Effective Teaching of English in Large Multilevel Under-Resourced Classes at an Afghan Public University

Kawita Sarwari

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EFFECTIVE TEACHING OF ENGLISH IN LARGE MULTILEVEL UNDER-RESOURCED
CLASSES AT AN AFGHAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

A Thesis
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

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May 2018
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The current qualitative study attempts to explore the challenges of teaching English in large, multilevel, under-resourced classes at the Afghan Public University (pseudonym) from the perspective of four Afghan ELT (English Language Teaching) instructors as well as their strategies in counteracting the perceived challenges. This study was conducted based on Kumaravadevilu’s (2001) postmethod pedagogy—parameters of particularity, practicality, and possibility. The data collected through interviews with four ELT instructors of the Afghan Public University was analyzed and coded thematically. The findings indicate that the ELT instructors struggle with challenges in different areas in their large, multilevel classes. For instance, classroom management, providing feedback, balancing teaching materials, availability of resources, and reaching each individual’s needs and wants were among the most challenging areas discussed by the study’s participants. Furthermore, the findings of this study show that teachers’ self-developed teaching materials as well as integration of technologies, conducting initial assessments of students’ needs and wants, peer-feedback, and teaching experience can maximize teaching effectiveness in large, multilevel classroom settings.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to extend my greatest appreciation to my thesis chair, Dr. Matthew Vetter, for his extraordinary support, guidance, and encouragement throughout this project. He has always been willing to help in every single step of this thesis. There is no doubt that without his sincere guidance and instructions, this thesis would have never been completed successfully.

Special thanks are given to my thesis committee members Dr. Park and Dr. Porter for their constructive feedback and instructions. I greatly appreciate their support and understanding not only with my thesis, but throughout my journey at IUP. It has been a pleasure being their student and learning from them.

Special appreciation is given to the Fulbright Foreign Student Program for sponsoring me. Thank you also to my study participants who willingly and truly shared their invaluable teaching experiences. I truly appreciate their support and their time. I am also especially appreciative of my friends who helped me to improve this paper with their insightful thoughts and comments.

Thank you to my parents for their support, encouragement, and belief in me. The one and only thing that I can say for certain is that without their support, dedication, and sacrifice, this journey would have never been a success. And lastly, thanks to my brother and my sisters for their cheers and supports.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Afghanistan has been experiencing an unstable political condition for approximately the past four decades. War has been devastating to the country’s infrastructures. Afghanistan’s higher education is one of the sectors which endured the damaging impacts of war and instability which resulted in a drastic decrease in the amount of educational resources and lower quality education (Roof, 2014). Babury and Hayward (2014) discuss the destructive effects of war on Afghanistan’s higher education by stating, “During those three decades, most of Afghanistan’s higher education institutions were damaged and many closed, women were excluded from secondary and higher education, and more than half the country’s faculty and staff members were lost” (p. 1). In fact, it takes years of hard work, investments, and expertise to provide and offer quality higher education.

Afghanistan started to restore and transform its education system after the Taliban regime collapsed in 2001. There appeared to be a huge increase in the number of applicants in primary and secondary education, which caused an increase in the number of universities’ admitted applicants. According to the USAID (2018) report:

In 2001, only 1 percent of college-age students were enrolled in higher education, among the lowest percentage in the world. Currently, approximately 9.6 percent of college-age students—around 300,000 students—are enrolled in public and private universities, including around 100,000 women. (para. 2)

The dramatic increase in the number of universities’ admitted students as well as a lack of available teaching resources, instructors, and staff bring the issue of large classrooms and quality
of teaching to attention. Babury and Hayward (2014) argue that this huge increase in the number of students admitted into universities caused issues such as increased workload and responsibilities on teachers and administrators. It also limited office hours and research time for instructors, which resulted in lower quality education at some institutions.

This situation has made teaching challenging as a whole, and particularly in crowded language classrooms. Considering the importance of elements such as meeting students’ needs, wants and interests, acknowledging them as individual beings with regard to their abilities and differences, and bringing student-centered approaches to classrooms; teaching English in large, multilevel, under-resourced settings becomes more challenging. Therefore, it is almost impossible for a teacher to accomplish all the above-mentioned elements in a large class setting.

Sadly, there are very few or no publications to discuss the issues related to English language teaching in large, multilevel classes in the Afghan context. Specifically, in connection to the context’s unique sociocultural, political, and economic situations. Therefore, considering the challenges associated with teaching large language classes and the lack of studies related to the Afghan context, studying the challenges of teaching English in large classes at the university setting is important.

**Afghanistan Education System at a Glance**

Afghanistan is a landlocked country located in South-Central Asia. It has borders with Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan in the north, China in the northeast, Pakistan in the east and south, and Iran in the West.
According to the World Bank (2016), Afghanistan has a population of 34.6 million people. Afghanistan is a culturally diverse country where people of different ethnicities and languages live together. Pashtu and Dari (Farsi Dari) are the official languages (Afghanistan’s Const. art. XVI) spoken by a majority of the country.

The education system in Afghanistan starts with primary, then secondary, and tertiary or higher education. The tertiary education includes Bachelor, Master and PhD programs. According to Article 43 of the Constitution of Afghanistan, the state is responsible for providing education free of charge until reaching the BA level in public universities for Afghan citizens.

The past four decades of war and instability have destroyed many of Afghanistan’s infrastructures including its education system. As a result, Afghanistan’s primary and secondary
education system exerted strong political influence over curriculum. In other words, when different regimes came to power, they changed the public-school curriculum, propagating their own political agendas (Samady, 2001). For example, during the Communist regime (1978 - 1989), which was established and supported by the Soviet Union, public school curriculum changed and propagated Communist ideologies. This situation was chaotic when half of the country’s public education curriculum supported Communism and the other half (in rural areas, controlled by anti-communist groups) had to study textbooks that included slogans against Communism and their ideology (Samady, 2001).

When the Soviet army withdrew from Afghanistan in 1979, the Mujahedeen Government took power and changed the school curriculum based on their own ideology (Samady, 2001). The Mujahedeen regime collapsed after about five years in 1997 and was replaced by the Taliban, who had strict rules, specifically towards women. During the Taliban period, according to Babury and Hayward (2014), “Women were excluded from faculty positions and not allowed as students in schools and higher education institutions, something that would have a long-term effect on women’s education” (p. 3). Moreover, the Taliban brought a more religion-based curriculum into Afghanistan’s education system.

Afghanistan’s higher education has been experiencing progress by restoring and transforming to a quality education sector since 2001, after the Taliban regime ended. With that being said, there has been a huge increase in the number of universities’ admitted students. Regardless of the large increase in the number of admitted students in the universities and lack of resources such as university’s campuses, instructors and staff, the country is working towards bringing quality education and restoring its past reputation as a leader in higher education in the region (Babury & Hayward, 2014).
English Language Status in Afghanistan

As discussed previously, four decades of war and instability damaged Afghanistan’s infrastructures including the higher education institutions. According to Babury and Hayward (2014), war has had a severe damaging impact on research related activities in Afghanistan. As a result, more than half of the academics and faculty members, including foreigners and locals, fled the country. Moreover, the political and ideological influences on academia undermined the research activities, especially after the Soviet Union and during the Taliban period. With that being said, there is very few publications on the status and history of foreign languages, including English, to refer to as a reliable source. Therefore, I have to mainly rely on my personal experience and knowledge in regard to English language status in Afghanistan.

Foreign languages, including English, have been vastly affected by the sociopolitical situations in Afghanistan. Similar to that of curriculum changes in Afghanistan, English has had an unstable status in the country. Sediqi (2010) states, “With the unstable political disturbances in Afghanistan, the status of English and contact with its speakers have not remained the same. Any changes in political and legislative policies have impacted both the national and foreign languages of the country” (p. 43). For instance, during the Soviet invasion from 1978 to 1989, Russian was the dominant foreign language in Afghanistan. People, especially those working with the government, tended to study Russian because of their professional engagement with Russian speaking colleagues. There were also training programs offered in different fields for Afghans in the Soviet Union territory. For this reason, there was a great potential for learning Russian rather than any other foreign language (Sediqi, 2010; Jones, 2009). The Soviet Union supported government collapsed in 1992, and Mujahedeen took power. With this political change, the Russian language lost its popularity in Afghan society. During this period, the
government had the support of some foreign countries, including the U.S, and was offered educational and academic assistance (Sediqi, 2010).

In 1996, with the collapse of the Mujahedeen regime, the Taliban came into power. Afghanistan’s education system entered into a new era. The Taliban brought a religion-based curriculum, where the main focus was on the religious concepts and less attention was devoted to science and foreign languages. Furthermore, due to the limited contact with the international communities, a ban on TV, and limited access to the media, English, like many other foreign languages, was becoming more uncommon; in contrast, Arabic was a dominant language. As a result, most of the books with religious concepts were in Arabic and Madrasahs (religious schools) were more common.

Since 2001, after the collapse of the Taliban Regime and the establishment of the new government supported by the international communities, particularly the U.S. government, English became the dominant foreign language with a vast increase in the number of English speakers, English learners, and English language institutions (Alamyar, 2010). The establishment of foreign organizations and NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) invested in different sectors in Afghanistan as well as the presence of foreign troops, including the U.S. strengthened the potential for learning English in Afghan society. With that said, people seeking careers in organizations funded by the international communities and/or interested in working with the international troops, especially with the U.S. and British forces in Afghanistan, had to first improve their English language skills. Alamyar (2010) states, “Learning English has become an important skill for members of the Afghan National Army, police, and parliament members. Courses have been launched to teach English to the Afghan military personnel who must work alongside the international forces” (p. 52).
Furthermore, Afghanistan’s higher education received tremendous assistance from international communities. Universities started building relationships and partnerships with international universities. In particular, capacity building, teacher training, and research programs have been offered for Afghan’s universities staff and instructors. Similarly, Afghanistan’s higher education has received scholarships for both students and instructors from different countries. A majority of these scholarships require the applicants to have TOEFL or IELTS scores. As a result, the requirements for attending academic programs outside the country and seeking employment opportunities in the country both with public and non-governmental organizations have massively developed the demand and the potential for English language learning across the country.

In recent years, due to a change in the curriculum made by the Ministry of Education, English starts in 4th grade and continues through 12th grade. Similarly, English is a compulsory course across Afghan’s universities. Students of different majors are required to take English courses for a minimum of two semesters, but some fields require four or more semesters depending on the faculties’ curricula. Students, other than those majoring in English, take both general English and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses (Alamyar, 2010).

**Context of the Study**

1The Afghan Public University, where the current study takes place, is one of the major universities in Afghanistan, is located in the western part of the country, and was established in 1989. It offers courses and programs at the Bachelor’s level in 16 different fields and a Master’s degree program in Farsi Dari literature, which are all officially recognized by the Ministry of

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1 All names and institutions are pseudonyms.
Higher Education. It is one of the coeducational public institutes of higher education in Afghanistan, where about 13,000 students across the country are enrolled in different faculties.

**My Researcher Positionality**

I experienced both studying and teaching in large classes in Afghanistan. I completed my elementary and secondary school there; my grades 8 to 12 in a public school had a class of about 60 students. Similarly, I earned my undergraduate degree in a large class with 40 to 50 students comprised of both females and males; however, this number could have increased in some of my elective courses where students from other fields joined us. I have always thought about the challenges of large classes during my undergrad school from my own perspective as a student. A major challenge in a large class is that students do not have a voice. The teacher must give an enormous amount of attention to a few of the students who always dominate the class, and those sitting in the back are easily ignored. Furthermore, in a language class with multilevel students, competition among the class becomes stressful. As a result, students with low levels of language proficiency compare themselves to the advanced level students. This situation creates stress and nervousness among students of lower proficiency and causes them to stay quiet.

When I started teaching large, multilevel classes, I realized that it is very challenging to be a teacher in a large class compared to being a student. Being an inexperienced new graduate and encountering challenges associated with teaching a class of 100 or more students added loads of pressure on me. This massive burden of responsibility was sometimes unbearable.

Large classes with multilevel students, lack of level-appropriate teaching materials and other needed resources, such as access to technologies and internet, were among the challenges that I struggled with in my classes. Managing the class from controlling to monitoring,

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2 Faculty is a common term used for college in Afghanistan.
separating students into groups, giving them feedback, listening to each individual student and responding to them, were not easy to accomplish. I participated in a few teacher training programs outside the country, namely, in India, Pakistan, and the U.S. where I learned about different approaches and strategies in teaching English to EFL students. Through these programs, I found teaching large classes to be more demanding compared to small classes. For instance, a class with 100 students of different levels of language proficiency, coming with different backgrounds, is not as easy to teach as a small class with 15 students. Teaching methods and approaches implemented in a small class do not always suit large classes. Moreover, approaches that are implemented in a certain context do not always positively respond to one another, due to the unique and/or different sociocultural, political, and economic conditions.

My teaching experience in an Afghan context, as well as my graduate school experience in the U.S. has taught me that Afghan ELTs need to be trained on practical ways to teach effectively using their available resources. Moreover, as the demand for higher education increases, the number of large classes will not only remain, but increase greatly over the coming years (Babury & Hayward, 2014). Therefore, it is necessary for researchers to explore the different aspects of large classes in an Afghan context.

**Research Questions**

1. What do the four ELT instructors in the English Department of the Afghan Public University state as the perceived challenges in teaching large, multilevel, under-resourced classes?

2. What strategies do ELT instructors employ in counteracting the perceived challenges?

The first research question explores the challenges of large classes, through the lived experiences of four ELT instructors of the Afghan Public University. Moreover, the second
research question attempts to seek the Afghan’s ELT instructors’ strategies in counteracting the perceived challenges of large classes.

**Purpose of the Study**

The current study aims to explore how large class size influences teaching and learning outcomes in general. Specifically, this study focuses on the perceived challenges that English language instructors at the Afghan Public University encounter in their large, multi-level, under-resourced classes. Furthermore, this study seeks to understand the possible coping strategies employed by the Afghan Public University’s ELT instructors in counteracting the perceived challenges of teaching and learning in large, multi-level classes.

**Significance of the Study**

Given the fact that teaching large, multilevel classes is a major issue in Afghanistan higher education setting which has not been well studied, this study could be a starting point in exploring the challenges and issues related to teaching English in large classes at Afghan Universities. The first research question aims to explore the challenges of teaching English in large, multilevel classes from the perspective of four instructors of the English department of the Afghan Public University.

The second question attempts to investigate the instructors’ coping strategies in counteracting the challenges associated with teaching large, multilevel classes. In addition, the answers to this question help to recommend more practical and contextualized strategies in coping with the challenges that instructors at the English department of the Afghan Public University encounter.

Overall, this study not only will raise attention to the challenges associated with teaching large classes in an Afghan university setting, but it will also explore possible opportunities as
well as the ELT interviewees’ coping strategies in counteracting the perceived challenges. As discussed previously, several decades of war had a massive damaging impact on research-related activities in Afghanistan. As a result, there are a limited number of research studies conducted in different fields, including language teaching in Afghan context for the past forty years. Therefore, this study may support future research activities related to English language teaching and learning in Afghan context.

**Overview of the Upcoming Chapters**

This thesis consists of five chapters. Following the introduction, Chapter Two focuses on the study’s theoretical framework and explores literature related to the challenges of teaching English in large, multilevel classes. Moreover, it provides strategies that have been implemented and/or recommended by the English language teachers and researchers in counteracting the challenges of teaching large, multilevel, under-resourced classes. In Chapter Three, the study’s methodological approach is presented. It also details the study’s participants, design, data collection, and data analysis methods. Chapter Four presents the results of the interviews in which the challenges of teaching in large, multilevel classes and the interviewees coping strategies in counteracting the perceived challenges include the major areas of findings. Finally, the study’s theoretical framework, discussion, limitations, and implications are presented in Chapter Five.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The current study aims to explore the challenges of teaching large, multilevel classes from the perspectives of four English language teachers (ELTs) of the English department of the Afghan Public University, as well as the ELTs’ counteracting strategies in a large classroom setting. As a result, this study attempts to respond to the following research questions:

1. What do the four ELT instructors in the English Department of the Afghan Public University state as the perceived challenges in teaching large, multilevel, under-resourced classes?

2. What strategies do ELT instructors employ in counteracting the perceived challenges?

The four ELT instructors’ perceived challenges of teaching in large, multilevel, under-resourced classes is the main focus of the first research question. The second research question attempts to unveil the ELTs’ coping strategies in counteracting the perceived challenges.

In this chapter, the study’s theoretical framework - Kumaravadivelu’s (2001) postmethod pedagogy - is discussed. Next, the existing literature on teaching large classes as well as the areas where challenges exist, such as classroom management, students’ engagement, balancing teaching materials, reaching students’ needs, assessment and feedback, and limitations of resources, will be reviewed. Furthermore, published research on the effective strategies in teaching large classes in connection to the above-mentioned areas where challenges exist will be discussed.

**Theoretical Framework**

The current study is guided by Kumaravadivelu’s (2001) postmethod pedagogy: parameters of particularity, practicality and possibility. Postmethod pedagogy covers a wide
range of areas that impact L2 education, as stated by the author, “I use the term pedagogy in a broad sense to include not only issues pertaining to classroom strategies, instructional materials, curricular objectives, and evaluation measures but also a wide range of historiopolitical and sociocultural experiences that directly or indirectly influence L2 education” (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p. 34). Thus, postmethod pedagogy is described as a three-dimensional system which consists of pedagogic parameters of particularity, practicality, and possibility.

The parameter of particularity emphasizes that a selected pedagogy should be relevant and specific to the teachers, students, and sociocultural conditions of the context of teaching. The parameter of practicality refers to the teacher’s self-created pedagogy resulting from their reflections on their teaching practices. The parameter of possibility deals with the sociopolitical conditions where a teacher’s pedagogy should be relevant and is informed by the context’s specific sociopolitical requirements (Kumaravadivelu, 2003).

My journey with English language learning and teaching from my home country (Afghanistan), to completing my Master’s in TESOL in the U.S., as well as attending teacher training programs, workshops, and conferences changed my views toward teaching. As a result, these experiences have taught me that teaching in general and teaching a foreign language in particular is influenced by the sociocultural, political, and economic conditions of the teaching context. Having said that, what is available in a context is not necessarily available in another. What is practical in one context might not be practical in another due to specific requirements of each context.

Considering the context of the current study, Afghanistan, with its unique sociocultural, political, and economic conditions, I believe conducting the current study based on the postmethod pedagogy – parameters of particularity, practicality, and possibility – will help me to
reach an in-depth insight on how teaching and learning in large classes can take place in an Afghan context.

**Definition of Large Class: A Debatable Issue**

The impacts of large, multilevel classes on teaching and learning outcomes, class size, and how many students qualify as a “large” class, should first be clarified. Seeing a class as large or small refers to the teachers’ experience with teaching classes of different numbers of students. For example, a teacher who used to teach a class of 20 students, may believe that 30 students forms a large class; but another teacher might see it different. In contrast, a teacher who used to teach a class of 40 students may consider a class of 60 students as a large class (Todd, 2006).

