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## **UNVEILING THE DYNAMICS: EXPLORING CHALLENGES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING ACROSS VARIED CLASSROOM SIZES IN ACEH, INDONESIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This research delves into the nuanced landscape of English Language Teaching (ELT) in Aceh, Indonesia, focusing on the distinctive challenges faced by educators in classrooms characterized by divergent sizes—ranging from larger classes with approximately 35 students to smaller, more intimate settings accommodating around 5 students. The study aims to uncover the multifaceted difficulties encountered by teachers in each context, exploring the impact of class size on instructional methods, student-teacher interactions, and overall learning outcomes. Through a combination of qualitative interviews, classroom observations, and teacher surveys, the research seeks to identify common obstacles as well as unique issues associated with both large and small class environments. By gaining insights into these challenges, the study aspires to inform targeted strategies and recommendations for enhancing the quality of English language education in Aceh, fostering more effective teaching practices and improving the educational experience for both teachers and students in diverse classroom settings.

***Keywords:*** *Challenges, Classroom Size, English Language Teaching.*

## INTRODUCTION

English Language Teaching (ELT) plays a pivotal role in shaping linguistic competencies and fostering global communication skills. In the diverse educational landscape of Aceh, Indonesia, teachers grapple with a spectrum of challenges that extend beyond the conventional dynamics of pedagogy. One critical aspect influencing the teaching and learning experience is the size of the classroom (Doğan et al., 2023; Francis & Barnett, 2019; Funkhouser, 2009; Garandau et al., 2019; Hossain & Rezwana, 2023; Ijeoma & Ngozi, 2020; Jung et al., 2024; Permatasari & Artha, 2023; Tanner, 2009; Ureña et al., 2022), with variations ranging from larger cohorts of approximately 35 students to more intimate settings accommodating around 5 students. The impact of classroom size on the efficacy of English language instruction remains an underexplored facet of pedagogical research in the local context.

This research endeavors to unravel the intricacies of English Language Teaching in Aceh by delving into the unique challenges confronted by educators across different classroom sizes. The rationale behind this investigation is rooted in the understanding that class size can significantly influence teaching methodologies (Ureña et al., 2022), the quality of student-teacher interactions (Adi Badiozaman et al., 2022; Hammad et al., 2022; Nayar & Koul, 2020; Ndethiu et al., 2017; Santhosh et al., 2023), and ultimately, the learning outcomes achieved by students (Doğan et al., 2023; Ndethiu et al., 2017). By shedding light on the distinctive hurdles faced in both larger and smaller class settings, this study seeks to contribute valuable insights to the ongoing discourse on optimizing English language education in Aceh.

As we embark on this exploration, the research aims to employ a comprehensive approach, integrating qualitative methodologies such as in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and teacher surveys. Through these methods, we aspire to not only identify the common obstacles experienced by English language teachers but also to discern the nuanced difficulties specific to each classroom size. The findings of this research are anticipated to inform targeted strategies and recommendations for improving the quality of English language education in Aceh, fostering an environment that caters to the diverse needs of both teachers and students across varied classroom sizes.

## **METHODS**

By employing this mixed-methods approach, the study aims to provide a holistic perspective on the challenges encountered by English language teachers in Aceh, shedding light on the nuances associated with varying classroom sizes and contributing valuable insights to the field of English Language Teaching. The study will involve English language teachers across various educational institutions in Aceh, Indonesia. Stratified purposive sampling will be employed to ensure representation from both larger classrooms (approximately 35 students) and smaller classrooms (around 5 students). Participants will be selected based on their teaching experience, qualifications, and willingness to engage in the research process.

In-depth semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and a structured survey will be administered to a larger sample of English language teachers to gather quantitative and quantitative data on perceived challenges related to class size. The survey will include Likert-scale questions and open-ended prompts, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of trends and variations.

Qualitative data from interviews and observations will be thematically analyzed using a coding system to identify patterns, recurring themes, and unique challenges associated with different classroom sizes. Quantitative data from surveys will be analyzed using statistical tools to discern correlations and trends. Triangulation of qualitative and quantitative findings will provide a comprehensive understanding of the difficulties faced by English language teachers in various classroom settings.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Result**

The research included an eclectic cohort of English language educators drawn from various schools in the Aceh region, offering a comprehensive representation of the local educational landscape. The participants were strategically selected to ensure diversity in classroom sizes, with some instructors managing larger groups comprising approximately 35 students, while others navigated the dynamics of more intimate settings accommodating around 5 students. This diverse group of educators brought a wealth of experience, varying qualifications, and distinct institutional backgrounds to the

study, enriching the research with a multifaceted perspective on the challenges faced by English language teachers in Aceh. The inclusion of specific school names, such as Fatih Bilingual School, Banda Aceh, SMK Negeri 1 Masjid Raya, Aceh Besar, SMA Negeri 2 Lhoknga, Aceh Besar, and SMA Negeri 1 Langsa. further contextualizes the study within the unique educational environments of the region.

