Using a Lecture and Tutorial Approach in Teaching Large Classes

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Abstract
This study was conducted to investigate how English language teaching using a lecture and tutorial system worked with a large class. The study involved 65 students taking their last English foundation course at King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi. Two researchers taking turns delivered the lessons in a large class as a lecture session and conducted a tutorial session with 15-16 students. The results from the questionnaire showed that the students preferred the tutorial mode to the lecture mode. However, they still rated learning in a conventional class highly. The students' perceptions contradicted the perceptions of the teacher/researcher who was satisfied with the teaching and regarded the teaching in lectures as successful. Therefore, we cannot reach any conclusions concerning appropriate modes of teaching English in large classes.

In any English class, the teacher has to make sure that the learners have the time to practise the language points learned as learning English is regarded as learning a skill. Therefore, generally the English class consists of an input, a practice by means of drilling or doing exercises, a production of the language taught and feedback from the teacher. Interaction happens throughout the process of teaching and learning and it is regarded as an important aspect because an English class is a place where the learners can produce the language and check the hypotheses they have formed about the language. In order to cover those activities, teaching English is normally conducted in a smaller class compared with other subjects; the number of students in the English class in Thailand is between 30 and 45 in the English foundation courses in government universities.

However, recently there has been a problem of an increasing number of students while the number of teachers has remained the same. Therefore, we had to find solutions to this problem. Inspired by the teaching used in other subjects in higher education, we tried using a teaching mode which was conducted with a large number of students; namely, a lecture. However, as mentioned above interaction is important; and using only lecture mode in a large class might not make the English language learning successful as it is difficult to give feedback to individual students and also to offer tasks which cater for interaction. Therefore, a tutorial, which is also used in higher education was integrated into this study in order to give the students the chance to interact with their friends and the teacher. This system would give a balance between studying English in a large class with less interaction and studying in a smaller class in the tutorial session. This classroom system thus tried to provide an English learning environment which was as similar as possible to the English conventional class, but which at the same time could cope with the increased number of students.

This study was therefore conducted to investigate how English language teaching using a lecture and tutorial system worked with a large class. It was conducted at King

Mongkut's University of Technology, a government university in Thailand. The class consisted of 63 Engineering students studying an English foundation course.

Teaching English in a conventional class
Conventionally, teaching English is conducted in a class size which is manageable because teaching English has a few important components, among which are interaction and giving feedback. These two components are important because acquiring a language needs interaction between learners and teachers and interaction among learners so that the language points learned will be practised and the success of communication helps learners measure their language competency. Therefore, one of the teacher's responsibilities is organizing and controlling classroom interaction (Watson Todd, 1997). This can be done by the teacher interacting with the learners or the teacher controlling interaction through organizing groupwork and pairwork (McCarthy, 1997). Therefore, a higher number of students studying in a conventional classroom mode seems likely to cause management problems in that interaction and feedback are difficult to provide.

Lectures
A lecture mode is the most common teaching mode in higher education because it provides human contact and it has a few advantages (Wallace, 1991; Jordan, 1997). It can be said that the main advantage of this mode of teaching is administration because it is cheap in terms of human resources; one lecture can deliver the same message to a large audience. It is also easy to arrange as long as the educational institution has space available. A lecture mode may be used with an English class if the focus is on delivering the content such as in a literature or a linguistics class. However, it is not likely to be suitable if the focus of the class is on communication where interaction to enhance language competence is promoted. In addition, a lecture mode is difficult for the teacher to provide feedback to the learners, s/he may be able to give feedback to the whole group but not individually. If the lecture mode is to be offered in an English class where communication is emphasised, it can be used when the teacher explains a certain concept such as introducing new language, context, aids or content, objectives goals or rationale, clarifying and dealing with students' problems (Watson Todd, 1997). The activities after this short lecture will cater for interaction through communication.

Tutorials
Tutorials are regarded as a group mode teaching. The main function of the tutorial is to provide discussion in a group. The discussion may be conducted in different ways. For example, if the tutorial is conducted as a seminar, the papers are presented by one or more participants as input for discussion. The topics to be discussed in the tutorial can also come from the teacher, a previous lecture, or an essay written by the students. The tutorial can also be conducted as a workshop, which is a practical session where learners learn to solve problems (Wallace, 1991). Tutorials are ideal for English language learning especially when conducted in a small group because the students have the chance to interact with their friends and the teacher through discussion. This is even more suitable for the students who do not like to speak up in class as they are too self-conscious of how they speak English. The feedback can also be done easily and individually in the tutorial because the teacher can focus on individual students. However, the major disadvantage of this mode is manpower. Because the ratio of the

teacher per students is lower than in a normal English class, if the tutorial mode is adopted, more English teachers are needed.