There is not a standard definition of large class, because it depends on the context and the teachers’ experience with teaching small/large classes (Ur, 2005). Similarly, Shamim (1993) argues that there are contradictions in the number of students forming a large class because there are many other factors, such as teachers and learners’ prior experiences with large and small classes, and teachers preferred methodology and style of teaching. Although the ideal number of students in a language class is not specified, there are recommendations about the specific number of students in writing and composition classes. According to Horning (2007), there are recommendations from Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) on the number of students in writing and composition classes, where the number of students in a class is ideally 15 but does not exceed 20. However, Brown (2001) believes that the number of students in an ideal class should not exceed 12. In other words, a class should be big enough to provide variation and allow interactions, yet it should be small enough to provide students with opportunities for participating and receiving attention on an individual basis. The average number of students in a class in Afghanistan is 50 or more, and can be up to 180 (Baharustani,
However, according to Renaud et al. (2007), the exact number of students in a class is not an issue to be considered; the important factor is how a teacher perceives the class size in their context. The findings of available studies discussed previously show that the perception of large class sizes depends on the prior experience of the teacher. For instance, the notion of a large class in the United States varies from what teachers/administrators believe of large classes in an Afghan context.

**Teaching and Learning in Large Classes: Challenges and Effective Coping Strategies**

This section focuses on the issues related to teaching and learning in large, multilevel classes. The review of studies related to teaching in large classes reveals different categories of challenges. These challenges include classroom management, students’ engagement, teaching materials and students’ needs, assessment and feedback, and limitations of teaching resources.

**Classroom Management**

Managing a large class with unmotivated and noisy students is a serious challenge. There are mainly two tasks which need to be considered: maintaining class discipline and checking a large amount of assignments (Renaud, 2007). Many teachers also feel surrounded with the problems of management; keeping students focused and speaking in English (Treko, 2012). Adequate space for monitoring a large class is another challenge that teachers struggle with. For instance, teachers cannot monitor groups if there is no space to walk around the room (Brady, 2012). Large classes can be time demanding and challenging for the teacher, requiring more time to be allocated to instruction, task management, and behavior management. Thus, it leaves less time for actual instruction to take place (Wilson, 2006; Holloway, 2002).

It is essential to think of effective classroom management before beginning to think about teaching a large, multilevel classroom; on the other hand, teachers should emphasize positive
behaviors to encourage and maintain effective classroom management (Finnan & Shawn, 2010). The teacher’s friendly personality, academic capability, mastery of his or her subject matter, and effective teaching methodology play an important role in successfully managing the classroom (Mezrigui, 2015). Students will improve more quickly in their learning process if the teacher can abandon the traditional "leader of the class" role and, instead, adopt the role of advisor and/or facilitator (Treko, 2013).

Advanced organization, detailed planning, and establishing and enforcing the rules are critical keys to successful classroom management in large classes. A well-managed class depends on the teacher’s ability, as well as developing the ability to teach effectively by planning and adopting strategies that will enhance lesson delivery and evaluation of teaching and learning processes (Asodike & Onyieke, 2016).

**Students’ Engagement**

In a large class, it is easy for students to feel ignored. If they feel that the teacher does not know them or care whether they learn, they will usually lose interest in participating actively in the learning process (Renaud et al., 2007). Classrooms should provide a unique opportunity for students – specifically, foreign language learners – to participate and interact, but due to the large number of students, it is difficult to have an interactive, students-centered class (Hess, 2001). Similarly, Dhami (2016) argues that engaging learners actively in the learning process is not easy in a crowded class. In large classes, students have a less interactive role with their teacher and classmates (Blatchford et al., 2002). Blatchford et al. (2007) state that “As the class size [increases], the number of interactions with individual pupils [decreases], and this adversely [affects] pupils’ progress” (p. 162). Likewise, Al-Jarf (2006) says that “Instructors in her study indicated that they do not have enough time to pay attention to each and give every student a
chance to speak or participate” (p.24). Studies about the relationship between teacher-student oral interaction, class size, and bilingual students’ academic performance indicate that there is a significant difference between small classes and large classes in terms of the level of the linguistic exchanges between teachers and their students (Bamba, 2012). Moreover, due to the lecture-based tendency of large crowded classes, “Soliciting student feedback in large lecture classes (with about 50 students or more) is challenging, and as a result, lectures tend to lack interaction” (Anderson et al., 2002, p. 1).

According to Ahmed- Khurram (2010), a case study in Pakistan, it is possible to engage learners in a large class, but under specific conditions: when the teacher is well prepared with lesson plans, a variety of teaching methods, and aware of what to teach and how to teach as well as developing a comfortable learning atmosphere.

Similarly, Renaud et al. (2007) discuss the strategies which help improve effective teaching in large, under-resourced classes. There are countries where students do not have access to textbooks and the only materials they bring to class are a notebook and a pen or pencil, which makes the teaching process difficult. In such situations, a teacher can use dictation, large sheets, and pictures, and bring actual materials.

Spending some time on introducing students to the idea and importance of group work, introducing them to simple activities to do in pairs or groups at the beginning, asking students to work with the one next to him/her to prevent wasting time, setting groups in advance and teaching students communication as something that they are expected to consider, will help the teacher in a large class to have a communicative-based classroom (Chen, 2005; Herington & Weaven, 2008). Bowman’s (1992) case study showed that communicative language teaching can be applied in large, multi-level classes with some adaptations.
Lecture/discussion and oral presentation are two other approaches in teaching large classes (Carpenter, 2006). Since large classes are mainly lecture-based, students find it interesting when they are given the opportunity to have discussions based on the lecture; it helps them to be more active learners during the class. Another effective method can be oral presentation, which makes students active learners and increases students’ engagement (Carpenter, 2006).

Teaching Materials and Students’ Needs

In English language teaching, developing countries are mainly influenced by the curriculum and teaching materials which are designed for the small classes in the West (Holliday, 1994). However, the situation is very different in large classes and many modifications need to be made (Holliday, 1996). Teaching materials, student assessments and pedagogical approaches to teaching are the main areas of problems in large classes (Sarwar, 2001; Shamim, 2012). On the other hand, Hess (2001) points to the same issues and states that in large, multilevel classes, due to the large population of students, it is difficult for the teacher to meet the needs and interests of all students. Using authentic materials and implementing interactive activities in large, under-resourced classrooms is a difficult and challenging task. Unfamiliarity with authentic materials and lack of access to the resources make it difficult for the teacher to develop content to meet the needs of all students in a multilevel classroom (Manrara, 2007). In the same vein, Treko (2013) discusses that accommodating individual learning style in a large, multilevel class is another challenging area teachers struggle with. According to Hess (2001), a mixed ability classroom seems to be uncooperative and advanced students get bored easily, which causes commotion in the classroom. Moreover, planning lessons and activities take
a lot of time for the teacher and cannot be guaranteed to be equally understandable for all levels of proficiency. This causes teachers to feel unqualified and unable to cope with the class.

Planning for students with different levels of proficiency is essential in a multilevel classroom. At the same time, developing materials to meet the needs of students of different levels and managing multiple curricula is a challenging task, too (Manitoba Education, 2003).

When in a multilevel, large classroom, the teacher can not expect to have a perfect class to meet the needs of all students; rather, he/she can still manage the situation by implementing constructive and practical strategies (Diluzio, 2011). For example, according to Holt (1995) determining students’ needs and wants is essential to ensure success in a multilevel classroom, and it can be accomplished through observation, one-on-one interview, and group discussion. Roberts (2007) argues that, instead of developing a variety of lessons with different goals for different proficiency levels, teachers can “teach to the middle,” and then assign different level appropriate tasks. Beginning the lesson with the whole class together gives the opportunity to keep the below and above level students interested, as does assigning leveled tasks using a variety of groupings. Leveling writing activities can also be helpful in large, multilevel classes. Finally, the teacher can end the lesson with the whole class together.

**Assessing Students and Giving Feedback**

According to Bell (2012), assessment is the first significant step teachers are supposed to take in multilevel classes. The author argues that finding appropriate tools of assessment in order to find students’ performance abilities and literacy skills is a critical challenge. Similarly, Bamba (2012) emphasizes the importance of assessment as a vital tool in maximizing students’ learning, which is threatened by larger class size. Bell (2012) states that in mixed, open entry classes with a range of literacy levels, educational and language backgrounds, the existence of formal
assessment tools seems to be difficult. However, applying the needs assessment at the beginning of the course through the first few lessons provides the opportunity to determine students’ needs and adapt materials accordingly. Individualization and monitoring students, giving them feedback on their writing is another issue behind teaching large classes (Shamim, 2012).

Lowman (1987) states that “The problems and challenges of evaluating students are magnified as a direct result of the increased number of students in a large class” (p.71). There is a magnitude of papers in large classes for the teacher to review and provide feedback, which is often too much pressure and responsibility for a teacher who has to plan lessons, teach classes, and meet with many students (Renaud et al., 2007). According to Shamim et al. (2007), “Since feedback must occur regularly throughout the learning process, it is impossible for teachers to give adequate feedback to all students in large classes” (p. 59).

However, O’Leary (2013) states that exploring students’ thinking through observations in a multilevel class is considered to be an effective and practical method. Furthermore, it helps teachers to learn about their students’ strengths and weaknesses as well as their development across multiple curricula. Moreover, teachers’ observations of students could be reliable when teachers follow specific learning outcomes and criteria, observe students over a variety of performances and monitor their learning process.

According to Bowman (1992), testing students depends on what they were taught; for example, if a teacher tries to figure out how well his students speak in English, then students will have to speak and the teacher will listen to each of them individually. With large classes of 60 to 150 students, the author recommends that teachers either manage oral assessments with groups of six to ten students at one time, or walk around the class, and assess students while the whole class is engaged in peer or group discussions. Koshy (2011) suggests that when a teacher is
trying to determine how well his/her students can read, he or she can have students take quick
reading comprehension tests, including cloze tests and sentence completion exercises.

There can also be occasions when teachers find themselves surrounded by a huge amount
of written work to correct (Treko, 2013). To speed up and facilitate the grading process, one
might want to score only five to ten students per day using a holistic grading scale to assign a
number from one to five on each paper (Bowman, 1992). Furthermore, according to Darasawang
and Srimavin (2006), “Acquiring a language needs interaction between learners and teachers and
interaction among learners so that the language points learned will be practiced and the success
of communication helps learners measure their language competency” (p. 42). Sadly, large class
size limits the amount of interactions between teacher-students and students-students in different
ways. For instance, there are a limited number of students who dominate the class while the
majority of students stay silent (Bughio, 2013).

Limitations of Teaching Resources

In developing countries, resources such as textbooks, notebooks, electricity, and
technological tools are limited in the classroom, which is another challenge associated with
teaching large classes (Renaud et al., 2007). Teachers and learners in developing countries,
where the number of students enrolled in schools is increasing yet teacher recruitment is low,
face the challenges of large class size and lack of teaching materials (Bullock et al., 2017).
Learning materials are important because they can directly or indirectly influence students’
achievements. For instance, a worksheet would give students a great opportunity to practice,
which can significantly increase student achievement by supporting student learning (Right,
2011). Carbone and Greenberg (1998) found that the lack of sufficient and appropriate spaces,
well equipped to facilitate integration of technologies, was another component of the problem in large classes.

Teachers adapt methodologies (communicative to grammar teaching developed for small classes in well-resourced contexts) to large classes with limited available resources under difficult circumstances (Shamim, 2012). According to Shamim (2010), teaching a large class the same way an instructor teaches a small class is another issue. In other words, the major issue is that teachers prefer to implement the ELT techniques and strategies in large classes that they learned in teacher training programs which could be practical in small classes. The real situation in the classroom is quite different, so there are things that do not work as expected. With large classes, there are the usual issues — limited space and resources, individualization, assessment, and process writing (Shamim, 2016).

**Summary of the Chapter**

The literature review, focusing on different aspects of teaching and learning in large, multilevel classes enhanced my understanding about various issues such as, the concept of a large classroom and the challenges associated with large class teaching: namely, students’ engagement in the learning process, classroom management, students assessment, providing feedback to students, as well as balancing teaching materials and availability of teaching and learning resources. On the other hand, the review of literature also suggests that although there are challenges behind teaching large, multilevel classes, there are still some pedagogical approaches that can improve the quality of teaching in terms of effectiveness in various difficult contexts. In the next chapter, the study’s methodology is discussed.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The current study aims to explore how large class sizes influence English language teaching and learning outcomes in a university setting. Specifically, this study focuses on the challenges that four ELTs of the English department in the Afghan Public University encounter in their large, multi-level, under-resourced classes. Furthermore, this study seeks to understand the possible strategies employed in counteracting the perceived challenges of teaching and learning in large, multi-level classes.

This chapter describes the design of the study. In particular, it will discuss the rationale for using a qualitative approach. Next, it will detail the data sources and the data collection procedures that are employed in this study.

Research Questions

As a result, this qualitative study aims to respond to the following research questions:

1. What do the four ELT instructors in the English Department of the Afghan Public University state as the perceived challenges in teaching large, multilevel, under-resourced classes?

2. What strategies do ELT instructors employ in counteracting the perceived challenges?

As discussed previously, the first research question attempts to explore the challenges of teaching large, multilevel classes in the Afghan Public University through interviews with the four ELTs of the English Department of the Afghan Public University. Moreover, the second question will unveil the ELTs’ coping strategies in counteracting the challenges of their large classes.
Study Design

This qualitative inquiry attempts to find effective strategies for teaching English language at the Afghan Public University through exploring the challenges of teaching large classes from the perspectives of four ELTs as well as their coping strategies. Considering the research questions, this study aligns with the characteristics of a qualitative inquiry. As discussed by Gay et al. (2012), “Qualitative research is the collection, analysis, and interpretation of comprehensive narrative and visual (i.e., nonnumerical) data to gain insights into a particular phenomenon of interest,” (p. 7). Furthermore, Gay et al. (2012) asserted that qualitative researchers believe that an individual’s particular perspective, or context, conveys all meaning. In other words, because individuals and groups hold different perspectives in different contexts, the world has a variety of different meanings, where no perspective or interpretation is necessarily more valid or true than another. Since the purpose of this study is to explore the challenges of teaching large classes from the perspectives of four ELTs in one institution, a qualitative study can be a suitable and appropriate research design. Moreover, since the context of the current study has its unique sociocultural, political, and economic conditions, studying this issue in connection to the aforementioned factors through a qualitative design is the most suitable way to answer the research questions.

Furthermore, as the research questions and the research purpose indicate, the main focus is on each individual ELTs’ perspectives in regard to the challenges of teaching large classes, as well as their coping strategies based on their teaching experiences with large language classes. According to Bazeley (2013), “Researchers engaging in a qualitative study focus on observing, describing, interpreting, and analyzing the way that people experience, act on, or think about themselves and the world around them,” (p. 4). Similarly, Creswell (2014) states that in
qualitative inquiry, the researchers manage to collect data in its natural setting, i.e., the site where the participants experience the issue under study. With respect to the characteristics of a qualitative research design, exploring the challenges of teaching large classes from the perspectives of four ELTs of Afghan Public University, as well as their coping strategies, through a qualitative study helps to accomplish the purpose of the study.

**Participants and Sampling Criteria**

Four ELTs of the English Department of the Afghan Public University who teach English in large, multi-level classes are the participants of the current study. It should be mentioned that all participants teach both in the English Department and English courses across the university for students of different disciplines. Participants were selected according to the following criteria:

1. Each ELT should be a current instructor at the Afghan Public University;
2. Each ELT should have at least 3-5 years of teaching experience at the Afghan Public University since this range can indicate the level of teaching socialization at this university;
3. Each ELT should have experience of teaching large, multilevel classes at the Afghan Public University; and
4. Each ELT should be interested in learning more about exploring the perceived challenges and possible strategies for teaching and learning in large, multilevel classes.

Participants were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling strategies. Individuals who were interested in the study, and those who met the abovementioned criteria, were recruited. Each participant received an email letter describing the study, which served as an invitation and as the informed consent (See Appendix C for details). The details on the interview protocol and securing their privacy was shared with each participant as well.
Table 1 includes the participants’ information, such as their teaching experiences and their educational degree.

Table 1

*Demographic Information of Interviewees*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Educational Degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asma</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>MA TESOL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahar</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>9 years</td>
<td>MA TESOL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohammad</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>MA TESOL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narges</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>9 years</td>
<td>MA TESOL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Source**

In this study, individual interviews with four ELTs of the English department of the Afghan Public University are the main sources of data. Gay et al. (2012) discuss the significant role of interviews in the process of data collection in qualitative research. They state that interviews are purposeful interactions between researcher and participant for the purpose of data collection. Furthermore, they emphasize that interviewers can explore and probe interviewees’ answers to collect in-depth information about their experiences and feelings: “They can examine attitudes, interests, feelings, concerns, and values more easily than they can through observations” (p. 386). Since this study’s research questions deal with personal perspectives and experiences in regard to teaching large classes, interviews can help to gather in-depth data from the participants.

It should be mentioned that face-to-face interviews were not possible because of the different places that the participants and the researcher were located. Thus, the interviews with
the participants took place through Skype. As Creswell (2014) asserted, telephone interviews with participants are one of the methods researchers utilize to gather qualitative data. Similarly, Janghorban et al. (2014) state that with technological innovations during the past decades, “the online interview has overcome time and financial constraints, geographical dispersion, and physical mobility boundaries, which have adversely affected onsite interviews” (p. 1). Furthermore, they added, “Skype as a synchronous online service offers researchers the possibility of conducting individual interviews as well as small focus groups, comparable to onsite types” (p. 1). The convenience of Skype and the fact that the participants had access to it, allowed interviews to be conducted via this format.

Semi-structured interview protocol was developed for this study, where the researcher had freedom to ask follow-up questions whenever clarifications were needed. As discussed by Galleta (2013), semi-structured interview tends to be specifically structured to address certain aspects of the research questions, while giving the participants great opportunities to add new meanings and perspectives to the topic of the study. Galleta added, “A key benefit of the semi-structured interview is its attention to lived experience while also addressing theoretically driven variables of interest” (p. 24). Cohen and Crabtree (2006) stated that semi-structured interview gives the participants (interviewees) the freedom to express their perspectives in their own terms. Moreover, they believe that the researcher can gather reliable and comparable data through semi-structured interview. Considering the various aspects of the research questions, the purpose of the study, the participants accessibility and availability, semi-structured interviews through Skype was the most convenient and suitable way of gathering data.
Data Collection Procedures

For the purpose of data collection, the below steps were followed:

1. Upon the approval of IRB, an email was sent to four ELTs of the English Department in the Afghan Public University;
2. The details of the study, its purpose, significance, and securing participants’ confidentiality were shared with each participant;
3. Consent letters were sent to each individual participant;
4. All four of the contacted ELTs agreed to participate, signed and sent back the consent letters;
5. Participants were contacted for a convenient time and place for the interview to be set;
6. Interviews were scheduled with each individual participant at a convenient time, date, and place;
7. All four interviews were conducted through Skype and each lasted 30 to 40 minutes;
8. The interviews were recorded through an audio recording device and saved in a password-protected folder on the researcher’s laptop.