Combining the findings from both qualitative and quantitative analyses, the results can be illustrated in the table as follows.

Table 1. *The Findings of both qualitative and quantitative analyses.*

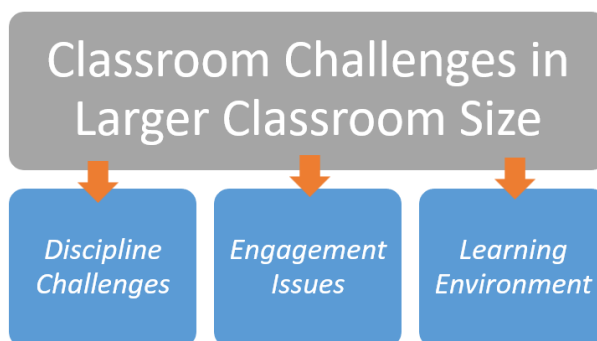
Qualitative Findings		Quantitative Findings	
Larger Classroom	Smaller Classroom	Larger Classroom	Smaller Classroom
Classroom Management - Discipline - Enggaement Issues - Learning Envinroment	Limited diversity of Perspective - Fosteration of Interaction - Balancing Intimacy and Diversity	Utilization of Collaborative Learning Strategies in Larger Classrooms	Implementation of Individualized Teaching Strategies in Smaller Classrooms
Limited Individualized Attention	Interaction Intensity		

## A. Result of the Qualitative Analysis

### 1. Challenges in Larger Classrooms

#### a. Classroom management

In larger classrooms with around 35 students, teachers encountered difficulties related to classroom management, specifically in maintaining discipline and sustaining high levels of student engagement. The sheer size of the group contributed to an increased complexity in orchestrating and maintaining order within the learning environment. below is the chart to illustrate the classroom management sub challenges.



**Chart 1.** *Classroom Management Challenges in Larger Classroom setting.*

Managing student behavior and ensuring a conducive learning atmosphere became more intricate due to the larger number of students. Teachers reported challenges in promptly addressing disruptive behavior or maintaining a consistent level of discipline throughout the class. The scope of supervision necessary in a larger group presented logistical hurdles that impacted the immediate response to behavioral issues.

While, the dynamics of engagement were also affected by the challenge of capturing and sustaining the attention of a larger audience. Teachers noted that it was more demanding to keep all students actively involved in the lesson, leading to potential disengagement or distractions. This difficulty was particularly pronounced during group activities or discussions, where ensuring equal participation and contributions from all students became a noteworthy concern.

Moreover, the aforementioned challenges collectively contributed to an altered learning environment. The classroom dynamics in larger groups were marked by a higher likelihood of disruptions, a potential decrease in individual student participation, and an overall sense of complexity in managing the diverse needs of a larger student body. This, in turn, had implications for the quality of the learning experience and the effectiveness of the instructional process.

In summary, the challenge of maintaining discipline and sustaining engagement in larger classrooms highlights the need for strategic classroom management techniques and pedagogical approaches that can effectively

address the unique dynamics of larger student cohorts in English language teaching contexts.

#### b. Limited individualized attention

In larger classrooms consisting of approximately 35 students, teachers conveyed challenges associated with offering personalized attention to individual students. The size of the class created an environment where it was inherently more difficult for educators to cater to the unique learning needs of each student. With a larger student-to-teacher ratio, instructors found it challenging to engage with students on an individual basis during class time. Consequently, this limitation had repercussions on the quality of feedback and support that could be provided to each student.

The sheer number of students in these larger classrooms posed a logistical hurdle, making it impractical for teachers to address every student's queries, concerns, or learning pace during regular class sessions. As a result, the interactive and personalized aspects of teaching were compromised, impacting the overall effectiveness of feedback mechanisms and the level of support that could be individually extended to students. This challenge underscores the need for innovative instructional strategies and support structures to enhance the educational experience in larger English language classrooms.

## 2. Challenges in Smaller Classrooms

In smaller classrooms, typically accommodating around 5 students, teachers encountered specific challenges related to the diversity of perspectives and interactions among students. The intimate nature of these settings, while fostering closer teacher-student relationships, presented a distinctive set of dynamics that influenced the variety of viewpoints and interactions within the learning environment.