To solve the problem of dealing with a higher number of students, we tried to combine teaching modes to allow us to cope with more students, while at the same time still providing both interaction and feedback. Therefore, a combination of a lecture which can cater for more students at one time and a tutorial which can provide interaction and feedback were chosen as a teaching mode in this study to find out if they are effective modes for English language teaching. The research question therefore is 'How effective is using a lecture and tutorial approach in teaching English?'

Context of the study
The study was implemented in the class LNG 103: Communicative Writing. It was the third course of the subjects who are studying at KMUTT. Therefore, they already had experience studying English in a conventional class; i.e. studying with 35-40 students with one teacher in charge of the class. The subjects were from Mechanical Engineering, Production Engineering, Electrical Engineering and Electronics Engineering Departments. The course employs a task-based approach where students have to perform different kinds of tasks which they can choose based on their interest. The tasks in this course are mainly written ones; e.g. writing an email, posting their opinions in the Bulletin Board in the website prepared by the Department of Languages, writing a postcard, writing a letter of complaint, and writing a report on a survey and an experiment. Some tasks were conducted individually such as the email task, writing the postcard and a letter of complaint, whereas others, such as the reports on the survey and the experiment, were conducted in groups.

Since the course had to follow the syllabus designed for conventional classrooms, the researchers were able to rearrange the class as long as it did not affect the requirements of the course which in turn affected the scores of the students. The class was rearranged by two lecturers taking turns teaching a large class which was regarded as a lecture session. In the lecture class, the lecturers chose the part of the content which aimed at delivering a message to the students, such as explaining strategies, the task, new grammar points necessary for the tasks and feedback of common errors coming from the whole class. However, because learning English is activity-based and the course is designed as a task-based approach, the lecture session was composed of input, or a short lecture to introduce a new concept, followed by exercises conducted in pairs or in groups of five to check if the subjects understood the input. Also using the lecture mode were the presentations of the experimental task which was the final and the most important task that needed evaluation from the whole group as a requirement of the course. While one researcher taught the class, the other acted as an observer recording what happened in class; she would not get involved in the teaching process.

To conduct a tutorial, the whole class was separated into four small groups, named A, B, C, and D. There were about 15-16 students in each group. One researcher was responsible for 2 groups. In this way, a smaller number of students would study in a tutorial session, which was arranged differently from the conventional classroom. The tutorials were conducted mainly to give feedback on the students' assignments individually, present the smaller tasks, and discuss the topics the students chose to do

in the survey task. Each group of 15-16 students met with the teacher/researcher in the tutorial session for one hour whereas the whole group of students or 40 students in the conventional classroom would meet for 2 hours. While one group met with the teacher/researcher, the other group was expected to do self-study or to complete their tasks. In other words, the arrangement of the tutorial was regarded as separating the conventional classroom into two smaller groups and dealing with one group at a time. In this way, the students did not have problems of not finishing their tasks when they came to the tutorial because the tasks were used as input for discussion. With this small number, all students had the opportunity to speak English or to interact with the teacher and friends. The contact hours in this new mode of learning are presented in the following table.

Table 1   Contact hours of students in new mode of learning compared with that in the conventional class

Type of class	Number of students	Time spent in each session	Time allocated for the whole semester
Conventional class	35-40	2 hours x 30 lessons	60
Lecture	63	2 hours x 16 lessons	32
Tutorial	15-16	1 hour x 14 lessons	14

Note: the students in the tutorial session officially had 14 hours for self-study and/or doing the tasks on their own.

Because learning English in a large class was new to the subjects, the first session was an introduction to how the class would be conducted. Then the students were assigned into small groups so that they knew which group they belonged to. In the introduction session, in addition to having the course outline, the students were given the timetable which specified when the lectures and the tutorials for each group were conducted.

The class met for 15 weeks or 30 sessions (2 sessions a week) for the whole semester, two hours a session or four hours per week. Normally, the first two hours of the week was allocated for lecture and the last two hours was for the tutorial. The students went through 15 hours of lecture and 14 tutorial sessions. The following table shows the comparison of conducting LNG 103 in three types of classes: conventional, lecture, and tutorial.