Data Analysis

First, all the four audio-recorded interviews were transcribed from the beginning to end. Gay et al. (2012) emphasized the usefulness of recorded interviews along with their transcriptions and defined it as “a written record of the events that were recorded” (p. 387).

During the process of transcription, I listened to the recordings on multiple occasions to ensure that the transcriptions were accurate. Each interview transcription was named and dated. Hard copies of all the four interview transcriptions were made. Also, soft copies were saved in a password-protected folder.
After reading each individual interview transcription carefully, “coding” was started for the collected data. Bazeley (2013) describes “coding” as a significant and purposeful strategy for qualitative analysis. Bazeley added, “It provides a means of access to evidence; it is a tool for querying data, for testing assumptions and conclusions” (p. 125). Having the research questions in mind, in the first step, the data was divided into two major themes, namely challenges of teaching in large, multilevel, under-resourced classes and the ELTs’ coping strategies in counteracting the perceived challenges. The second step initiated more in-depth analysis of the data considering the initial themes: challenges and coping strategies. Bazeley (2013) discussed the process of codification of data to move through at least two main phases. First, the “initial identification and labeling” of data, followed by the second step, an in-depth interpretation of the data to develop “analytical categories and clusters” (cited Saldana, 2009). More subcategories under the two main themes were created. For example, under the challenges of teaching large, multilevel classes, categories were developed to address areas such as managing classroom, distinguishing students’ levels, needs and wants, balancing teaching materials, and giving feedback to students. Similar steps were followed with the second theme, ELTs coping strategies. It should be mentioned that each interview was analyzed individually through the abovementioned steps.

Furthermore, in order to present the participants’ common perspectives in regard to teaching large classes and their shared coping strategies, the data was compared and contrasted. The same steps were taken with the analysis of each individual interview’s data, but this time was taken to compare and contrast each category of data to identify the interviewees’ common perspectives.
Furthermore, participants’ reported experiences with teaching large classes was presented using a narrative approach. According to Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000), “Narratives are not open to proof, and cannot simply be judged as true or false. They express the truth of a point of view, of a specific location in space and time” (p. 72). The narrative approach to presenting the result of the interviews’ data helped to focus on each participant’s reported experience in more depth.

**Ethical Considerations**

Protecting the participants’ identity and securing their privacy was one of the priorities in conducting this research. To do so, all the four interviewees were given pseudonyms by the researcher which are used throughout the study. Moreover, the interview recordings and transcriptions are saved in a password protected file on the researcher’s laptop.

**Summary of the Chapter**

The current qualitative inquiry attempts to explore how four ELTs of the English Department at the Afghan Public University perceive teaching English in large, multi-level classes, as well as their coping strategies in counteracting the perceived challenges. This chapter introduced the study’s methodology. Specifically, it described the study and the rationale for choosing this research design as well as the study’s participants and the sampling criteria. It also described the data sources and the semi-structured interviews with the four ELTs. The data collection procedures are discussed, too. It also presented the data analysis method, procedures, and thematic analysis as well as the ethical considerations. The next chapter presents the results of the data from the interviews with the study’s four participants.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

This chapter focuses on the findings from the interviews with four ELTs of the English department of Afghan Public University. The data collected from the interviews was analyzed and interpreted through thematic content analysis approaches. A point to be mentioned is that first the data collected from each participant’s interview was divided into two main themes: challenges of teaching in large, multilevel, under-resourced classes, and the ELTs’ coping strategies. Then, the main themes were divided into sub-themes, considering the purpose of the study and the research questions. As an example, classroom management, giving feedback to students, finding students’ needs and wants, knowing students, balancing teaching materials, and teaching resources were the sub-themes under the theme of challenges of teaching large, multilevel, under-resourced classes (See Chapter 3, Data Analysis Section, for a detailed description of the data analysis procedures). Since the research questions deal with participants’ personal experiences in regard to teaching large classes, I believe presenting each participant’s reported experience narratively gives an in-depth insight about each interviewee. Therefore, each participant’s shared experiences in connection to teaching large, multilevel classes is narrated in this chapter, considering the research questions:

1. What do the four ELT instructors in the English Department of the Afghan Public University state as the perceived challenges in teaching large, multi-level, under-resourced classes?

2. What strategies do ELT instructors employ in counteracting the perceived challenges?

Table 2 includes an overall summary of the study’s major findings.
Table 2

**Study’s Major Findings**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Challenges of large classes</th>
<th>Coping Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asma</td>
<td>1. Finding students’ levels, learning styles, interests, and needs</td>
<td>1. Diagnostic essay and initial observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Balancing teaching materials</td>
<td>2. Designing and developing her own teaching materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Classroom management (arranging groups, monitoring, paying equal attention)</td>
<td>3. Assigning a student to lead the group discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Giving feedback to students</td>
<td>4. Peer-feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahar</td>
<td>1. Getting to know students (knowing their names, specific needs, emotions)</td>
<td>1. None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Balancing the teaching materials</td>
<td>2. Developing her own teaching materials/bringing difficult and easy activities to the class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Students’ engagement</td>
<td>3. Considering the interests of students of different levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Feedback to students</td>
<td>4. General feedback/peer feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohammad</td>
<td>1. Students’ needs, wants, learning styles, and levels</td>
<td>1. Initial assessment (observations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Level appropriate teaching materials</td>
<td>2. Developing his own teaching content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Classroom management (listening to students, paying equal attention, monitoring, arranging groups, managing the time)</td>
<td>3. Implementing grammar-translation approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Giving feedback</td>
<td>4. Peer-feedback based on the given rubrics and descriptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narges</td>
<td>1. Distinguishing multilevel students</td>
<td>1. Placement tests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Level appropriate materials</td>
<td>2. Develops her own teaching contents/mixing simple and complex activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>3. Classroom management (monitoring, time management)</td>
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<td>4. Feedback to students</td>
<td>4. Peer feedback/giving students rubrics and descriptions of the assignments’ requirements</td>
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<td>5. Detecting plagiarism</td>
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Asma’s Narrative

Asma graduated from the English department of the Afghan Public University and started her career with the English department upon her graduation. She has been teaching at the Afghan Public University since 2012. She has taught a variety of subjects, namely reading courses for the freshmen and sophomores and literature courses at the English department and ESP (English for specific purposes) at different faculties at the Afghan Public University.

When Asma was asked about the number and the level of her students, she did not have a specific answer due to the different number of students in each of her classes. She experienced teaching classrooms with a huge difference in the number of students in the classes. She mentioned, “I taught in science classes, there were more than 70 to 80 to 90 students in each classroom, or in public administration faculty I had more than 100 students in each class, so the number of students were quite different in each faculty” (Interview, June 29, 2017). Asma stated that the classes she taught, sometimes with 100 students, are definitely considered large classes. She said, “There are like when I said 70 to 80 or in public administration faculty I had more than 100 students in each class, I would consider them large classes” (Interview, June 29, 2017).

Asma’s Attitude Towards the Class Size

Asma’s preference of having a class made up of 20 to 25 students seems to lead to great achievements such as effective teaching and learning outcomes which cannot be achieved in the large classes with 100 students. She asserted that a class of 20 to 25 students provides her the opportunity to achieve her teaching goals and be an effective teacher. She specifically mentioned:

Well, ideally, I would prefer a class with 20 to 25 students where I would be able like to look at, cover the multilevel students that I have or cover all the materials that I plan for
that class, bring new activities every session and being creative in that class, doing different
types of activities and different group activities or individual activities, I think 20 to 25
students in each class would give me more freedom. (Interview, June 29, 2017)

This indicates how teaching in a small class makes a huge difference in teaching
outcomes from the point of view of a teacher. In this context, 20 to 25 students is considered a
small class, according to Asma. Furthermore, it indirectly indicates how teaching in a large class
can be challenging and problematic for a teacher.

Asma stated that teaching in large, multilevel classes where students come with different
language backgrounds and proficiencies, some at beginner levels while some at advanced levels,
is challenging. Asma specified that teaching in such a context limits the freedom of the teacher in
bringing teaching materials such as a variety of class activities. Moreover, getting feedback from
students, giving feedback to students, and engaging students are all among the challenges that the
teachers struggle with them in a large class.

She noted:

When teaching such classes, you find that you are limited with types of activities that you
do, you are limited with getting feedback from each of them or giving feedback for each
of them, you would be limited to bring new activities every time you teach something
new, or involvement of students would be limited as well. (Interview, June 29, 2017)

Furthermore, she expressed that it is difficult to reach her struggling students who need
more attention. She noted, “It would be so difficult to figure out who is in need for more
participation in each class, so I think there are so many other things that would be problematic in
teaching large multilevel classes” (Interview, June 29, 2017).
Teaching in a Large Class: Challenges and Effective Coping Strategies

Asma’s reported experience with the challenges of teaching a large class as well as her coping strategies are presented in this section. As a result, finding students’ levels and needs, balancing teaching materials, classroom management, and giving feedback to students are the major areas discussed here.

Finding students’ levels and needs. Specifying each student’s level and what he/she needs is one of the difficulties associated with large classes. Asma said that the problem of having multilevel students usually occurs when she encounters large classes. Speaking from her experience, she thinks with a large, multilevel class it is sometimes even impossible to figure out each individual’s learning style, level of proficiency, and specific needs in order to help effective learning outcomes. She argued, “With multilevel it is sometimes impossible to figure out what is the learning style, what is the learners styles, what do they prefer in each class, how do they learn better, sometimes it is totally impossible to consider each individual specific context” (Interview, June 29, 2017).

Despite that finding students’ levels, their learning styles, and their specific needs in a large, multilevel class seem to be difficult for Asma, she still does not give up. She has her own strategies in getting to know her students in a large class made up of 100 or more students. At the very first session of the semester, Asma starts her class by giving some interview questions to the students to ask each other. The questions are mainly about basic things one needs to know about a friend like a classmate. Then she asks students to talk about each other and answer the questions. She believes that in this way she can evaluate her students’ level of proficiency and how much exposure they had to the language. She noted:
I would put students into peers and give them interview questions so they would interview each other and they would like four to five minutes talk to each other and would after that, they would introduce one person, each other, so in that way when they talk they use the vocabularies, the fluency they have and the way they comprehend the questions would give me an idea that who is in what level. (Interview, June 29, 2017)

Furthermore, she assigns her students some writing activities. For instance, she asks her students to write what they understand and think about the readings. Saying that, she is able to distinguish who is in which level. She noted, “I would make them write paragraphs, write opinions about things they read so that give me the idea that who is on advanced level and also I specify that in the first day” (Interview, June 29, 2017).

Balancing the teaching materials. Asma found balancing the teaching materials to meet the needs of all students coming with different levels of language proficiencies to be challenging. She experienced that when she considers the advanced level students and select teaching materials such as the textbook and the class activities according to their level, it is difficult for the low-level (beginner) students to learn effectively. Similarly, when she tries to choose the teaching materials considering the needs of the beginner students, it is so boring for the advanced level students. She says:

It would be for instructor so difficult to select something or material that would address all the different levels of students that you have in your classroom. There are usually texts or activities that would suit one level but for the other level if I consider advanced level it would be so difficult for the beginner level, if I consider beginner level it would be so boring for the advanced level students. (Interview, June 29, 2017)
What Asma does in such a situation where the beginner students find the teaching materials difficult to learn, she tries to ask the advanced level students to help the low-level students with the lessons. She usually tries to ask each student at the beginning of the semester some questions such as where they consider themselves as English learners, how much exposure they have to English, and then she arranges the class where advanced level students could help the struggling or low-level students.

She noted:

The arrangement and the class activities or group activities would be in a way where in each group there would be one to two students who would be volunteers to help those who are struggling with the language or with the activities in the classroom to help them to practice. (Interview, June 29, 2017)

Lack of accessibility to the needed teaching materials such as textbooks, internet, library, and technological tools is another issue that Asma struggles in teaching large, multilevel classes. She mentioned that the available textbooks are not level appropriate in her multilevel classes. Moreover, according to Asma, the textbooks that she implements in her classes are not designed for the Afghan students or Afghan context. Saying that, she stated that the available textbooks are not culturally appropriate and sometimes could clash with the Afghan culture. Therefore, she has to skip some content in order to avoid any misunderstanding or issues among her students. She noted, “We have books, but they are at very advanced level and they are not targeted for Afghan students or Afghan society, so there are some texts that clash with the culture, with the traditions that you should just skip them” (Interview, June 29, 2017). Moreover, there are texts with limited number of exercises and activities, which does not give that much freedom to the instructor to incorporate more activities. She added:
There are texts that are very low level and you don’t have that much freedom to incorporate so many other activities, so activities other than the things that we have in the book would be only having things that we get access through internet so the resources are very limited. (Interview, June 29, 2017)

Asma has limited access to the internet and technological tools such as computers and projectors in her classes. She noted:

If we talk about technology, some classes are equipped, like if you go to the public administration faculty, their classes are equipped or Engineering their classes are equipped, but science very limited you do not find projector in the classroom, so it is only white board and marker that you have available. (Interview, June 29, 2017)

When Asma was asked to share an incident that she faced in one of her large classes, she talked about how her students reacted to the selected course textbook. Asma considered the administration team’s suggestion on selecting the teaching materials in one of her classes at the faculty of public administration. She decided to select the textbook to be a little bit higher level compared to what her students were expecting. She noted:

Actually, so when I went to that class we talked about it I gave them a sample of the material that we will be having that semester. They were all scared and they were all about to leave the class so that was difficult for me to cope with that situation. (Interview, June 29, 2017)

When she found that her students were angry and anxious, even scared to approach something new, she decided to assure them that she would help them to understand each lesson before they move to the next step. Moreover, she tried to bring more activities and exercises to motivate the students to work harder. She mentioned, “I would motivate them to do more things
more activities or give them more references that would make the materials adjustable to their level and make it enjoyable in that classroom” (Interview, June 29, 2017).

**Classroom management.** Asma experienced class management related issues in her large, multilevel classes. She says, “That is so challenging that is so difficult especially when learners are not that cooperative” (Interview, June 29, 2017). Moreover, arranging students into groups, monitoring the groups to make sure everyone is really working, is one of the many challenges Asma encountered in her large, multilevel classes.

She noted:

> The area that I have struggled as well to manage that activity within each group and to find out whether they complete that activity within the time limit that they are given, all the groups are in the same position when they are moving on to the next activity.

(Interview, June 29, 2017)

Although there are challenges with arranging the class and monitoring students’ performance, Asma tries different strategies to minimize this issue in her large classes. She divides the class into groups. She assigns one student in each group to take notes on the group discussions, activities, or text translation, so this way she tries to keep the class engaged. She pointed out:

> I would assign one person in each group to take notes or the other person would lead the discussion or the activity so that way there would be small community in each group, so they would be talking and at the end I would make them to write basically what they come up with, or what was the solution or the translation or any activity that we do.

(Interview, June 29, 2017)

Making sure that students feel comfortable in the group discussion is one of the areas where Asma experienced difficulties in her large classes. She discussed that the purpose of group
work is for everyone to be involved. She added, “Group is when you are comfortable when you are not scared of telling that you did not get anything or if you ask a question you are sure that no one would laugh at you, so these things would influence the learning outcomes of students” (Interview, June 29, 2017). Asma’s experience with teaching large, multilevel classes shows that when there are male and female students in a group, male students dominate the discussions and female students are sitting quietly. She noted, “They [girls] would be mostly silent in that group, so boys would be dominating the group discussions or activities” (Interview, June 29, 2017).

Overall, Asma’s reported experience indicates that there are issues associated with classroom management in large, multilevel classes.

**Giving feedback to students.** Asma tries to cover all the main language skills and subskills in each of her classes. She gives her students 15 minutes to have a discussion on the topic that she introduces, so students practice listening and speaking during discussion-based activities. She noted, “Every session that I introduce a new topic, there are fifteen minutes’ discussions on that specific topic so I would look at how to target each language skill, so they are having listening and speaking in that fifteen minutes” (Interview, June 29, 2017). Asma said that she is not able to reach each individual student to provide them feedback on their listening and speaking skills. She noted, “[giving feedback] not all the time on group activity, maybe not all the time on spoken activities and reading text” (Interview, June 29, 2017).

She also assigns her students to write a reflection paper on what they understood from the readings. Students are supposed to cover the vocabulary they were taught as well as the grammar they studied. Students submit their papers and Asma tries to provide them feedback. Students usually edit the papers and return them to the instructor. But still, Asma is not always able to follow what types of revisions students made to provide them feedback. She noted, “I tried, I
never promised a timeline that I would bring the material or I will bring your assignments next week but I always try to provide feedback to those students on their writing” (Interview, June 29, 2017).

Asma’s experience with teaching large classes shows that she works hard to provide her students feedback, but it is not always possible to reach all students’ needs and wants.

**Asma’s Preferred Method of Teaching**

Asma prefers to implement a communicative language approach (CLT) in her classes. She tries to have more interactive classes by putting her students into groups and asking them to discuss the topics related to the class activities. She noted, “I would try to have CLT, I would like ideally that is what I prefer to practice in my classes, but sometimes it switches to totally grammar translation so it depends” (Interview, June 29, 2017). When she was asked about the reason she switches to grammar translation, she mentioned that having multilevel students make her rely on grammar-translation.

According to Asma, the faculties’ administrations’ supports play a significant role in what and how a teacher teaches. For instance, Asma is able to implement her preferred method of teaching and teaching materials in the faculties where she has the support of the administration teams. She noted, “If you look at engineering or if you look at public administration faculty for them English language or English course is very important, so they make their students to learn the language” (Interview, June 29, 2017). At the same time, she also struggles in some faculties as students complain and she has to change her method of teaching. She mentioned, “but there are other faculties where they don’t have that much emphasis on the language so when students complain the administration make us to change the method we practice in those classes, so it totally varies in the classes” (Interview, June 29, 2017).
Although Asma prefers implementing CLT in her classes, she believes that it does not always work. She emphasizes that teaching is a contextualized practice, meaning that the needs of the students and availability of the resources are important factors to consider. For example, “What works for U. S. students may not work for students in Afghanistan, you have to look at what things you have to adjust what things you need to delete and what things you can” (Interview, June 29, 2017). Moreover, she stated that in the Afghan context, it is so difficult to only implement CLT:

If we talk about like most of the classes or most of the programs that I attended two scholarships that I had even some online classes when they talk about teaching, when they talk about new teaching methods, they talk about CLT that works totally for the context like western context, but as an instructor back in Afghanistan as I said before that would be so difficult to only use CLT. Sometimes looking at the needs of students looking at how effective your teaching is if you switch to other method if you are drilling if you do some translation like grammar translation that would be like more effective than CLT alone, so looking at different contexts and try to implement in your own context would tell you, you may fail in the beginning but would tell you what to do what not to do next time. (Interview, June 29, 2017)

Asma also pointed out the class time as one of the issues which limits her to examine different methods and materials to see how they work and how her students make promotions. She mentioned, “The number of sessions you meet the students in ESP classes, so you do not get to like to find or see how they improve from the beginning till the end of semester” (Interview, June 29, 2017). Moreover, she emphasized that one session in a week is not enough to reach students’ questions and needs. She said, “You just introduce a topic and maybe students have
problems, maybe students have questions but given the time limit that you have with those students in that specific session for a week would make it even more challenging” (Interview, June 29, 2017). Therefore, Asma found lack of time (number of sessions she meets her students) and the time allocated for each session as big challenges which limit her in many ways. She noted, “You didn’t have enough time to practice more to look at the language from different angles, from different methods, and different activities and different materials and to let those students explore” (Interview, June 29, 2017).