#### a. *Limited Diversity of Perspectives*

Teachers in smaller classrooms observed that the reduced number of students led to a more homogenous group in terms of perspectives, experiences, and backgrounds. This limited pool of perspectives could impact the breadth and depth of discussions, potentially hindering the exposure of students to a

diverse range of ideas. The closeness of the learning community, while beneficial in many aspects, could inadvertently lead to a narrower spectrum of viewpoints compared to larger and more diverse groups.

The smaller size of the class presented challenges in facilitating a vibrant and dynamic exchange of ideas among students. Teachers found that, in some instances, there was a tendency for interactions to become repetitive or for a dominant perspective to emerge without the counterbalance of diverse voices. This posed challenges in cultivating a rich and varied learning environment that encourages critical thinking and broadens students' perspectives.

While the smaller class size promoted a closer and more personalized learning experience, it required a delicate balance to ensure that this intimacy did not inadvertently limit the exposure of students to a diverse set of viewpoints. Teachers grappled with finding strategies to encourage students to bring forward their unique perspectives and engage in discussions that reflect a broader range of experiences.

In essence, the challenge in fostering a diverse range of perspectives in smaller classrooms underscores the need for intentional strategies that balance the benefits of intimacy with the promotion of varied viewpoints. This includes designing activities, discussions, and assignments that actively encourage students to share their unique perspectives, fostering a more inclusive and diverse learning environment

#### *b. Intensity of interactions*

In smaller classrooms, where the number of students typically hovers around 5, teachers highlighted a unique challenge related to the intensity of interactions among students. While the smaller class size facilitated closer teacher-student relationships, it also introduced a dynamic where the depth and intensity of interactions among students could become a noteworthy aspect of the learning environment.

In the intimate setting of a smaller classroom, teachers observed that interactions among students tended to be more intense and personal. The reduced number of participants allowed for a more profound exploration of

ideas and perspectives, fostering an environment where students felt a greater sense of individual connection and responsibility within the group.

However, this heightened intensity in interactions posed challenges for teachers in terms of managing the emotional and personal aspects of student relationships. Teachers noted instances where strong opinions or personal connections could lead to more emotionally charged discussions, potentially impacting the overall classroom atmosphere. Balancing the positive aspects of intense interactions with the need for a respectful and inclusive learning environment became a crucial consideration.

The intensity of interactions also influenced the need for individualized attention from the teacher. While the smaller class size allowed for more personalized support, it also required teachers to navigate and manage the varying intensities of student engagement. Some students might thrive in such an environment, while others might find the intensity challenging, necessitating tailored strategies to meet individual needs.

In summary, the intensity of interactions in smaller classrooms brings both advantages and challenges. While it creates a conducive environment for profound discussions and individual connections, teachers need to carefully navigate the dynamics to ensure a positive and inclusive learning experience for all students. This underscores the importance of strategies that harness the positive aspects of intensity while mitigating potential challenges in smaller English language teaching settings.

## B. Result of the Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative phase of the research involved administering surveys to English language teachers in both larger classrooms (approximately 35 students) and smaller classrooms (around 5 students) across various schools in Aceh. The survey aimed to gauge teachers' perceptions of challenges in their respective classroom sizes.

Survey responses unveiled distinct patterns in the perceived challenges identified by teachers in different class settings. Teachers in larger classrooms were more likely to highlight issues related to classroom management. This encompasses difficulties in maintaining discipline, handling disruptions, and creating a conducive learning atmosphere in the context of a larger group. On

the other hand, teachers in smaller classrooms placed greater emphasis on challenges associated with catering to diverse learning needs. This refers to the complexities arising from addressing the unique educational requirements and preferences of each student in a more intimate class setting.

The survey also probed into the adaptations that English language teachers made in their teaching strategies based on the size of their classrooms.

#### 1. Teachers in Larger Classrooms (Utilization of Collaborative Learning Strategies in Larger Classrooms)

Teachers managing larger classrooms indicated a proclivity towards the implementation of group activities. Recognizing the need to engage a substantial number of students simultaneously, educators in larger settings leveraged collaborative learning strategies. Group activities, discussions, and projects were employed as mechanisms to promote interaction among students, fostering a sense of community within the larger class.

#### 2. Teachers in Smaller Classrooms (Implementation of Individualized Teaching Strategies in Smaller Classrooms)

Conversely, teachers in smaller classrooms acknowledged a shift in focus towards facilitating more individualized tasks. With the luxury of a smaller student cohort, these educators tailored their teaching strategies to hone in on the specific needs and preferences of each student. Individualized tasks, personalized feedback, and targeted learning activities were employed to capitalize on the advantages of a more intimate learning environment.

In essence, the quantitative findings not only highlighted the divergent perceived challenges but also shed light on the adaptive strategies employed by English language teachers in Aceh based on the size of their classrooms. These insights contribute to a nuanced understanding of how class size influences educators' perspectives and instructional approaches in the context of English Language Teaching.