Table 2   A comparison of conducting LNG 103 in a conventional, lecture and tutorial classes

Type of class	Number of students	Input	Practice	Presentation of the task	Feedback
Conventional	35-40	Language points, strategies, how to conduct a survey, how to write an abstract.	Writing using the language points learned in the input.	The survey and experiment tasks were done in groups in front of the class. The audience was required to ask questions.	Common mistakes are presented to the whole class. Sometimes individual students receive written feedback.
Lecture	63	Language points, strategies, how to conduct a survey, how to write an abstract.	Writing using the language points learned in the input.	The survey and experiment tasks were done in groups in front of the class. The audience was required to ask questions.	Only the important mistakes from the whole class were raised.
Tutorial	15-16	Common mistakes from the assignments, questions from lectures.	Speaking through asking and answering questions.	Presenting the proposal of the survey task.	Mistakes from written assignments were discussed in detail with each student.

Research procedures

In order to find out if the combined lecture and tutorial mode was effective in teaching English or not, the researchers investigated how the students felt about being taught in this new mode of learning compared with their experience of learning English in a conventional classroom and looked at how the class was conducted. The two instruments used are as follows:

- A questionnaire asking the subjects' attitudes about these teaching modes. It was composed of 22 items where the subjects had to rate their opinion on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from completely agree to do not agree at all. There were three open-ended questions at the end of the questionnaire asking the subjects to list the advantages of a lecture conducted in a large class, the advantages of a tutorial session and the advantages of the conventional class they had previously experienced. The questionnaires were distributed at the end of the semester after the subjects had enough experience studying in the lecture and tutorial mode.

- A diary by one teacher/researcher whose expertise is in teaching techniques. She recorded what happened in class. Because of her expertise, her record was also evaluative in that she focused on the objectives of the lesson, pace of teaching, reaction of the participants, success of the class considering students' involvement and the achievement of the objectives. The data from the diary were used to support the data from the questionnaire.

Findings

From the rating scale section, the subjects showed their opinions of the lecture and tutorial mode of teaching compared with the teaching mode in the conventional class as shown in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3   Opinions on learning in a large class or in a lecture mode

Items	Mean	Interpretation
Learning English in a lecture mode in a large class is the same as learning English in LNG 101 and LNG 102	3.26	Not certain
You still have interaction with your teacher and your friends although you are learning English in a lecture mode in a large class.	3.00	Not certain
You are still able to do groupwork although you study in a lecture mode in a large class	2.80	Not certain
You can ask questions from the teacher in a lecture mode of learning	3.02	Not certain
The teacher can pay attention to every student although the teaching is conducted in a lecture mode in a large class	3.20	Not certain
Learning English in a lecture mode in a large class is meaty/contentful	3.07	Not certain
Learning English in a lecture mode in a large class enables you to use English a lot	3.39	Not certain
Learning English in a lecture mode in a large class enables you to show your opinions	3.07	Not certain

From the findings in Table 3, the students did not seem to make a clear distinction between studying in the lecture mode in a large class and their previous experience in studying English in a conventional class as most of them rated 'not certain' in almost all the categories. This showed that class size did not have much effect on their perceptions. It might be because the teachers covered all the aspects that could be done in the conventional class although they might not be able to attend to each individual student

When asked to show their opinions of the tutorial, the students could more clearly distinguish between the tutorial and the conventional class as seen in Table 4.

Table 4   Opinions of learning English in a tutorial mode

Items	Mean	Interpretation
Learning English in a tutorial mode is the same as what you used to do in LNG 101 and LNG 102	2.43	Agree
Learning English in a tutorial mode enables you to work in small groups	1.98	Agree
You can ask the teacher questions when learning English in a tutorial mode	1.85	Agree
Learning English in a tutorial enables the teacher to pay attention to every student	1.70	Totally agree
Learning English in a tutorial mode enables you to interact with the teacher and friends	1.71	Totally agree
You learn a lot in a tutorial mode	2.09	Agree
You can use English a lot in a tutorial mode	2.00	Agree
Students have a chance to show their opinions when learning in a tutorial mode	1.80	Totally agree

From the findings in Table 4, the students thought that this mode of learning enabled them to interact with the teacher and friends and they were able to learn more through

using English. In addition, they thought that the teacher could pay attention to every student. However, their perceptions of the difference between the tutorial and the conventional class were not clear as they thought that learning in the tutorial was the same as learning in the conventional class. Again, this may be because the activities used in the two modes are similar.