**Asma’s Beliefs in Effectiveness of Teaching a Large Class**

Asma asserted that when the class is small with the same level of students, teaching is not problematic, and one can say whether the teaching is effective or not. But when it comes to teaching a large, multilevel class, it is difficult to generalize whether teaching is effective or not. She noted, “When the class is large and the level is not like very different from each other, that would be not a very problematic thing, but considering the multilevel you cannot generalize that it was effective or it was ineffective, full stop” (Interview, June 29, 2017). Asma’s experience with teaching large, multilevel classes indicates that she is sometimes satisfied with the outcomes of what she teaches, but it is not always the same. She believes that sometimes she notices that things do not really work the way she desires. She argued:

Sometimes some activities, some texts would give you so much satisfaction as an instructor and being in that environment and helping them with activities and the text, but sometimes all the instructors around the world would agree with that they would have bad days as a teacher so they would feel that it was totally something that did not work for that class. (Interview, June 29, 2017)
Considering all the challenges that Asma struggles with in her large classes, she believes that teaching in large classes and the challenges she struggles with daily make her learn and grow as a teacher. She noted:

Every day you are growing as a teacher, as an instructor you learn what works and what doesn’t work, and for the next time, you would learn from the mistakes you did in that class. So, I would not conclude it as effective or ineffective I would take it as a more of learning experience that you grow as a teacher and as an instructor. (Interview, June 29, 2017)

**Summary of Asma’s Narrative**

Asma has experienced teaching a variety of courses both at the English department and English for the students of other majors (ESP) at the Afghan Public University. The number of students in each of the classes she taught varied, as an example, she taught in classes with 40 students to classes made up of 100 students. Asma prefers teaching a class with 20 to 25 students which she considers as a small class, where she can reach each individual student’s needs and wants. She emphasized the challenges she has experienced in her large classes; as a result, she mentioned, finding students’ levels, wants and needs to be among the most challenging areas in large classes. Moreover, balancing teaching materials to meet the needs of students of all levels is another issue related to teaching in large, multilevel classes. Asma has struggled with bringing level-appropriate teaching materials and activities to meet the needs and the levels of all her students. As a result, she mentioned that when she chooses high-level teaching materials, it is difficult for the struggling students to learn. Similarly, when she provides lower level teaching materials and activities, the advanced level students get bored and do not find the teaching materials helpful. Moreover, she mentioned that when students are not that cooperative, it is so
difficult to really handle the issues related to the classroom management. Providing each student with feedback on their learning progress was another issue that Asma talked about as one of the challenges she struggled with so far.

Asma’s preferred teaching method is Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, but still, she believes the context and availability of resources, as well as what the administrations in each faculty demand, play an important role in which method should be applied and how it should be implemented. Therefore, she decides on the method which she believes can fit her teaching context.

Asma stated that there are a lot of challenges and issues associated with teaching large, multilevel, under-resourced classes, so a teacher may experience good and bad along this journey. She noted that sometimes one is satisfied with what she teaches, but it happens when she [teacher] finds herself in a situation where she really finds it difficult to say whether her teaching was effective or not.

Overall, Asma does not rely on a specific method of teaching in her classes. She implements a variety of teaching approaches depending on the needs and conditions of the class for that specific session. Moreover, she helps students to have feedback from a peer on each other’s papers. Developing level appropriate teaching materials is one of Asma’s strategies in balancing teaching materials in her multilevel classes.

Bahar’s Narrative

Bahar’s teaching experience goes beyond 2007; she has taught in primary and secondary classes and experienced teaching computer classes before teaching English at the university. She officially started teaching English at the Afghan Public University in 2007. She has taught a variety of courses in the English department, such as translation, linguistics, and teaching
methodology courses. Moreover, she has taught English for the students of other majors (ESP) at the Afghan Public University. She has taught classes made up of 35 to 100 students. She mentioned that she has never taught a class with students below 35, so the minimum number of students she has taught in a class used to be 35. She noted, “It started from 35 not less than that normally, I taught a class with over 100 students” (Interview, May 24, 2017).

Bahar’s Attitude Towards the Class Size

Bahar considers all the classes she taught, made up of 35 to 100 students, as large classes. She believes that in a language class, the number of students should not exceed 20. She noted, “In a language class, the class must be near 20 or 15 to 20 something like that and not more than that” (Interview, May 24, 2017). She is comfortable with 50 students in classes where she can give lectures, so she thinks it depends on the type of teaching, but overall, in language teaching classes, there should not be more than 20 students. She mentioned, “…but if it is some sort of subjects which needs lecturing it can be yeah, it can be more than 50, if it is lecture-based, but all my courses were not lecture based, so all of them were large for me” (Interview, May 24, 2017).

Bahar stated that the number of students in a class affects how students learn and how the teacher teaches. She thinks that when there are a smaller number of students in a class (ideally 20 students), the teacher can reach each student’s needs and wants. The teacher can address students’ weaknesses and difficulties in small classes. She noted, “When the number of students are less, then the teacher can work more on each individual” (Interview, May 24, 2017). However, it is not that easy in a class with a huge number of students to work with each individual. She mentioned, “…but if the number of students are large, then the teacher cannot work with every single student to find their problems, find their weaknesses, or trying to work on those weaknesses and problems” (Interview, May 24, 2017).
Bahar is not positive about teaching effectiveness in a large class. She prefers teaching in a small class, made up of 20 students, where she believes she can reach her individual students and work closely with them on their weaknesses and difficulties. When she was asked whether she is positive about teaching in large classes, she pointed out, “No, I am not very positive, although there are some positive things in large classes, but I prefer small classes” (Interview, May 24, 2017).

**Challenging Areas and Counteracting Strategies**

Bahar’s experience of teaching large classes; the challenges she encountered and her coping strategies are discussed in this section.

**Finding students’ levels and needs.** Bahar believes that getting to know her students, specifically, addressing them by their names, is important to her, but sadly it is not achievable in large, multilevel classes:

I see more challenges on knowing my students. I believe if we know our students we can teach them as they want, so in large classes, since I cannot speak directly with everybody there is no time for doing that we do not know the name of each individual which is super important for me. (Interview, May 24, 2017)

Furthermore, she emphasized that she cannot recognize those students who are passive, who are reluctant, and those who have difficulties, so that she adjusts her teaching method to address students’ specific needs. She noted, “There are students who are quiet, do not speak, so I cannot recognize those students to vary my method for him or her” (interview, May 24, 2017).

For Bahar, there are elements that she really values, such as reaching her students with disabilities: “I have some students who have some disabilities I need to understand that and I need to address that in the class” (Interview, May 24, 2017). Moreover, addressing students who
have limitations, weaknesses, and difficulties and understanding students’ feelings and emotions towards the teaching are important for Bahar, but she cannot reach all of these significantly important elements in her large classes. She noted, “I want to focus on each individual as human beings with feelings, with limitations, strong points, and weakness, so the problem in large class for me is that I cannot be with my students” (Interview, May 24, 2017). Therefore, when she cannot reach each individual student to find his/her needs and wants, it is difficult for her to decide on an appropriate method of teaching. She noted, “I cannot know them more and to vary my method according to the needs of each individual” (Interview, May 24, 2017).

Bahar thinks about exploring and practicing strategies to help recognize her students’ interests. She is planning on allocating one or two sessions of her classes at the beginning of the semester to implement some activities such as asking students to talk to each other and have poster presentations. In this way, she can evaluate each student’s area of interest and level so that she can decide on implementing level appropriate and interesting teaching materials. She noted:

Recently, I am working on building group dynamics and I try my best to have some activities at the very first days, not to rush on the teaching, so for two or one session, I would like to add some elements of group building like introducing each other, speaking with each other. Students speak among themselves using posters so that everyone can hung on the wall. I go and read them so within these two sessions I can have general understanding of my students’ interest in that class. (Interview, May 24, 2017)

**Balancing the teaching materials.** Bahar has experienced multilevel students in her large classes with 100 students, where there was a vast difference between students’ levels of proficiencies. Bahar noted, “In the class that I had with 100 students, there were multilevel students. It started from beginner to near advance or upper intermediate” (Interview, May 2017).
That said, balancing the teaching materials to meet the needs of all students is not an easy task for Bahar. She tried to have difficult activities and simple activities to help students of different levels to enjoy the classes. She mentioned, “It is super difficult I should say, but for one of my classes which was a large class, I designed material, the materials were somehow both easy and difficult” (Interview, May 2017).

When Bahar decides to design activities for her classes with multilevel students, she considers what her students’ reactions towards the teaching materials would be. That said, for Bahar, students’ feelings and interests towards the class activities is important to be considered. She noted, “…so I tried to make some of them easy, some of them a little bit challenging to meet at least one expectation of each students, so they feel not overwhelmed a lot and they should not feel it is so easy for them” (Interview, May 2017). Struggling with lack of level appropriate teaching materials made Bahar design her own teaching materials for some of her classes. Although she has many classes to cover in a week, she believes that if teachers spend some time to develop their own teaching materials over a period of time, it is possible to have appropriate teaching materials. She noted, “I started working slowly on some materials and keep the materials like within one year I have a lot of activities and materials prepared on my computer that I can reuse that maybe with some small changes” (Interview, May 2017).

Moreover, lack of other needed resources such as technological tools is another issue which puts some limitations on Bahar and prevent her to provide appropriate teaching materials and activities. She finds activities and exercises which she believes can be helpful to implement in her classes, but when she realizes that she does not have access to the required technological tools to implement those activities, she has to skip and move to something different. She noted, “We have less access to technology. I always find something which is technology based but then
I realize how can I do this without technology” (Interview, May 2017). Therefore, lack of resources becomes a barrier in large teaching settings.

**Classroom management.** For Bahar, keeping all students engaged is one of the difficulties she struggled with in her large classes. Specifically, reaching those students sitting in the back to make sure that they do the activities that they are required and asked to do is not an easy task. Therefore, students sitting in the back of the class do not show interest and prefer to make themselves busy with activities other than the class tasks. She noted, “There are problems like students sitting in the back of the class they are busy with reading subjects other than what I was teaching. It happened that I found students reading other chapters I faced with that situation” (Interview, May 2017). Furthermore, when the teaching materials is not level appropriate and students find it difficult, they feel bored and /or distract the class. She also mentioned, “I also faced with that students were overwhelmed, although I tried to keep the balance, there are students with lower level become overwhelmed” (Interview, May 2017).

Experiencing the classroom management related issues, Bahar came up with some strategies which help her to reduce the distractions and keep students engaged. She believes that when the activities are according to the students’ interests, students are interested to take active parts, in this way the teacher can have better classroom management. Therefore, when there are interesting activities, she believes that students work on it and she does not need to monitor all the groups and individual students whether they do the assigned activity or not. Moreover, Bahar stated that giving clear instructions helps students to be more active and it also reduces the confusion. This helps a teacher to have a better class with less distractions from the students’ side. She noted:
If we have a good activity for students, if we have an interesting activity, if we give clear instructions for students, students tend to do that there is no need for monitoring even outside the class because they [students] know what to do, they like to do that. It is clear for them, so I wanted to make sure that the activity is interesting after that giving clear instructions on what to do and if it was a little bit challenging, I would ask two persons to demonstrate that in front of the class and then after I make sure that everyone understand, then I ask my students to do the activity and I ask them if everything is clear then they do the activity. (Interview, May 24, 2017)

There is another factor which seems to be important for Bahar in handling the challenges of large classes, specifically, the classroom management, and that is teacher’s teaching experience. She believes the more experienced the teacher is, the better he/she can handle the challenges associated with teaching in large, multilevel classes. She thinks that experience in large classes helps the teacher to have a clear understanding of the large class and issues related to it; therefore, he/she can adapt his/her teaching method to what the class demands. She added, “The teachers should be very experienced in that [handling the challenges of teaching in large multilevel classes], we should at least have a clear understanding of what is a large class and a clear understanding of different approaches and how to adapt them” (Interview, May 2017).

**Giving feedback to students.** Bahar assigns her students to do activities outside the classroom. She wants them to translate texts and answer comprehension questions. She mentioned being a teacher gives a feeling of responsibility to a teacher to reach his/her students and provide them feedback, but yet it is difficult in large classes. When she was asked whether she is able to provide feedback or not, she noted, “Well, it was very difficult but I managed to do
that, I feel responsibility of giving them feedback, it was very difficult but I did” (Interview, May 2017).

She also talked about the type of feedback she is able to provide her students in large classes. She cannot give them precise and detailed feedback the way she wants to. She can give very general feedback on general issues that she finds on students’ papers to be revised; such as underlining and saying “correct” or “incorrect”. She mentioned, “The feedback that I gave them were very general, I couldn’t go through details for each person, it was just underlining sentences and saying this is right, wrong or I don’t know, some very general feedback” (Interview, May 2017). Therefore; she believes that giving detailed feedback and asking students for revisions is difficult and even impossible. She noted, “…but right, in large class, giving feedback is super difficult, and sometimes checking homework is impossible” (Interview, May 2-17). Moreover, she does not have enough time to listen to her students and to know what their questions are and what their weaknesses and strengths are. With that said, she added, “It is for sure impossible that I listen to every single student in that large class, we do not have enough time to do that” (Interview, May 2017).

Interestingly, she has a strategy which helps her students to have feedback, not from their teacher, but their classmates. Bahar does not have enough time to provide her students feedback on their classroom’s performance, but still, she tries to help them to know how they progress. She usually tries to have peer work, where students first write about the task individually and share that with a partner, so this way they can have each other’s feedback. She noted, “I ask them to write something, after writing which is an individual work, then they had to share it with a partner maybe sometimes with the person at their right or their left” (Interview, May 2017). She implements a similar strategy with students’ speaking skills. For example, if there is a topic
where they have to talk, she prefers to ask them to do it in pairs or groups, so that they listen to each other and share their thoughts. She added, “If there is a conversation, I want them to do the conversation in pairs or groups, I try to add these elements in my teaching for those students who cannot speak with me directly, they have a chance to speak with one pair around them” (Interview, May 2017).

**Bahar’s Preferred Method of Teaching**

Bahar’s experience of teaching with large, multilevel classes and her coping strategies indicate that she is not limited to a specific method or approach in teaching her large classes. She prefers to implement more communicative based approaches. As a result, she tries to have paired work and group work in her classes, and in situations where she can have groups in her over crowded classes, she tries to ask students to work with a partner sitting next to them. Therefore; she tries to avoid the elements of grammar-translation approach in her classes. She noted, “I try not to have the elements of grammar-translation in my classes but sometimes it is possible to have it but I try to use less grammar-translation elements and more communicative based activities” (Interview, May 2017).

She believes there are very important elements such as students’ needs and the context that play a significant role in deciding on what method is more practical and helpful to implement in a class. Therefore, for Bahar, what her students want and what the context requires are what she is concerned about, and she tries to address them when she decides on what method to implement in her large classes. She argued, “I cannot say there is not a specific type of approach I implement I see the needs and the context” (Interview, May 2017).

Moreover, she never gives up exploring different approaches and strategies to implement in her large classes, even those that are designed for small classes. She emphasizes a teacher can
adapt different approaches to achieve his/her teaching goals. She noted, “I studied different approaches and I try to find different ways if it is possible to teach them [approaches and strategies designed for small classes] in large classes and most of them are practical in large classes, always there are ways of adapting” (Interview, May 2017).

Bahar’s Beliefs in Effectiveness of Teaching a Large Class

Although Bahar prefers teaching in small classes made up of 20 to 25 students, she is still optimistic about teaching in large classes. She believes that teaching in large classes is difficult, there are challenges associated with it, but still it does not mean that it is impossible to overcome the challenges. She insists that there are coping strategies which help to have effective teaching, but it depends on the teacher and how prepared he/she is. She argues that teaching in large classes is too demanding compared to teaching in small classes. It requires the teacher to get a lot of preparations. Moreover, for Bahar, teaching experiences as discussed above is an important element which helps the teacher to overcome the challenges of teaching large classes. Therefore, being prepared as a teacher and having experience with teaching large classes helps to have effective teaching and learning outcomes in large classes. She noted:

It is difficult, still I say I prefer smaller classes, but it is not impossible to handle the challenges of large classes or not to be able to implement different approaches. It is possible but it demands lots of preparations and the teachers should be very very experienced in that. (Interview, May 2017)

Summary of Bahar’s Narrative

Bahar has been teaching a variety of subjects such as linguistics, translation, and teaching methodology at the English department for the last eleven years. Moreover, she teaches ESP courses, English for the students of other majors, at the Afghan Public University. She taught in
classes consisting of different numbers of students, which starts from 35 to over 100 students in each class. She considers all of her classes as large. She prefers teaching in small classes with 20 to 25 students, which she considers as an ideal number of students in a class, where reaching each individual student’s needs, wants, and learning goals is achievable. She believes that there are challenges associated with teaching in large, multilevel classes such as difficulties in knowing students, their needs and wants, classroom management related issues, giving and getting feedback, balancing the teaching materials, and availability of teaching resources.

For Bahar, knowing her students, what they need, who needs what, and how to meet those needs is a significant factor in teaching effectively. Sadly, she stated that teaching large classes does not really give this opportunity, even sometimes it is impossible to know all students and listen to what they want. Therefore, she says that in large classes, distinguishing struggling students and recognizing students with disabilities is so challenging.

She has also experienced class management related issues in her large classes. When she assigns her students to do a task, due to the huge crowd of students in a class, those sitting in the back do not do the assigned task and prefer to make themselves busy with readings and tasks of other courses. Therefore, monitoring and listening to each student is what Bahar found difficult in her large classes.

Furthermore, Bahar is not able to provide her students with detailed feedback on their papers and their performance inside the classroom. However, she tries her best to give them some general feedback on their papers. Moreover, she tries to help her students to have feedback from each other [classmates] through different strategies that she implements such as peer review sessions.
Bahar is not limited to a specific method of teaching in her large classes. For her, students’ needs, the context requirements, and availability of the resources play an important role in what kind of teaching approach she implements in her large classes. However, she prefers communicative language teaching approach (CLT) and tries to have more student-centered classes.

**Mohammad’s Narrative**

Mohammad is the only male participant interviewed here. He has been teaching a variety of courses such as conversation, speaking and listening skills, art of public speaking, phonology and linguistics, and ESP (English for Specific Purposes) both at the English Department and other faculties of Afghan Public University since 2011.

