presented in the first place, followed by the class size debate where different researchers have various opinions about the relationships between class size and students' achievements. Additionally, problems in large EFL classes identified by previous researchers are presented and the strategies they promote are also reviewed in this chapter. Afterwards, a summary is made to present the gap between the previous research and this present one. Chapter Three outlines the research methodology, including research questions, participants, data collection methods and instruments, data collection procedures as well as data analysis methods. Chapter Four reports the findings based on the data collected from questionnaires, classroom observations and interviews. The results are reported in line with the research questions. Discussions are included at the end of this chapter. Chapter Five summarizes the main findings along with the implications of this research. At the end, suggestions for further research are also put forward in this chapter.