To conclude, the data from the rating scales showed that class size had no effect on the students' perception of the differences among the three types of classes; namely, the lecture, the tutorial and the conventional class, because the three types of classes incorporated all important aspects of teaching English, namely, input, practice, presentation of the task and feedback, albeit in different degrees.

In the open-ended section which asked the students to state the advantages of each mode of teaching and learning, the findings show the students' perceptions of the English class in relation to learning in 5 aspects: teacher, interaction, content, social aspects, and practical aspects. These are compared in Table 5.

Table 5   A comparison of the students' perceptions of advantages of the three modes of teaching

	Lecture	Tutorial	Conventional Class
Teacher	• Teacher not being able to take care of the students (3.7%) • Gaining knowledge from various teachers (5.6%)	• Teacher being able to take care of every student (20.7%) • Being able to ask questions to the teacher (37.7%)	• Teacher can take care of every student (20.7%) • Being able to speak with and ask questions to the teacher (11.3%)
Interaction	• Having the chance to work in groups (9.4%) • Having the chance to show opinions (11.3%)	• Being able to use English more (15.0%) • Being able to show opinions (18.8%)	• Having to work in groups (5.7%) • Being able to show opinions (7.5%)
Content	• Gaining a lot of knowledge (5.6%)	• Getting a variety of knowledge (13.2%)	• Gaining a lot of knowledge and understanding the content (5.7%)
Social aspects	• Getting to know more friends (16.9%)		
Practical aspects	• Saving energy, space (9.4%) • Convenience for assigning tasks (3.7%)		• Taking not much time to learn (11.3%) • Being able to concentrate (5.7%)

Comparing the advantages of the three modes presented in Table 5, it can be seen that a higher proportion of students cited advantages for tutorials than for the other two modes. The advantages stated for tutorials have much in common with those for conventional classes, but occur at higher frequencies. Conventional classes, however, do have some practical advantages not apparent in tutorials. For lectures, on the other hand, the proportions of students citing advantages are low, and the advantages cited are not clearly linked to learning (e.g. getting to know more friends). Therefore, it

appears that, at least from a learning perspective, students perceive lectures as being least useful.

However, the data from the diary contradicts the data from the students' perceptions as the diary reveals that the researcher was satisfied with the teaching and regarded the teaching conducted in lecture classes as successful. The following extracts showed her perceptions of the class when she acted as an observer.

> 'The room is big, the students' chairs can be moved around so the teacher can walk closely to the students supervising while they are working groups. Asking questions to each group helps them to have clear idea of what they are doing ... The students can present good tasks to the class.'

> 'The teacher always asks questions to students. I think the class goes very smoothly. Most of the students can answer correctly.'

> 'All the students are listening attentively, maybe because the topic the teacher is talking is interesting and her pace of teaching is good, not too slow not too fast.'

> 'I feel that the teaching today is successful considering the way all the students pay good attention to the class; they look happy answering the questions and joining the activities. Each task the teacher gave is not too big or too long. They do not get bored with the tasks.

The contradictions may have arisen from different perceptions because the two parties have different roles in the teaching and learning process. The teacher regarded pace of teaching, students' attention, and being able to monitor students' work in groups as important conditions in teaching, whereas the students looked at how much they learned from their friends and their teachers as an important aspect.

Although this research did not yield any substantial data about the effectiveness of using a combined lecture and tutorial approach in teaching English to replace the conventional class, it created an awareness in the researchers about conducting research to suit the problem they were facing. When teachers conduct research, they may do it from different reasons and for different purposes (McDonough & McDonough, 1997). The fact that the researchers were not able to reflect on the teaching process through using the data obtained from the research partly arose from the research procedures. The researchers did not conduct the research as action research where data was used as input for a change of action. Action research focuses on action and reflection as the data received can help the teachers plan their action, implement their plan, and revise and amend their plan (Wallace, 1991; McDonough & McDonough, 1997).

The data collection process in this study, however, was conducted once at the end of the teaching in order to see the students' attitudes towards lectures and tutorials. This meant that this research study could not be used to improve teaching and learning. Thus, although we learnt some things about the different modes of teaching, this

learning occurred too late to have any impact on the course. Therefore, although possibly valuable as research, this study did not have the desired impact on the teaching and learning situation.

Conclusion

The data from the research shows that of all the three types of learning mode, the students preferred the tutorial mode. However, if we compare the conventional class with the combination of lectures and tutorials, the students still preferred learning in a conventional class. These student perceptions were contradictory to the perceptions of the teacher/researcher. We cannot, therefore, reach any conclusions concerning appropriate modes of teaching English in large classes.

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