Mohammad has taught in the classes made up of different numbers of students starting with 40 students to 120 students in each of his classes. He mentioned, “I have taught classes of 40 to 120 and 20 students in each. With 120 I mean the maximum number of students in each of my classes” (Interview, June 2017). Mohammad considers his classes large, with multilevel students where he does not have access to sufficient resources to cope with the challenges he struggles almost every day. He noted, “I definitely consider my classes large with multilevel students” (Interview, June 2017).

Mohammad talked about the challenges he encountered in his large, multilevel classes in detail. He mainly discussed issues related to the following areas: finding students’ levels and needs, balancing teaching materials, classroom management, giving feedback to students, application of teaching methods and approaches, and some other relevant issues that are narrated in this section.
Mohammad’s Attitude Towards the Class Size

Mohammad believes that the number of students in a language class does affect the result of the teaching. He prefers a language class with 20 to 25 students or maximum 30 students. He thinks that teaching in small classes can be more effective as the teacher can pay more attention to his students’ needs and wants; furthermore, teaching can be interesting for both students and the teacher. He noted:

I would prefer a class with 20 to 25, let’s say maximum 30 students. A teacher can have more control over a small class, he can implement a variety of methods and activities in order to have a better result. Moreover, teaching in small classes can be joyful and entertaining, too. (Interview, June 2017)

According to Mohammad, teaching language in large classes is not as effective as it is in small classes. He believes that he cannot implement student-centered, communicative based approaches and techniques in his large classes. Moreover, he thinks teaching in large classes is boring and even a waste of time. Furthermore, he stated that teaching in large classes requires more space and more resources compared to teaching in small classes. He/she [the teacher] needs bigger classrooms to have students into groups, and he/she needs more time to implement communicative based tasks and activities in her/his classes. However, he mentioned that he does not have access to sufficient resources in his context of teaching. Therefore, it can be another reason which makes him believe that teaching in large, multilevel classes is a waste of time. He discussed:

Teaching large classes is useless, it is a waste of time because teacher cannot do group work, if the teacher tries to have group work, it requires more time that we do not have, it needs bigger places that we do not have, therefore, more than 20 students in a language
class makes no sense of the teaching. In large classes, you cannot implement anything but grammar translation method, that’s all. (Interview, June 2017)

Overall, Mohammad prefers teaching language in small classes with 20 to 25, maximum 30 students, and he believes that teaching in smaller classes can be more effective due to the opportunities that they give for the teacher to meet the needs of each individual students and teach accordingly.

**Mohammad’s Teaching Practices: Challenges and Coping Strategies**

Mohammad’s reported experience with teaching large classes from the challenges he has struggled to his coping strategies is narrated in this section.

**Finding students’ levels and needs.** Mohammad’s experience with teaching large classes help him to distinguish students’ levels and understanding of English in the first few sessions through indirect and direct observations. Mohammad mentioned, “Experiences of teaching in large classes can help teacher to get an idea of students’ level through observation in the first few sessions of the semester” (Interview, June 2017). According to Mohammad, the allocation of the first few sessions of the class significantly helps him to decide on the teaching materials and even to adjust his method of teaching. For instance, Mohammad discussed that he does not have any clue about the level of his students before he starts his actual teaching. He mentioned:

There was time before going to the class for the first time that I was assuming that the majority of the students are going to be low level students or there are going to be beginner, intermediate and advanced level, but when I started teaching in that class, I found out that I was wrong, about 70 to 80% of the students are in higher levels, not beginner, and there can be opposite, too. (Interview, June 2017)
This lack of knowledge about students’ levels and needs sometimes cause enormous challenges. As a result, he has to change all the course materials that he planned beforehand to teach in a specific class once he gets to know his students. He noted:

In one of my classes, I had selected the teaching materials including the textbook, when I started teaching, during the third session, I realized that the majority of the class are low level students, then I decided to make significant changes to the teaching materials, as a result, I totally changed the selected textbook. (Interview, June 2017)

Mohammad believes that teaching in large classes is so general that the teacher cannot meet the needs of all students equally and provide them teaching materials accordingly. He mentioned, “Teaching in large classes is so general. In large classes, we cannot meet the needs of students like if a student is visual, or audio lingual to provide learning materials accordingly” (Interview, June 2017).

Overall, the only strategy Mohammad implements in his large, multilevel classes to get to know his students’ level in order to adapt the teaching materials according to their needs and wants is through classroom observation and having interactions with students during the first two to three sessions of the semester.

**Balancing the teaching materials.** Mohammad has experienced having students of different levels during his five years of teaching large classes, which made the task of selecting level appropriate teaching materials for each of his large classes challenging. He mentioned:

Having multilevel students in large classes is another challenge. During four to five years of teaching, I had students with different levels in my classes, for example, some students with intermediate level, while some are advanced level and some very low level I can say beginner those who do not know English at all. (Interview, June 2017)
Mohammad is well aware of the importance of taking into considerations both students’ levels and providing level appropriate teaching materials, but it is still a tough goal to achieve. He discussed:

The teacher has to design the class in a way to consider all these different levels. For example, if the course materials are designed considering advanced levels, it is not of use for low levels and if it is designed considering the low-level students, the class is boring for advanced level students. Therefore, when facing with this challenge, it becomes difficult to control the class. (Interview, June 2017)

In order to balance the teaching materials, Mohammad considers the level of students who form the majority of the class. He mainly provides teaching materials at the intermediate level. He noted, “What I usually do is to keep the balance by bringing more intermediate materials” (Interview, June 2017). Moreover, there are some other strategies that Mohammad applies to keep the balance of teaching materials in his large, multilevel classes. For instance, when there are difficult tasks for the low-level students to understand, he tries to simplify them by seeking help from his advanced level students. He believes that advanced level students can help low-level students by reading the complicated passages, talking about them, and translating them in students’ native languages. He discussed:

There are sometimes highly structured passages which fits advanced level students, what I do is that after giving students to read the passage those with advanced level usually share their thoughts on the passage and then after translating the passage into students’ mother tongue, there are follow up activities which can be done through grammar translation method and in this way, we can help low-level students to benefit the class, too. (Interview, June 2017)
Mohammad thinks that teaching for several semesters in the same classes gives him an idea of what needs to be done to provide balanced teaching materials for the similar classes in the future when new students get enrolled. Therefore, according to Mohammad, if teachers themselves provide their own teaching materials instead of relying on the available textbooks, it would help students of different levels to benefit the class. He noted, “Designing our own teaching materials is another thing I did, for example, I designed a textbook in which I tried to have a variety of activities for different levels and also, I considered students’ professional needs, too” (Interview, June 2017).

Therefore, Mohammad is aware of the challenges of teaching multilevel students and the importance of balancing the teaching materials to be beneficial for all different levels in a large, multilevel class. As a result, several years of teaching in large classes made him to think of seeking effective strategies to cope with this challenge.

**Classroom management.** Mohammad discussed important issues related to the classroom management and his coping strategies. First, Mohammad stated that managing to reach out to all students equally and listening to them is impossible in large classes. He mentioned, “It is impossible to reach out all students in a class of 120 in the 50 minutes of the class time” (Interview, June 2017). Apparently, the huge number of students is not the only reason, but time plays a significant role in large classes, too. Mohammad pointed out that reaching students’ needs in large classes requires more time to be allocated for each session, otherwise, it is not possible to do so in 50 minutes (50 minutes is the total time of each class he teaches). He mentioned, “It [reaching students’ needs] can be possible if the teacher puts extra hours other than the class time to listen to the students’ problems, needs and wants, but inside the classroom in 50 minutes of the class, it is impossible” (Interview, June 2017).
Second, Mohammad believes that controlling and preventing the noises and the distractions from the students’ side in large classes depend on the teacher’s power over students and his/her method of teaching. According to Mohammad, applying Grammar-translation methods help him to overcome this issue. For instance, if he applies communicative and student-centered approaches, he has to divide the class into groups, which provides the opportunity for the students to discuss irrelevant topics and cause distractions by creating noises. He noted, “I believe that preventing the noises and distractions refer to the teacher’s ability and power over the students. In my classes, just to control and manage the class better I tried to implement grammar translation method” (Interview, June 2017).

Third, Mohammad is limited to grammar-translation approach in his large classes because he is not able to manage to divide a class of 120 students into groups. He mentioned that in small classes, it is easy to break students into groups, but in large classes it is not possible to monitor, for example, ten groups of students. He noted:

In small classes, teacher can divide the class into smaller groups, for example groups of four or five and control better, but in large classes for example having ten groups, the teacher cannot control and monitor the class, so I prefer not to have communicative based activities.

Fourth, according to Mohammad, time management is another issue in large classes. He believes that he cannot manage dividing students into groups to implement student-centered activities in 50 minutes of his total class time. He pointed out, “It is impossible to have proper groups in 60 minutes of the class, if I do so I will be having 15 minutes for the activity to do which I cannot do anything” (Interview, June 2017).
Fifth, for Mohammad, low-level students can sometimes negatively impact classroom management and cause disruptions. He discussed that when low-level students find the teaching materials higher compared to their level, they start complaining, which sometimes reaches the administration and can disrupt the teaching. He mentioned, “When the beginner students especially at the beginning of the semester realize that they may fail the course, they start complaining from the teacher and the materials” (Interview, June 2017).

Finally, in mixed-gender classes, having male and female students work together is another concern in large classes due to some cultural sensitivities. Moreover, he believes that it is important to have mixed groups because it helps students to learn from different perspectives. He mentioned, “Asking male and female students to work together create some issues, but still the teacher can manage this, but I believe that having mixed groups help students to learn from an opposite gender” (Interview, June 2017).

Overall, Mohammad found classroom management in large classes to be challenging. The amount of time allocated for each session, the huge number of students, and the availability of resources are all the causes of poor management in large classes.

**Giving feedback to students.** Mohammad’s experience with providing feedback to his students is similar to that of Narges. He said that giving direct feedback to each individual student is not possible in large classes, but there are some techniques and strategies he implements to help his students know about their strengths and weaknesses. He noted, “Giving feedback for each student in a large class is impossible, but there are ways that the teacher can help students to benefit indirect feedback on his/her papers” (Interview, June 2017). Mohammad provides his students with rubrics describing each specific assignment. These rubrics are not only to help students to do their papers, but also to give each other feedback when they are asked to
do so in the class. For instance, students review one another’s papers, mainly higher-level students help struggling students, following the rubrics. He asserted, “I give students rubrics and then I ask them to do peer-review and give comments on one another paper using the rubric, especially it can be a task for the advanced level students to help low-level students” (Interview, June 2017).

Furthermore, students are required to give group presentations on a topic related to their lessons in groups of four. Mohammad tries to give them oral feedback on their presentations right after they present. He mentioned, “…but on students speaking and oral presentation, I was able to some extent, very rarely provide direct feedback in the class” (Interview, June 2017). Mohammad stated that the feedback he gives his students in the class is not detailed. He mentioned, “I sometimes can provide direct oral feedback on their presentation, but again I would like to emphasize that not always this can be possible” (Interview, June 2017).

Mohammad’s Preferred Method of Teaching

The grammar-translation method is the only approach that helps Mohammad to manage his teaching in large classes in a more controlled way. He mentioned, “The method that I use 80 to 90% in my large classes is grammar-translation method, because if I try to have more student-centered classes, I fail to control the class” (Interview, June 2017). He said that he has no other choice, but to rely on the grammar-translation approach because it helps him to manage his time and prevent the noises and distractions. Moreover, in order to have student-centered activities, he needs more space, meaning bigger classrooms and sufficient time, which he does not have in his large classes. He noted, “In my classes just to control and manage the class better I tried to implement grammar-translation method, to prevent students not to discuss irrelevant issues, I mean other than the content of the lesson” (Interview, June 2017).
Relying on the grammar-translation method does not mean that there are no interactions between students in Mohammad’s classes. It is a fact that having students work in groups is not possible in large classes, according to Mohammad, but peer-work can be an alternative, which works to some extent. Mohammad sometimes asks his students to work on some tasks with someone sitting close to them. He mentioned, “Whenever I wanted to have students to do a task, I asked them to work with a partner sitting close to them. It was the only thing I could do, it was not possible to have 120 students in groups” (Interview, June 2017).

**Mohammad’s Beliefs in Effectiveness of Teaching in a Large Class**

Mohammad believes that teaching in large classes can be a learnable opportunity for the teacher. Saying that, a teacher can learn from the challenges and difficulties that he/she encounters and try to seek solutions. Moreover, one can learn from a large number of students coming with different backgrounds and perspectives. He stated, “Teaching in a class with 100 or 120 students, there are students with different personalities, perspectives, needs and wants, so the teacher can improve and learn from them” (Interview, June 2017).

Mohammad discussed the effectiveness of learning outcomes from two perspectives. He believes teaching and learning in a large class is useless and a waste of time, unless the teacher designs his/her own teaching materials and puts in more effort. He believes that if the teacher considers his/her students’ needs and wants, the class can be effective. He noted:

If teachers can develop their own teaching materials in all their large classes, one can say teaching in large classes can be effective 50%, but otherwise, it is not. So, it depends on the teacher how much effort he or she can put to make the class interesting, and engaging. (Interview, June 2017)
Overall, Mohammad is not satisfied with the results he gains from teaching large classes. He mentioned, “I want to emphasize again that in the language classes with 120 students teaching cannot be effective due to the challenges that exist, for example, teacher cannot implement effective methods, cannot meet the needs of different levels and different learning styles” (Interview, June 2017).

**Summary of Mohammad’s Narrative**

Mohammad has experienced a variety of challenges in his large classes, which made him to think that teaching in large, multilevel, under-resourced classes is useless and a waste of time. Mohammad asserted that in large classes reaching out to each individual’s needs is impossible. Moreover, according to Mohammad, balancing the teaching materials to help students benefit from the class equally and providing feedback to students, specifically direct feedback from the teacher are among the challenging areas in large classes.

Therefore, considering all the challenges that Mohammad has discussed in regard to his large classes, he believes that the only option for the teacher to have better control over the class, students, and time management is to implement the grammar-translation approach.

Mohammad believes that although teaching large classes is challenging, it can be a learnable opportunity for the teacher to learn both from students coming with different backgrounds and from the challenges that he/she encounters daily in large classes.

**Narges’ Narrative**

Narges has been teaching a variety of courses, such as translation and language-related courses at the English Department of Afghan Public University since 2009. She taught English courses both at the English department and English for specific purposes for students of different fields, such as students of computer science across the Afghan Public University. Her classes
were comprised of a huge number of students with over 120 in a class. She mentioned, “In one class it was 120, in one class it was more than 150 students and I divided them into two groups in each group there were 75 students” (Interview, June 2017). Although she had large classes in the English Department, she considers her ESP courses, particularly classes at the computer science faculty larger and more challenging. She noted, “You know I have had a lot of large classes in computer science faculty, I also had large classes in the English department too. But the number of students have been a lot in the computer science, 120 students in a class” (Interview, June 28, 2017). Narges addressed a number of issues related to teaching in large classes, such as class size effects on teaching and learning, recognizing students’ needs and wants, classroom management, balancing teaching materials, and giving feedback, which are addressed in detail in this section.

**Narges’ Attitude Towards the Class Size**

Narges believes that the number of students in each class definitely influences the teaching and the learning outcomes. Narges considers 20 to 25 students as a perfect number in a language class. According to Narges, the teacher has more freedom to apply and practice a variety of methods, and the students can benefit from the class. As a result, once she decided to divide the students into smaller sections because she believed that she was able to meet each individual’s needs and wants because she can practice the strategies that she believes are helpful. She could design and select teaching materials and activities to meet the needs of all her students. But it did not last for a long time, due to the availability of limited resources, she had to mix them again and have large groups. She mentioned, “I decided to divide this class into three groups (sections) and it was very helpful for the students and I was very confident, it was very easy for me to deal with the students, with low-level students I put some activities for them” (Interview, June 2017).
Narges argues that a smaller class gives the teacher more freedom and opportunities to manage student-centered classes, where she can have group discussions. Having students work with each other, and having peer review sessions is another good aspect about teaching a smaller class. She also talked about having fun activities, which can be interesting for students and maximize the engagement among them. She noted, “[in small classes she was able to practice] applying group discussion and peer work some others like playing games and others” (Interview, June 2017). She particularly mentioned that in large classes, the teacher is not able to help her students to practice speaking. In practicing speaking, she believes students need to be divided into groups and it is not easy in large classes, while it can be easily managed in small classes. She noted, “The large number of students you know, whenever we are teaching especially whenever we are focusing on speaking we face with a lot of problems. Like group discussion they want to be divided” (Interview, June 2017). Overall, Narges considers her classes large and she thinks that large class size negatively affects the learning and teaching outcomes. She prefers to have small classes with 20 to 25 students, which she considers as an ideal number of students in a language class because it provides the opportunity to offer effective teaching.

**Challenges and Attempts to Develop Coping Strategies**

Narges’ discussion of her experience with teaching large classroom settings as well as her attempts to develop counteracting strategies are narrated in this section.

**Distinguishing students’ levels and needs.** The main challenge with teaching large, multilevel classes for Narges is having multilevel students. She has students whom she considers low, intermediate and advanced levels. Narges has a strategy which helps her to differentiate students of different levels.
At the beginning of each new semester, Narges gives diagnostic tests to find out her students’ levels of language proficiency. She thinks that her tests give her a sense of who is in what level and what is needed to be offered to students of different levels to meet their needs. She mentioned, “At the beginning of the semester I had an exam and then I understood in which level they [students] are” (Interview, June 2017). Therefore, it is the only strategy Narges can apply in her large, multilevel classes to find her students’ levels of language proficiencies.

**Balancing the teaching materials.** Narges’ biggest problem with teaching multilevel, large classes is balancing the teaching materials to meet the needs of students of different levels of language proficiencies. As mentioned, Narges gives her students a test of language proficiency to find out their levels. She initially knows who is in what level, but balancing the teaching materials to have students of different levels benefit from the class is a challenging task for her. She mentioned, “When I use teaching materials with higher level like advanced level only the students who have high level could benefit, the other two levels, the medium level and the low level, they could not benefit” (Interview, June 2017).

Furthermore, she encountered students both in the advanced level and low-level complaining about the teaching materials. She stated, “I started to teach some medium level and then the students who were in higher level they said that we are not using the class because we know these things” (Interview, June 2017). She pointed out that the only solution she had with this problem was to divide the students into different sections according to their level of language proficiencies. She mentioned, “I decided to divide this class into three separate groups, which was very helpful and I was very confident. It was very easy for me to deal with the students, with low-level students I put some activities for them and applying group discussions” (Interview, June 2017). It indicates that balancing the teaching materials to meet the needs of
students of different levels in a large class is impossible, as stated by Narges. She was asked whether she made this decision to divide her students into separate groups when she realized that balancing the teaching materials is impossible. She mentioned, “Yes, you are right” (Interview, June 2017).

Moreover, Narges does not have access to level appropriate teaching materials. However, this problem made her to design two textbooks for her students considering the challenges she had encountered during her teaching career in large, multilevel classes. She believes that the designed textbooks solved part of the problem with inappropriate teaching materials. She mentioned:

The number of the students and the teaching materials were the challenges that I had, then I decided to bring some ESP books which solved part of the problem. I designed two ESP textbooks for third and fourth semesters, I integrated all language main skills and subskills. (Interview, June 2017)

Narges’ decision to design textbooks for her classes indicates that when the teacher designs the teaching materials, considering the needs and the levels of students, it can be helpful to deal with the challenge of having multilevel students.

When Narges feels that the teaching materials are difficult for the low-level students to learn and understand, she asks her advanced level students to help the struggling students. She divides students into groups where she assigns advanced level students in each group to lead the discussions and cooperate with the struggling or low-level students. She thinks it is helpful especially in large classes where the teacher alone cannot reach out to all students and help them in case they do not understand the instructions. She stated:
Most of the time I try to just create the groups to be multilevel, for example, two students who are weak with three students who are better than them or higher level and sometimes there is only one higher level student with four low level in a group, they work together. I also give tasks for students with high level to help other students who are weak.

(Interview, June 2017)

Overall, Narges’ teaching experience with large multilevel classes made her to seek various strategies to cope with the challenges of balancing the teaching materials to meet the needs and the levels of her students of different levels of language proficiencies.

**Classroom management.** Narges has experienced issues related to the classroom management in her large classes as well. Managing the time, having students involved, and preventing noises are all among the difficulties she encountered in her large, multilevel classes. She particularly struggled when she implemented group work activities. For example, monitoring all the groups to make sure that everyone is involved and doing the required task is another challenge she encountered. She mentioned:

If I divide students into groups of five students when I was monitoring them, when I was checking their conversations sometimes I found that they started speaking on some other issues, not about the topic, sometimes they use their native language, so controlling the class was somehow difficult for me. (Interview, June 2017)

Furthermore, the allocated time for each session of the class is not sufficient to listen to all students and reach out to them individually. There are students in Narges’ classes who are interested to participate in class discussions, but there is not sufficient time to give each individual the chance to raise his/her voice or to tell what they need, and how they performed on the assigned tasks. Narges talked about one of her large classes where her students were very
enthusiastic to share their work with others, but she was not able to give everybody the opportunity to talk. She mentioned, “They [students] were eager to read their translations, I mentioned them every day that let me I will give you chance to read your translations but in fact, I could not manage it” (Interview, June 2017).

Therefore, having all the students in large classes involved has always been a challenge. Moreover, monitoring the class to make sure that students are on the right track, reaching out to each individual’s needs and wants, and also preventing disturbances are all among the challenges that Narges encountered in her large classes.

**Giving feedback to students.** Narges believes that providing feedback to students is another challenge in large classes. Specifically, she mentioned that she teaches many classes with so many students which makes it difficult to provide feedback for each individual. She mentioned, “In Afghan context, a teacher has many classes, not one or two classes to be able to deal with them, we have many classes and a big number of students in each, so giving feedback is a very difficult procedure for the teacher” (Interview, June 2017).

Struggling with the challenges of teaching in large classes, specifically providing feedback to students, Narges came up with some strategies, which helped her students identify their strengths and weaknesses. One of her strategies is peer-feedback, where she asks students to review each other’s papers and provide feedback. A point to be mentioned is that she only implements this strategy to give feedback on written assignments. In this way, students benefit from each other’s ideas and comments to improve their final drafts. She noted, “I use some methods to provide feedback to my students like peer-feedback” (Interview, June 2017).

Narges does not limit herself to peer-feedback, her curiosity and awareness of the importance of feedback made her to think of other strategies, too. As an example, she provides
rubrics on each assignment and shares them with her students to develop their papers accordingly. In this way, students know all the requirements for that particular assignment in detail. Moreover, when students provide feedback on one another’s paper, they can follow the rubrics. Narges mentioned:

I also have some rubrics, I introduce the rubrics to the students to do their assignments according to the requirements of the rubrics. Therefore, they do it, they check the papers and they make changes and give them to me, so it is easier for me to check the class’ papers. (Interview, June 2017)

She provides some in-class, general feedback, addressing students’ strengths and weaknesses after each session. She believes that if she collects students’ papers to provide feedback on each of them individually, she will not be able to do it during the semester because she has to return students’ papers by the end of semester. She says that students need to know about their strengths and weaknesses during the semester to be able to make promotions, otherwise, it is useless to return their papers with comments at the end of the semester. Therefore, giving some general feedback in the class can be useful to help students identify the areas they need to improve on. She noted:

For feedback or for checking most of the time I give it in the class because I do not have a lot of time to check all these papers. If I check them all individually I should give them at the end of the semester which does not have any benefits for them because they should use the feedback to make changes to their papers. Most of the time I apply in the class some certain rubrics or some questions or requirements as rubrics and give them to the students. In this way, I think it is a good idea because students learn when to they write
and when they check their peer’s papers. This way, I provide students some general feedback. (Interview, June 2017)

To conclude, according to Narges, providing students with feedback in large classes is a challenging task for the teacher. But several years of teaching in large classes helped her to develop some strategies, which can be both practical in large classes and beneficial for the students. She mentioned that peer-feedback, providing rubrics and giving some in-class general feedback are some of the strategies that she implements in her large classes.

Narges’ Preferred Method of Teaching

Narges is against the grammar-translation approach implementation in both small and large classes. She prefers to have more student-centered classes, where the teacher acts as a facilitator while students’ engagement matters the most. Therefore, she avoids the grammar-translation approach in her classes and instead she prefers Content-Based Instruction (CBI). She says that at the beginning of the semester, students find CBI difficult and they insist that the teacher should first translate the texts and also speak in their mother tongue. But she insists on her preferred method of teaching, which is CBI. She believes that it takes a while, at least a semester, for the students to get used to this approach. She noted:

I totally avoid Grammar Translation method, and it is possible, I experienced that. At the beginning, students did not accept it, they wanted me to translate the passages and give tasks and instructions in their native language, for one semester they had this problem but in the second semester they became content about that and using the content language. (Interview, June 2017)

She still believes that, although students may get used to this method, there are some challenges behind applying a content-based instruction approach, too. For example, when she
divides students into groups to do the assigned tasks, it is difficult for the teacher to manage the class, monitor students, prevent noises and distractions, and have all the students engaged. She noted:

The challenge is the huge number of students, for example, whenever I divided students into groups of five, when I was monitoring them, when I was checking their conversations sometimes I found that they talk about some other issues not about the topic. They also sometimes use their native language, so controlling the class was somehow difficult to me. (Interview, June 2017)

Therefore, besides all the existing challenges with teaching large classes, Narges prefers to avoid the Grammar-Translation Approach and instead implements CBI, which she believes can be appropriate, practical, and beneficial for the students.

**Narges’ Beliefs in Effectiveness of Teaching a Large Class**

Narges talked about the benefits of teaching in large classes both for the teacher and the students. She believes that teaching in large classes and struggling with a high number of multilevel students, and lack of resources makes the teacher seek solutions to these challenges. Therefore, whenever she feels that there is a problem, she thinks of finding a coping strategy. As an example, Narges noted, “Whenever we face a problem in our large classes, the teacher tries to find some solutions, for example, in one case, I went to the office and talked to the head of the department and the problem was discussed in a meeting” (Interview, June 2017). Moreover, she always thinks about students of different levels in her classes and tries to find ways to balance the teaching materials. She mentioned, “Dealing with multilevel students in one class with lack of resources made me to think of solutions to overcome them and become successful” (Interview, June 2017).
Furthermore, she believes that when dealing with 100 students in a class, there are plenty of ideas discussed, which provide ample opportunities to learn. She discussed:

I really like in Afghan context students are used to attending large classes they are ok with that, I could manage the class and I could learn something from students when it was teaching in large classes. It made me more powerful to manage the class may be with 100 or 85 students. (Interview, June 2017)

Summary of Narges’ Narrative

Narges has experienced teaching large classes with 100 students since she started teaching English courses at the Afghan Public University since 2009. She believes that there is an indefinite amount of challenges in large classes, from class management to finding students’ needs and wants, balancing teaching materials, providing students with feedback, and many more. Considering all the challenges that she has been struggling with in her large classes, she believes that language classes should not exceed 25 students, but still, she believes that 40 students in a class in Afghan context can be well managed.

She thinks that struggling in large classes makes the teacher seek strategies to cope with the challenges. For example, Narges mentioned that when she found the existing textbooks levels were higher than her students’ levels of language proficiencies, she started designing her own teaching materials. As a result, she developed two textbooks, which were published and successfully implemented.

Furthermore, when she found that she is not able to provide individual feedback in her classes with 100 students, she tried to rely on peer feedback to provide an opportunity for her students to know about their strengths and weaknesses. Overall, Narges believes that teaching
language in small classes with 20 to 25 students can be more beneficial for both the teacher and for the students.

**An Overall Analysis of the Interviewees’ Common Perspectives**

In the current study, the four interviewed instructors were all selected from the same institution, the Afghan Public University, and consists of three females and one male. Two participants, Bahar and Narges, have been teaching for almost 9 years at the Afghan Public University. Asma and Mohammad have been teaching for almost 5 years. When comparing participants’ experiences, I realized that there are common themes among them, from the challenges of teaching large classes to their coping strategies.

Moreover, all of the four interviewed instructors had similar ideas regarding their ideal class size. All of them consider their classes to be large and multilevel. When they were asked about their ideal number of students in a language class, Asma, Mohammad, and Narges believe that 20 to 25 students in a language class make it a good number. Asma mentioned, “Well, ideally, I would prefer a class with 20 to 25 students” (Interview, June 2017).

In this section, the participants’ perspectives in regard to teaching large classes at the Afghan Public University is analyzed to shed light on the areas where interviewed participants had similar and/or different experiences with teaching large, multilevel classes.

**ELTs’ Common Perceived Challenges in Large Classes**

The interviewed instructors found seeking students’ needs and wants, specifically their levels of language proficiencies, and their learning styles to be challenging in large, multilevel classes. Asma mentioned that it is sometimes impossible to know each individual’s learning style and his/her level of proficiency. She noted, “Sometimes it is totally impossible to consider each individual specific context” (Interview, June 29, 2017). Similarly, Bahar emphasized the
importance of knowing students’ strengths and weaknesses, reaching out to each individual’s needs, and knowing students’ names in order to help effective teaching, but she believes it is not achievable in large, multilevel classes. According to Bahar, “There are students who are quiet, do not speak so I cannot recognize those students to vary my method for him or her” (interview, May 24, 2017). Narges and Mohammad addressed similar challenges related to the difficulties of meeting their students’ needs and interests in their large classes. Mohammad noted, “In large classes, we cannot meet the needs of students like if a student is visual, or audio lingual to provide learning materials accordingly” (Interview, June 2017).

Therefore, the interviewed instructors of the Afghan Public University believe that it is extremely important to know students’ levels of language proficiencies, learning styles, specific needs (those with disabilities), in order to teach effectively. They all found these to be the most challenging areas in teaching large, multilevel classrooms.

Balancing the teaching materials to address students of different levels in large classes is another challenging issue that interviewed instructors agreed upon. They believe that when they bring advanced level teaching materials, struggling students find it difficult, and when they introduce lower level activities and tasks it can be boring for advanced level students. According to Asma, “If I consider advanced level, it would be so difficult for the beginner level, if I consider beginner level, it would be so boring for the advanced level students” (Interview, June 29, 2017).

Similarly, Mohammad noted, “If the course materials are designed considering advanced level it is not of use for low levels and if it designed considering the low-level students, the class is boring for advanced level students” (Interview, June 2017). According to Narges, when she tries to consider her advanced level students, she cannot be considerate of intermediate and
beginner students because the advanced level teaching materials cannot be helpful. She argued, “When I use teaching materials with higher level like advanced level, only the students who have high level could benefit” (Interview, June 2017). Therefore, providing and presenting teaching materials to meet the needs of students of different levels, specifically their levels of language proficiencies in large, multilevel classes, is a challenging area for the teacher.

Paying equal attention to all students, having all students involved, applying student-centered methods, monitoring the class, managing the time and considering cultural sensitivities were all among the classroom management related issues that participants found challenging. As a result, Asma mentioned, “The area that I have struggled as well to manage that activity within each group and to find out whether they complete that activity within the time limit that they are given” (Interview, June 2017). Similarly, Bahar and Narges also addressed this issue. Particularly, they emphasized that monitoring large classes to make sure that everyone is engaged in the assigned task is a difficult thing to ensure. Bahar stated, “I found that they [students] started speaking on some other issues, not about the topic, sometimes they use their native language, so controlling the class was somehow difficult for me” (Interview, June 2017). For Mohammad specifically, time management to be the biggest issue preventing him from applying group work activities. Moreover, he believes that managing students into groups requires more time and larger classrooms, which they do not have available. Participants agreed that issues related to the classroom management is one of the main areas, where they struggle the most in their large classes.

According to participants, giving feedback to students, both oral and written, presents another challenge. Mohammad and Narges mentioned that they are unable to give their students direct feedback, specifically, on their written assignments. However, Asma stated that she tries
her best to give her students feedback on their written assignments, but she never promises a deadline to return their papers with her comments. Similarly, Bahar mentioned that the comments she provides her students on their written assignments is so general. Saying that, she is unable to provide detailed feedback addressing her students’ strengths and weaknesses. She noted, “The feedback that I gave them were very general, I couldn’t go through details for each person, it was just underlining sentences and saying this is right, wrong or I don’t know some very general feedback” (Interview, May 2017).

The challenges that the participants of the current study have commonly struggled with in their large, multilevel, under-resourced classes at the Afghan Public University were addressed in the previous section. In the following section, the participants’ common coping strategies in counteracting the perceived challenges of teaching in large classes is presented.

ELTs’ Common Coping Strategies in Counteracting the Perceived Challenges

The participants believe that struggling with teaching large, multilevel classes has always made them seek coping strategies to teach effectively. According to participants, they all had experienced implementing strategies to overcome the challenges and difficulties of large classes in the most challenging areas, such as distinguishing students’ levels of language proficiencies, needs and wants, providing students with feedback, issues related to classroom management such as time, monitoring, preventing noises, and paying equal attention, balancing the teaching materials, and providing their own teaching materials to meet the needs of students of different levels. In this section, participants’ common coping strategies related to the above-mentioned areas is presented.

The participants mentioned that they try to identify their students’ levels of language proficiencies in order to provide their teaching materials accordingly. According to the
participants, they allocate the first two to three sessions at the beginning of each semester to find their students’ levels of proficiency through observations, giving language proficiency tests, having interactions with students, and asking them to write autobiographies. For example, Asma, Mohammad, and Bahar mentioned that they get an idea of their students’ levels of proficiency through having interactions and listening to them when they talk to each other. Mohammad noted, “Experiences of teaching in large classes can help teacher to get an idea of students’ level through observation in the first few sessions of the semester” (Interview, June 2017). Moreover, Asma also asks her students to write about themselves, then she evaluates who is in what level. She noted, “I would make them write paragraphs write opinions about things they read so that give me the idea that who is on advanced level and also I specify in the first day” (Interview, June 29, 2017).

In addition, Narges mentioned that she gives tests of language proficiency to assess students of different levels in her large, multilevel classes. A point to be mentioned is that according to the participants’ reported experiences, implementing these strategies gives them a general view of the whole class. For example, these strategies show what percentage of students could be in what level, not specifically knowing about each individual level of language proficiency.

Participants discussed some strategies in regard to balancing their teaching materials to help students of different levels benefit from the class. First, they try to design their own teaching materials considering the needs of students of different levels such as advanced, intermediate, and beginner. Secondly, they seek help from advanced level students to cooperate with struggling students in the areas where they find the textbook content difficult to understand.
Designing their own teaching materials was the strategy that all participants emphasized on as a helpful way to consider the needs of students of different levels. They believe that the available textbooks are either advanced or low level, which make it difficult to consider the needs of students of different levels. Moreover, the available textbooks sometimes clash with the Afghan culture, which causes misunderstandings.

Therefore, the study’s participants have experienced designing their own teaching materials which they found beneficial and practical in the Afghan context. For example, Asma stated, “We have books, but they are at very advanced level and they are not targeted for Afghan students or Afghan society, so there are some texts that clash with the culture with the traditions that you should just skip them” (Interview, June 29, 2017). Furthermore, Bahar, Narges and Mohammad also emphasized on the importance of designing their own teaching materials for their large, multilevel classrooms. Bahar noted, “…so I tried to make some of them easy, some of them a little bit challenging to meet at least one expectation of each students, so they feel not overwhelmed a lot and they should not feel it is so easy for them” (Interview, May 2017).

For better classroom management, participants tried some techniques in their large classes, such as seeking help from advanced level students, bringing interesting activities, and preferring peer-work to group-work. Asma believes that assigning an advanced level student in each group to take care of the discussions and take notes can help to reduce the noises and distractions. Bahar stated that bringing activities and tasks according to the students’ interests and levels of proficiency maximize students’ engagement and help the teacher to have a better control of the class. Mohammad prefers peer work when he finds that he does not have enough available space and time to do group work, and especially when he realizes that he is not able to monitor the noises and the distractions that group work may cause.
Although all the study participants mentioned that they are unable to provide detailed feedback to each individual student in their large classes, they still try to help their students know about their strengths and weaknesses through giving them some in-class general feedback, and peer-feedback. For example, Bahar mentioned that she provides her students with some general feedback on their written assignments. Similarly, Mohammad mentioned that he gives his students in-class feedback which is very general and brief on their oral presentations.

Furthermore, peer feedback is one of the most common strategies among all of the participants of the current study. Saying that, Mohammad and Narges stated that they give their students rubrics on each specific assignment and ask them to read one another’s paper and give feedback according to the rubrics requirements. In this way, students can have feedback from their classmates when they cannot have direct feedback from their teacher. Mohammad stated, “I give students rubrics and then I ask them to do peer-review and give comments on one another paper using the rubric, especially it can be a task for the advanced level students to help low level students” (Interview, June 2017).

When participants were asked about their preferred method of teaching in their large classes, Asma and Bahar stated that they are not limited to a specific approach or method. Saying that, they try to implement communicative based approaches where they can have their students engaged in the class. However, communicative-based approaches are not always achievable, so they also implement some elements of grammar-translation. Asma stated, “I would try to have CLT, I would like ideally that is what I prefer to practice in my classes but sometimes it switches to totally grammar translation so it depends” (Interview, June 29, 2017). Similarly, Bahar noted, “I try not to have the elements of grammar-translation in my classes but sometimes it is possible
to have it but I try to use less grammar translation elements and more communicative based activities” (Interview, May 2017).

However, Mohammad and Narges had different experiences with their common method of teaching in their large classes. For instance, Narges’ common method of teaching in her large classes is CBI (Content-Based Instruction). She believes that there are challenges with implementing this approach, specifically for the first few weeks of the semester when students find it difficult. Similarly, Mohammad is also limited to one specific method of teaching in his large classes and that is grammar-translation. Although he tries to practice other approaches too, his most common method of teaching in large, multilevel classes is grammar translation. He believes that it is the only method he can implement to have control over his class and his students from the time management aspects to controlling and monitoring the class as well as preventing noises and distractions. He stated, “The method that I use 80 to 90% in my large classes is grammar translation method because if I try to have more student-centered classes, I fail to control the class” (Interview, June 2017).

Overall, participants have experienced similar challenges in their large, multilevel classes, specifically with the level appropriate teaching materials, meeting students’ wants, needs and interests, distinguishing students’ levels, classroom management related issues such as maximizing students’ engagement, controlling the noises and distractions, time management, paying equal attention, having male and female students equally involved, and applying student-centered approaches. However, their coping strategies vary from faculty to faculty to a greater extent compared to the types of challenges they encountered.
Summary of the Chapter

All participants’ reported experiences with teaching large, multilevel classes were narrated in the first section of this chapter. Specifically, each individual participant’s narrative has been divided into main and sub-themes in which both the challenges and the instructors’ coping strategies in counteracting the perceived challenges in their large classes were discussed. As a result, all four participants discussed challenges they encounter in different areas in their large classes. For instance, distinguishing multilevel students, balancing teaching materials, classroom management, and giving feedback to students were among the main areas where the four ELT interviewee’s experienced challenges in their large classes. Moreover, the interviewees discussed their coping strategies in counteracting the stated challenges. For example, finding students’ needs through some initial assessments such as observations, designing their own teaching materials to meet the needs of students of different levels, assigning advanced level students to take care of the group discussions, providing opportunity for peer-feedback, etc. were among their coping strategies.

In the second section, participants’ common perspectives in regard to the challenges of teaching large, multilevel classes and their common coping strategies in counteracting those challenges were presented.

In the following chapter, the six themes that participants emphasized to be beneficial in coping with the challenges of teaching large, multilevel, under-resourced classes are discussed. These themes are:

1. A need for developing contextualized and level appropriate teaching materials
2. Identifying students’ abilities, interests, and needs through initial assessments
3. Peer feedback as an additional form of feedback
4. Smaller class size to develop effective teaching

5. Teachers becoming more effective with teaching experience

6. Integrating technologies as appropriate and available to facilitate effective teaching
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The current qualitative study attempts to explore the challenges of teaching in large, multilevel, under-resourced classes at an Afghan Public University. Furthermore, ELT interviewees’ coping strategies in counteracting the perceived challenges of teaching large classes is discussed and analyzed as well.

In this chapter, I intend to introduce the themes that emerged from the study’s thematic analysis of the findings as well as discussing the existing literature in connection to the selected major themes. It should be mentioned that not all participants equally emphasized on the selected themes. Moreover, the emergent themes are all introduced as coping strategies and/or ways to maximize teaching effectiveness in large classes.

These themes are as follows:

1. A need for developing contextualized and level appropriate teaching materials
2. Identifying students’ abilities, interests, and needs through initial assessments
3. Peer feedback as an additional form of feedback
4. Smaller class size to develop effective teaching
5. Teachers becoming more effective with teaching experience
6. Integrating technologies as appropriate and available to facilitate effective teaching

In this chapter, limitations of the study, namely, relying on a single data source and the broadness of the topic is discussed. Implications of the study to the teaching and the higher education administrators; needed actions and attention are presented, too. Moreover, further research directions, different aspects of large classes that should be investigated, and a final reflection on the topic are included in this chapter.
Recalling the Study’s Theoretical Framework

This study is conducted based on Kumaravadivelu’s (2001) postmethod pedagogy: parameters of particularity, practicality, and possibility. The term postmethod is used to convey a wide range of different aspects of teaching L2. For instance, teaching is described to be beyond classroom strategies and the teaching contents, but it is more about the context’s sociocultural and historiopolitical conditions where the teaching is undertaken. This indicates that teaching L2 in general and teaching pedagogies, in particular, are more of a contextualized practice. Effective teaching happens when the context’s particularities are kept in mind when practicing teaching.

Atkins and Brown (2002) argue that effective teaching varies from one context to another. In other words, what is considered effective in one context is not necessarily effective in another. Moreover, the authors add that “Effective teaching is systematic, stimulating, and caring” (p.5). Devlin and Samarawickrema (2010) discuss the criteria and components of effective teaching under two broad categories: particular range of skills and practices as well as meeting the requirements, needs, and conditions of the context where teaching takes place. The authors discuss a wide range of affective factors such as “department, faculty, and institution as well as the societal, political, economic, technological and demographic change forces” that influence effective teaching and/or define effective teaching in a particular context (p.118).

Similarly, Bax (2003) emphasizes the importance of teaching contexts’ particularities in connection to effective teaching. The author suggests a shift from CLT to a context approach of language teaching:

I shall argue that CLT has always neglected one key aspect of language teaching— namely the context in which it takes place—and that the consequences of this are serious, to the extent that we need to demote CLT as our main paradigm, and adopt something
more similar to what I term a Context Approach. (p. 278)

With that said, effective teaching is not about promoting particular ideologies, such as western-based teaching that is practical and effective in a specific context, to understand teaching English, but in fact, effective teaching requires teachers to seek organic and contextual ways of effective pedagogies.

**Emerging Themes**

The following section discusses the themes that emerged from the results of the interviewees’ experiences with the challenges of teaching large, multilevel classes and their coping strategies. Furthermore, the emerging themes are either suggestions from the interviewed instructors for promoting effective teaching in large classes or their coping strategies in counteracting the challenges associated with large-class teaching.

**A Need for Designing Contextualized and Level Appropriate Teaching Materials**

The participants emphasized that teaching large, multilevel classes can be effective if teachers put more effort toward developing their own teaching materials emerging from their pedagogical experiences with students who have entered their classrooms. The participants believe that when a teacher of a multilevel class develops teaching materials considering the needs of students of different levels, the class can benefit from the teaching materials. It can be interesting for students as well. As a result, all four participants of the current study experienced designing, developing and publishing their own teaching materials. For example, Narges has published two textbooks, which she believes to have been successfully implemented.

Moreover, Asma believes that the existing textbooks are not only level inappropriate—they can be higher or lower compare to the students’ levels of language proficiencies—but also sometimes clash with the Afghan culture, which results in some misunderstandings. Asma noted,
“We have books, but they are at very advanced level and they are not targeted for Afghan students or Afghan society so there are some texts that clash with the culture with the traditions that you should just skip them” (Interview, June 29, 2017). The participants’ experiences with developing their own teaching content parallel Miri’s (2016) discussion on the importance of locally designed teaching materials to integrate writing into literature courses at an Afghan University. The findings of his study indicate that the available textbooks and teaching materials are not culturally and linguistically appropriate for the Afghan context, therefore there is a need for the locally, culturally and linguistically appropriate teaching materials to meet the needs of both students and the context. This argument also coincides with Kumaravadivelu’s (2001) post method pedagogy in which the author emphasizes the teaching L2 to be influenced by the context’s particularities, specific needs, requirements, and conditions.

According to the interviewees, they are responsible to cover more than one large class—two to three—which is considered to be a huge responsibility. Therefore, they are not able to develop their own teaching materials for each of their classes. According to Bahar, she adapts her own developed teaching materials considering the needs and interests of her students in her new classes. This coincides with Wong’s (2015) discussion on the adaptation of English language teaching materials where teachers can creatively develop their own teaching materials considering the needs, interests, and aptitudes of their students.

Furthermore, according to Asma, the existing textbooks are limited to certain number of activities which do not give much freedom to the teacher to incorporate level appropriate activities in a multilevel class. That being said, she believes that they need to design their own teaching materials to incorporate more activities by considering the needs of their classes. This corresponds with Ansary and Babaii’s (2002) argument related to the teachers’ reliance on
textbooks, which states that the teachers may find themselves limited to the textbook content without having freedom. This argument correlates with the current study’s findings from different perspectives. For instance, when the teacher relies on a single textbook, incorporating activities to meet the needs of students of different levels become limited.

Mohammad stated a similar perspective in regard to the development of his own teaching materials. Mohammad decided to design a textbook based on his experience of teaching multilevel classes. He had this idea in mind that he has to be considerate of students of different levels in his classes, therefore, he incorporated activities to meet the needs of students of different levels in his large classes. Ansary and Babaii (2002) bring this argument into a broader discussion, saying that when the needs of students of different groups vary, a single textbook cannot be responsive to all differing needs.

Overall, there is a vast body of literature supporting the study’s participants’ perspectives on the importance and effectiveness of teachers’ self-designed teaching and instructional materials, specifically for large, multilevel classes by considering the specific needs of students. This coincides with Kumaravadivelu’s (2003) the post method pedagogy condition as it not only helps teachers to develop their teaching skills and challenge the colonization of certain western-based ideologies embedded in the curriculum, but also promotes autonomy in teachers where they can act actively within “the academic and administrative constraints imposed by insituations, curricula, and textbooks.” Moreover, it promotes the teachers’ ability to explore and develop approaches to observe, analyze and evaluate their own teaching for the purpose of accomplishing desired changes (p. 33).
Identifying Students’ Abilities, Interests, and Needs Through Initial Assessments

One of the challenges of teaching large classes is the issue of dealing with multilevel students. This issue becomes serious when the teacher has no idea about the distribution of students’ levels of language proficiency in her class. Participants discussed their strategies for assessing their students’ overall knowledge of English language and their needs. Evaluating students’ writing assignments and the teacher’s observations from the class are among the strategies discussed by the interviewees. It should be mentioned that these strategies are all implemented during the start of the academic year, therefore, the first few sessions of the class are critical to getting to know students’ abilities, skills, and interests.

There is a vast body of literature discussing the importance and effectiveness of getting an overall understanding of the class at the beginning of the semester through some initial assessments. According to Kearney (2013), one of the first and most important jobs of the teacher at the start of a class or academic year is to get an understanding of his/her students’ abilities and skills as well as their deficits and struggles. Furthermore, it is stated that although this quick initial assessment might give a very general understanding of students’ abilities and achievements, it indicates students’ true abilities.

As a result, Asma assigns her students to write about themselves briefly during the first class. She collects students’ papers and assesses her students’ levels of language proficiency and their exposures and experiences with the English language. Besides evaluating students’ autobiographies, she also asks them to share their descriptions with a partner and with the whole class. She selects a few of the students and asks them to introduce each other. This helps her to get an idea of her class’s levels of language proficiency and their exposures and experiences with the English language. Park (2011) discusses the strengths of autobiography writing by stating
“As an ESL instructor, I envisioned one of the strengths of the CLA writing project to be the development of writing skills through the construction of students’ own narratives” (p. 160). Moreover, the author states that autobiography writing provides opportunities for both instructor and students to learn about their life histories and connecting their experiences to their sociocultural and sociopolitical contexts.

Similarly, Bahar and Mohammad take the first two to three sessions of their classes to assess their students’ levels of language proficiency and their needs and interests through some in-class activities and observations. They believe that raising personal questions and asking students to talk about their answers with the class can help the teacher to have an initial overall understanding of the class. However, these strategies give a very general knowledge of their classes because they cannot reach out to each individual student in a class with 100 students, but still, their observations during the first few sessions of the class are considered to be critical. Mohammad noted, “Through observation, the teacher can get an idea of the level and needs of the students and can adapt the selected teaching materials accordingly” (Interview, June 2017).

Kearney (2013) emphasizes that at the start of the academic year, a teacher must be a good listener and observer to get to know students’ needs and wants. Specifically, listening and watching students’ performances is of importance when the teacher and students are not directly interacting with each other. According to the study’s interviewees, it is impossible for them to directly interact with each student in a class made up of 100 students to get an understanding of students’ specific needs and wants in order to tailor their lessons accordingly. Therefore, in-class observations are a practical way to obtain an overall image of the class needs in a large class setting.
Peer Feedback as an Additional Form of Feedback

The findings of the current study indicate that providing feedback by the teacher for each individual student in a large class setting is a challenging task. According to the participants, they are aware of the importance and effectiveness of providing students with feedback by the teacher. They believe it helps students identify their strengths, weaknesses, and the areas where they need to improve, but when it comes to the large classes made up of over 100 students, it is sometimes impossible to reach each student. Therefore, all participants agreed that peer feedback is practical and effective in large classes where the teacher alone cannot give feedback to each student.

Bahar mentioned that considering the fact that she cannot give her students detailed feedback on both their writing and their oral activities, she encourages peer feedback among her students. Bahar does not provide specific written guidelines for her students to follow when giving feedback to one another. This promotes a sense of responsibility among learners and encourages them to help each other. Yang et al. (2006) study findings indicates that peer feedback helps students to make promotions and encourages students’ autonomy; therefore, it can be considered as a useful adjunct to the feedback provided by the teacher. In a similar vein, Hyland’s (2000) findings indicate that providing students with written guidelines to give feedback limit students to the direction guided by the teacher; however, students respond better when they are not directed towards a specific direction.

However, two participants, namely Mohammad and Narges, have implemented more structured peer feedback in their classes. They provide their students with rubrics on each specific assignment and detailed instructions on what they are required to consider in their papers. Students follow the rubrics and the instructions to do the assignments, and at the same
time provide feedback to one another accordingly. This strategy specifically helps students with their written assignments. Yu et al. (2016) empirical study of the peer feedback indicates that implementation strategies such as providing feedback structure by utilizing peer feedback sheets, providing guiding questions and assessing feedback helps L2 writing practitioners to maximize the benefits of peer feedback.

According to the participants, they all had students of differing levels in their large classes. They believe that advanced level students can be a great source in helping struggling students. Mohammad specifically mentioned that he assigns advanced level students to give feedback to the struggling students. Diluzio’s (2011) findings indicate that allowing higher level students to help lower level students is beneficial to both levels, as the lower level students receive assistance from the higher-level peers, and the higher-level students also enhance their understanding of the concepts too.

Peer-feedback strategies were mainly implemented by the participants of the current study in their large, multilevel classes to assist students with their written assignments. The findings of this study show that teachers are not able to cover all different main and sub-skills to help students understand their strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, the feedback that students receive in large classes, both from their teacher and from their peers, is limited and very general.

**Smaller Class Size to Develop Effective Teaching**

The findings of this study indicate that all participants agreed upon the effects of class size on the teaching and learning outcomes in the language teaching classrooms. According to the participants of this study, the smaller a language class, the more effective teaching can be from different aspects. In other words, a language class with 20 to 25 students is an ideal class to cover students’ needs, interests, strengths, and weaknesses.
For example, for Asma, a class with 20 to 25 students is considered to be an ideal class where she can offer effective teaching. She believes in a small class she is able to cover her multilevel students’ needs, use appropriate teaching materials, design and bring new activities to the class, implement and practice a variety of suitable methods and do more interactive based activities. This correlates with the Schanzenbach’s (2014) summary of the academic literature which emphasizes a small class size positively impacts the teaching outcomes. It allows teachers to employ a variety of activities, monitor students’ progress, re-teach using alternative strategies when students do not comprehend the concepts and maintain effective interactions with students.

According to Bahar, teaching in a small class provides ample opportunities to be considerate of elements that contribute to teaching effectively. These significant elements from Bahar’s perspectives include reaching students’ specific needs and wants, knowing them by their names, understanding their emotions and feelings and acknowledging them as individual beings with regard to their differences, backgrounds, and experiences. All these elements are achieved through teacher-student interactions, which sadly are not accessible in large classes. Bahar’s perspective in regard to the importance of teacher-student interactions correlates with Komarraju et al. (2010) that “Student-faculty interactions can be crucial in developing students’ academic self-concept and enhancing their motivation and achievement” (p. 332).

For Mohammad, time management is crucial in implementing student-centered activities in a class. In other words, he believes that doing group work activities to maximize students’ engagement in a large class require more time to manage. Therefore, smaller language classes, 20 to 25 students, can be student-centered because separating students into groups does not require much time and effort. Mohammad’s view of class size and its limitations goes along with Bamba’s (2012) literature review findings that the class size significantly influences the
classroom practices; specifically, the large class size can be challenging for teachers. These challenges include teaching time, time spent with individual students, group and whole class context, as well as instructional activities, amount of teacher-student interactions, and equal attention from the teacher to the students.

Furthermore, large class size becomes a more challenging issue in the countries where mixed-gender/ co-education in the secondary school is not common. In other words, male and female students study in separate schools, and girls hardly have interactions with boys outside the home. Therefore, at the university where the classes are mixed gender, and girls and boys sit on the two different sides of the classroom, socialization into coeducation after 12 years of single-sex education becomes an issue particularly in a large class setting. Especially, it applies to girls because they do not feel comfortable to be grouped with boys. According to Asma, she encountered this issue when she groups girls and boys together; boys dominate the discussions and girls are quiet. Similarly, Bahar pointed out:

It is better to have mixed gender, because each gender has a kind of book, different experiences from the other gender mostly in our society so if they sit in mixed groups I prefer that, but because I faced with this situation that students especially girls don’t like it, it causes tension, if I mixed them I want them to do the activity, they obviously feel something bad, so I try to avoid that feeling by having separate gendered based groups.
(Interview, May 2017)

Asma and Bahar’s perspectives reveal the importance of student-student interactions to develop a feeling of understanding between them and reduce the fear from an opposite gender. However, student-student interactions in large classes, especially considering the way they sit, on two different sides of the class, is not easy to manage because of the existing cultural practices.
For instance, girls who spend most of their time at home and hardly interact with boys outside the home when attending a class consists of a big number of male students, they prefer to stay quiet and it indirectly provide the opportunities for the boys to dominate the class.

**Teachers Becoming More Effective with Teaching Experience**

Participants discussed the effects of teaching experience on offering quality teaching in a large classroom from different perspectives. However, they all believe that more teaching experience can positively affect teaching in large classes. According to the participants, teaching in large classes and struggling with the challenges makes them seek coping strategies. Therefore, the more a teacher works in large classes, the more she knows the challenging and problematic areas. This helps a teacher to be equipped to reduce the challenges and cope with them.

For example, three participants designed and published their own textbooks considering the needs and demands of large classes in their teaching context. This decision to develop their own teaching materials resulted from years of teaching large classes and struggling with the lack of level and context appropriate teaching materials. Similarly, the teachers’ experience can facilitate the adaptation of teaching materials and identifying students’ levels of language proficiency. For instance, Bahar mentioned that due to the load of work and responsibility of teaching several large classes, she is not able to develop teaching materials for all of her classes each year. Therefore, she reflects on her classes, identifies the weaknesses and the areas where she needs to develop, and then she adapts her developed teaching materials for her new classes.

For Mohammad, the more he gains experience with teaching large classes, the easier it is to employ initial assessment of his students’ levels of language proficiency and their needs. Observation is the most common, effective and practical strategy for Mohammad, through which he gets an overall understanding of his class, and he believes that this becomes easier with
teaching experience. He noted, “Experiences of teaching in large classes can help teacher to get an idea of students’ level through observation in the first few sessions of the semester” (Interview, June 2017). Similarly, Asma, who believes her teaching experience was not enough to reach each individual’s needs stated:

With multilevel it is sometimes impossible to figure out what is the learning style what is the learners styles what do they prefer in each class, how do they learn better, sometimes it is totally impossible to consider each individual specific context that I felt that way, maybe it was because of lack of experience or something, but I felt it was something totally… I will never imagine doing that considering that many students, that different levels that I had in a classroom. (Interview, June 2017)

Furthermore, Asma perceives her everyday teaching experience as significant in offering quality and effective teaching. She noted:

Like every day as a teacher you experience something new, there is a challenge for you to stand in front of a large multilevel class every single day, the problem with ESP classes are that you see them only once a week for like less than two hours, having materials and going there standing in front of them itself is a challenge I feel that, everyday something new I learn from experience. (Interview, June 2017)

Teaching experiences (the more a teacher teaches) impact teaching effectiveness, especially with large, multilevel classes where one needs to be equipped to overcome challenging situations.

**Integrating Technologies as Appropriate and Available to Facilitate Effective Teaching**

The findings of this study indicate that integrating technologies into language classrooms positively affects the quality of teaching. However, the challenging aspect is lack of sufficient resources to make integration of technologies into classrooms possible at the Afghan Public
Participants mentioned that they all use their own laptops in their classes. If an issue occurs with their personal laptops, there is not a replacement at the moment to get the problem fixed. Moreover, not all the classrooms are equipped with projectors. There is no access to the internet inside the classrooms, according to the participants. Narges pointed out:

It depends, for example, in the computer science we have technological devices like projectors, but still, we do not have some computers for the teachers to use, so teachers use their own or private computers. So, if my private computer gets any issue or problem there is no extra computer that I can use to connect to the projector and use it in my classrooms. In literature faculty English department, we have this problem that not always the projector works no access to the internet in the classes to search. (Interview, July 2017)

Bahar mentioned that she finds activities that are suitable to implement in large classes, but to implement those activities she needs access to the internet and a computer which her classes lack, so she has no choice but to avoid them. She mentioned:

I try to use less technology because we do not have access to that technology, I love to use technology in my classes, but because of that situation we have less access to technology, I always find something which is technology based but then I realize how can I do this without technology. (Interview, May 2017)

Furthermore, Narges believes that integrating technologies and using databases can prevent students from committing plagiarism. For a teacher of a large class, where a large number of students submit hard copies of their papers, detecting plagiarism without having access to a database is a difficult task. Narges discussed the situation she encountered in one of her classes when she puts students’ assignments into a plagiarism detecting program, she realized
that students copied and pasted the original work, so she graded them zero. Students learned about this and started copying their friends from the previous years because they knew that the papers from their friends were not added to any databases. Narges discussed:

…I put students’ papers into that software and I found the plagiarism parts and I gave for example zero marks, later when students realized that I found the copied parts then they started copying students from other classes. See I was not able to find these research papers; therefore, students were able to easily copy and paste. So, if we had databases we would have saved the papers online which prevented plagiarism. (Interview, July 2017)

There is a vast body of literature supporting the integration of technologies into the classroom, to name a few, (Hong, 2010; Miller, 2013; Prihatin, 2012; Rodriguez, 2002; Saleh, 2014). Nelson’s (2001) review of literature discusses that incorporating technologies into the classroom helps teachers to enhance the learning environment, improve the teaching and learning experience, and also simulate what learners will encounter in the workplace. Similarly, Li (2005) emphasizes on the significant role of incorporating technology into the classroom: “The best way to learn a language is in interactive, authentic environments. Computer technologies and the internet are powerful tools for assisting these approaches to language teaching” (p. 39).

Integrating technologies into the language classrooms can facilitate the process of teaching and maximize the effectiveness of teaching and learning.

The following section discusses the study’s limitations, further research directions, and implications as well as a final reflection.

**Limitations of the Study**

There are several limitations associated with the implementation of the current study. First, interviews with four ELTs of the Afghan Public University constitute the only primary
source of data. I was not able to observe the classes to collect data from the actual context of participants’ classrooms. Secondly, although gender was not a targeted variable in the current study, the initial plan was to have two male and two female participants. Unfortunately, I was not able to secure this due to difficulties contacting participants, so there were three females and one male participant. Thirdly, I found investigating both challenges and teachers’ coping strategies in large classes to be broad topics to cover in-depth in a single study. Therefore, focusing on certain aspects of teaching large classes would lead to a more in-depth research study. Finally, the language used to develop the research questions could have been more direct and precise. For instance, the term “perception” used in the research questions is a complex socio-construct concept with a variety of complicated aspects associated with it. With that being said, it is difficult to comprehensively reach people’s perceptions in connection to their experiences and measure the results precisely, it is particularly because of the complex ways that perception itself happens.

Further Research Directions

The current study addresses one of the many issues related to the language teaching in Afghanistan that has not been explored yet. Specifically, teaching large, multilevel, under-resourced classes, as discussed previously in this paper, is getting more serious due to the high level of applicants and new enrollees at the Afghan Universities. Unfortunately, compared to the increased level of applicants and new enrollees each year, the resources, including teachers and instructional materials, are not sufficient.

The coping strategies and the emerging themes identified in this study can help and support new teachers faced with large, multilevel classes. However, each of these coping
strategies could be further explored in greater detail through both research and practice, most possibly, employing different research designs and methods.

This study attempted to explore the challenges of teaching large classes, as well as the instructors’ coping strategies at an Afghan Public University through a qualitative exploratory study. A similar topic can be studied through the perspectives of students who experienced studying in large, multilevel classes through a similar or a different research design.

Moreover, the current study was limited to four participants from the same institution, the Afghan Public University. A similar study can be conducted with more participants from different institutions across the country following quantitative or a mixed-method approach so that the results can be generalized over a wider context.

Furthermore, the findings of the current study can be used to conduct a follow-up research study on large class teaching through connecting each participants’ narrative to his/her life history as a student growing up in Afghan context.

As I discussed under the limitations of the study, there are so many issues associated with teaching and learning in large, multilevel classes, which makes a single study challenging to cover them all in depth. Therefore, to be able to do a more in-depth study, one could investigate a similar topic considering a narrower aspect of teaching English in large, multilevel classes.

**Implications for Teaching and Administration in Higher Education**

The current study’s findings reveal some implications for teaching and administrations in higher education overall. Specifically, the implications of the study that address the issues that require the attention of the administrations in higher education is discussed.
Implications for Teaching

There are plenty of challenges associated with teaching large, multilevel classes that require a teacher to be equipped and ready to cope with them. Otherwise, teaching in a large, multilevel class can become more challenging. There are certain areas that challenges can be predicted such as classroom management and instructional related issues. However, there are unpredictable challenges too, especially when students bring different backgrounds and perspectives into the classroom. Furthermore, in the areas where the challenges can be predictable, the teacher needs to carefully decide on choosing coping strategies. The current study’s findings showed that the existence of teaching resources, sociocultural sensitivities and students’ backgrounds are among the issues that one needs to be mindful of in counteracting the challenges of teaching large classes. For example, the importance of selecting teaching materials to be locally and culturally acceptable discussed by the participants. Similarly, student-student interactions in terms of mixed-gender and separate-gender, due to the societal and traditional treatments that girls and boys hardly interact together both inside and outside the classroom, was discussed too. So, a teacher should be cautious when implementing interactive-based tasks and activities.

Moreover, the existence of resources is another concern in large classes. According to the participants, they believe that integration of technologies positively affects their teaching, but in regard to the availability of resources, they do not have this choice to incorporate technologies into their classes. For example, Bahar mentioned that she finds activities that fit a large class well, but she needs technological tools and access to the internet to practice them in her classrooms, so she has to skip over those activities and rely on something that she can provide the needed materials.
Similarly, Narges shared one of the incidents she encountered in one of her large classrooms where she caught students committing plagiarism, but once students realized that, they began copying students from the previous years because those papers were not added to any database to identify plagiarism.

Therefore, the teachers of large classes need to be informed about the challenges of teaching large, multilevel classes to be able to control them, minimize them and prevent them to its possible extent. Furthermore, being aware of the challenges of large, multilevel classes and affective sociocultural factors help to seek more practical coping strategies.

**Implications for Administrations in Higher Education**

The current study’s findings reveal a series of issues that require attention and actions from higher education administrators, especially those at the institutions with large, multilevel classes:

1. Providing sufficient resources: large classes require more resources to be effective.

   The higher education administration is the agency that is responsible for providing the specific resources needed in large classrooms. To discuss this issue considering the Afghan context, according to the participants, they need equipped classrooms with technological tools, access to internet and databases, and enough papers and copying/printing machines to teach effectively. Moreover, not all the classes are equipped with movable chairs, so that the teachers can do group work activities. It should be mentioned that the resources need to be improved when the number of applicants and new enrollees increases. Therefore, the higher education administrators should consider investing in the needed teaching materials to help teachers of large classes in particular to maximize the teaching effectiveness.
2. Teachers need the administration’s support and cooperation: teaching a crowded multilevel class requires more preparation from planning a lesson to its implementation. According to Narges, she teaches several large classes which put enormous responsibilities on her. In order to contribute to the effectiveness of teaching, teachers should not be assigned to teach several crowded classes.

3. Conducting practical and contextualized teacher training programs: teachers should be trained on how to use their available resources to be effective in teaching large classes. A teacher who does not have access to a class equipped with movable chairs (This means there are classes where chairs are installed in rows) cannot do group work. Furthermore, training a teacher on how to incorporate technologies into his/her classrooms does not seem helpful when he/she does not have access to technological tools in her teaching context. Instead, he/she needs to know how to teach effectively in an under-resourced context. Narges noted that she attended programs where she has been trained to integrate technologies into her classrooms, but in fact, she does not have access to such tools. She pointed out:

   We study the way we can integrate technology into our classrooms. For example, asking students to use the social media they access and so to speak in the classes, but when it comes to practicing it we do not have computers we do not internet of course, the classes are most of the time teacher-centered. (Interview, June 2017)

With that said, teachers need to be trained on how to be effective in large classes using the resources that are available in their teaching context.

4. Limiting class sizes: The findings show that there are language classes made up of 100 plus students each which makes the process of teaching and learning challenging.
Moreover, the interviewees stated that they teach several large classes, three and more, which adds to the workload and decreases the teaching efficiency. The class sizes need to be limited to smaller numbers to help teachers teach effectively.

**A Final Reflection**

Teaching in difficult conditions and struggling with the challenges in my classes, especially in my large, multilevel classes, has always made me to think of seeking effective ways to cope with the challenges in order to offer quality teaching. Seeking practical solutions to the challenges that I have encountered resulted from reflections on my teaching in connection to the existing opportunities and challenges.

Entering the TESOL field and specifically, my journey in the MATESOL program at Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP), opened my eyes to a variety of issues related to language teaching, particularly English language teaching worldwide. The more I got to know about English language education in different contexts worldwide, I realized that there are plenty of topics and issues in connection to the English language education in the Afghan context that need to be studied.

Conducting the current study on a topic that I could relate to as my first formal research study was a huge learning experience from different perspectives. First, conducting the current qualitative study made me better realize that things seem to be easy when we learn about them. However, applications of concepts that one learns in theory bring challenges that a class cannot teach. For example, it is not difficult to critique and discuss the weaknesses of a paper, but when it comes to conducting a study, one could realize how difficult it is to present an acceptable work. This was what I experienced during this study. I realized that research is such a broad field that the more you get into, the more you feel you need to know.
Second, learning about teaching in general and teaching large classrooms in particular in other contexts, such as in Pakistan, the Ivory Coast, and Egypt and comparing them to my teaching context, Afghanistan, helped me to understand that there are challenges associated with teaching large classrooms everywhere that large class teaching is common. The findings of this study revealed that the nature of the challenges and the sources of the challenges vary from one context to another, which might require different treatments and strategies.

Third, the study participants’ reported experiences with teaching large, multilevel classes at the Afghan Public University showed that teaching large classes is stressful, demanding, and challenging. The ELT interviewees’ narrated perspectives, understandings of their large classes, and their counteracting strategies revealed certain issues that I personally found important to know as a teacher teaching large classes in the Afghan context.
References


Galletta, A. (2013). *Mastering the semi-structured interview and beyond: From research design to analysis and publication*. NYU Press.


Appendix A

IRB Approval

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
School of Graduate Studies and Research
Stright Hall, Room 113
210 South Tenth Street
Indiana, Pennsylvania 15705-1048

March 24, 2017

Kawita Sarwari
Dept of English

Dear Ms. Sarwari:

Your proposed research project, “Effective Teaching of English in Large Multilevel Classes at Herat University, Afghanistan,” (Log No. 17-084) has been reviewed by the IRB and is approved. In accordance with 45CFR46.101 and IUP Policy, your project is exempt from continuing review. This approval does not supersede or obviate compliance with any other University requirements, including, but not limited to, enrollment, degree completion deadlines, topic approval, and conduct of university-affiliated activities.

You should read all of this letter, as it contains important information about conducting your study.

Now that your project has been approved by the IRB, there are elements of the Federal Regulations to which you must attend. IUP adheres to these regulations strictly:

1. You must conduct your study exactly as it was approved by the IRB.

2. Any additions or changes in procedures must be approved by the IRB before they are implemented.

3. You must notify the IRB promptly of any events that affect the safety or well-being of subjects.

4. You must notify the IRB promptly of any modifications of your study or other responses that are necessitated by any events reported in items 2 or 3.

The IRB may review or audit your project at random or for cause. In accordance with IUP Policy and Federal Regulation (45CFR46.113), the Board may suspend or terminate your project if your project has not been conducted as approved or if other difficulties are detected.

Although your human subjects review process is complete, the School of Graduate Studies and Research requires submission and approval of a Research Topic Approval Form (RTAF) before you can begin your research. If you have not
yet submitted your RTAF, the form can be found at

While not under the purview of the IRB, researchers are responsible for adhering
to US copyright law when using existing scales, survey items, or other works in
the conduct of research. Information regarding copyright law and compliance at
IUP, including links to sample permission request letters, can be found at

I wish you success as you pursue this important endeavor.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Roberts, Ph.D.
Chairperson, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Professor of Criminology

JLR:jeb

Cc: Dr. Gloria Park, Thesis Advisor
    Ms. Brenda Boal, Secretary
Appendix B

RTAF Approval

May 14, 2017

Kawita Sarwari
1300 Oakland Avenue #213
Indiana, PA 15701

Dear Ms. Sarwari:

I have reviewed your Research Topic Approval Form and approved it.

Based on the information you have provided on your RTAF, your anticipated graduation date is the earlier of May 2018 or your time-to-degree deadline. This means that if your program requires a defense, you must defend by no later than April 1, 2018 and all necessary documents are due by this date. A description of the required documents can be accessed at http://www.iup.edu/page.aspx?id=116439. Your thesis must be submitted to the School of Graduate Studies & Research by April 15, 2018 if you desire to graduate by your anticipated date. You must apply for graduation by May 1, 2018. For deadlines for subsequent graduation dates, please access http://www.iup.edu/page.aspx?id=166663.


Finally, if you change your topic, the scope or methodology of your project, or your committee, a new Research Topic Approval Form must be completed. I wish you well and hope you find this experience to be rewarding.

Sincerely,

Hillary E. Creely, J.D., Ph.D.
Assistant Dean for Research

X: Dr. Yaw Asamoah, Dean
   Dr. Curtis Porter, Graduate Coordinator
   Dr. Matthew Vetter, Thesis Committee Chairperson

HEC/bb
Appendix C
Informed Consent Form

Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Title: Effective Teaching of English in Large Multilevel Under-Resourced Classes at an Afghan Public University
Investigator: Kawita Sarwari
Thesis Chair: Dr. Matthew A. Vetter, Assistant Professor of English

You are invited to participate in a research study on the effective teaching of English in large multilevel under-resourced classes at Herat University, Afghanistan. The following information is provided in order to help you to make an informed decision whether or not to participate. You are eligible to participate because you are a current teaching faculty at the English Department, Herat University with 3-5 years of teaching experience at large multilevel under-resourced classes.

The current study aims to explore how large class size influences teaching and learning outcomes in general. Specifically, this study focuses on the perceived challenges that English language teachers at Herat University may encounter in large, multi-level under-resourced classes. Furthermore, my study aims to understand the possible strategies employed in counteracting the perceived challenges of teaching and learning in large multi-level classes. You will be interviewed through Skype at a convenient time and setting. The interview will be recorded for the purpose of data collection. All data will be securely saved in a pass-coded folder for three years in compliance with federal regulations. Answering the questions takes approximately 30-40 minutes.

Your participation in this study is absolutely voluntary. There are no direct benefits such as financial benefits for you. You may receive a PDF copy of the thesis upon its completion. If you decide to participate, all information provided by you will remain confidential and will be used only for the purposes of this study. There are no risks associated with participating in this study. It should be mentioned that you can withdraw at any point by emailing the research investigator. In this case, all the gathered information from you will be destroyed. If you are willing to participate in this study, you will be sent a copy of the consent form to sign and send it back to the researcher. Should you have any question, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher using the provided contact information.
Sincerely yours,

**Research Investigator:**
Kawita Sarwari  
MA TESOL Candidate  
English Department  
Indiana University of Pennsylvania  
Email. K.sarwari@iup.edu

**Thesis Advisor:**
Dr. Matthew A. Vetter  
Assistant Professor of English  
English Department  
Indiana University of Pennsylvania  
Email: matthew.vetter@iup.edu

This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (Phone: 724/357-7730).
VOLUNTARY CONSENT FORM:

I have read and understand the information on the form and I consent to volunteer to be a subject in this study. I understand that my responses are completely confidential and that I have the right to withdraw at any time. I have received an unsigned copy of this informed Consent Form to keep in my possession.

Name (PLEASE PRINT) ________________________________________________________________

Signature __________________________________________________________________________

Date ______________________________________________________________________________

Phone number or location where you can be reached _________________________________

Best days and times to reach you ______________________________________________________

I certify that I have explained to the above individual the nature and purpose, the potential benefits, and possible risks associated with participating in this research study, have answered any questions that have been raised, and have witness the above signature.

_________________________________  _________________________________
Date                              Researcher’s Signature
Appendix D

Individual Interview Protocol

Brief Description: The following open-ended questions are for the current interview on the study “Effective Teaching of English in Large Multilevel Under-Resourced Classes at an Afghan Public University”. There might be some follow-up questions for more clarifications.

1. Would you please share with me your teaching experiences?
   a. How many years of teaching experience do you have?
   b. What is the level of your students?
   c. How many students are there in your classes, in general?
   d. Do you consider your classes small or large? Why?
   e. What is the ideal number of students in a class in your point of view?
   f. How does the size of your classes influence how students learn and how you teach?

2. How do you find your experience of teaching large, multilevel classes?
   a. What do you think of teaching large, multilevel, under-resourced classes?
   b. Can you share an incident related to class size you faced in teaching a large class?

3. How do you cope with the challenges in your large classes?
   a. What are the strategies you apply to balance the teaching materials in multilevel, large classes?
   b. What are the strategies you apply to maximize students’ engagement in large, multilevel classes?
   c. Can you share a story of a success you had with a large class?