### Discussion

The study's findings offer a detailed exploration of the complex challenges faced by English language teachers in Aceh, emphasizing the intricate relationship between classroom size and teaching dynamics. The

emphasis on the nuanced impact of classroom size suggests that the challenges extend beyond a simple dichotomy and are influenced by multiple factors within the educational landscape.

Specifically, the study highlights the limitations encountered in larger classes, with a particular focus on the challenge of providing individual attention to each student. This resonates with well-established educational theories, notably Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky's theory posits that optimal learning occurs in the zone where a student's current abilities meet the challenges just beyond their reach, and scaffolded support is provided. In the context of larger classes, the inherent difficulty in offering tailored support and individualized attention can hinder the creation of this optimal learning environment.

The reference to Vygotsky's theory underscores the pivotal role of individualized attention in effective learning. The challenges identified in larger classes, such as limited individual attention, align with the fundamental principles of ZPD, where personalized guidance is crucial for cognitive development and language acquisition.

Moreover, the mention of larger class sizes inherently posing challenges in meeting the unique needs of each student emphasizes the broader implications for optimal cognitive development and language acquisition. In a larger class, the diversity of student needs may be more pronounced, making it challenging for teachers to address the specific requirements of each learner effectively. This, in turn, can hinder the potential for students to progress optimally in their cognitive and linguistic development.

In essence, the study not only unveils challenges but also provides a theoretical lens, drawing on Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, to articulate the educational significance of the identified limitations. It emphasizes the critical role of individualized attention in fostering effective learning environments and aligns these insights with foundational theories in education, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities within English language teaching in Aceh.

The necessity for creative strategies to enhance engagement and manage larger groups effectively is grounded in the principles of contemporary

pedagogical theories, notably constructivism. Constructivism is an educational philosophy that places a strong emphasis on active participation, collaborative learning, and the idea that learners actively construct their knowledge through meaningful interactions with their environment.

In the context of larger classes, where the sheer number of students can present challenges for individualized attention, constructivist approaches become particularly relevant. These approaches prioritize engaging students in active, participatory learning experiences that go beyond traditional lecture-style teaching. The emphasis is on creating an environment that encourages students to construct their understanding of concepts and skills through hands-on activities, discussions, and collaboration with peers.

The strategies mentioned, such as group activities, peer learning, and project-based assignments, align harmoniously with constructivist principles. Group activities provide opportunities for students to collaborate, share ideas, and learn from one another. Peer learning encourages students to actively engage with course content by teaching and learning from their peers, fostering a sense of shared responsibility for the learning process. Project-based assignments, where students work on real-world problems or create tangible outcomes, offer a context for active exploration and application of knowledge.

In larger classes, where personalized attention might be challenging, constructivist strategies promote a more inclusive and interactive learning experience. Students are not passive recipients of information but are actively involved in constructing their understanding, making the learning process more meaningful and impactful. Furthermore, these strategies align with the idea that knowledge is not simply transmitted from the teacher to the student but is actively built by the learners themselves.

Overall, incorporating constructivist principles into teaching strategies for larger classes acknowledges the dynamic nature of learning and recognizes the importance of student engagement and collaboration in the educational process. It offers a pedagogical framework that addresses the challenges posed by larger class sizes by fostering an environment where students can actively participate, collaborate, and construct their knowledge and language skills. On the other hand, the study sheds light on the nuanced difficulties of managing intense interactions in smaller classes. This observation resonates with theories

that emphasize the social aspects of learning, such as Social Learning Theory. In smaller classrooms, where interpersonal relationships are more pronounced, the heightened intensity of interactions may impact the social dynamics of the learning environment. Balancing the closeness of teacher-student relationships with the promotion of diverse perspectives aligns with the socio-cultural theory, emphasizing the importance of social interactions in the learning process and the role of the teacher as a facilitator of both individual and collective learning.

Furthermore, the findings underscore the significance of addressing both individual attention and diversity of perspectives, highlighting the importance of an eclectic approach that draws on multiple theories. Integrating aspects of behaviorism, constructivism, and socio-cultural theories can offer a comprehensive framework for English language teachers in Aceh to navigate the challenges posed by varying classroom sizes. This study contributes not only empirical insights but also provides a theoretical lens through which educators and policymakers can consider the complexities of English Language Teaching in diverse classroom settings.

The influence of class size on teaching strategies stands as a crucial aspect of effective pedagogy, echoing the adaptability inherent in skilled educators. This phenomenon is deeply rooted in pedagogical literature, where the interaction between class size and instructional methods is recognized as a dynamic and evolving process. The dichotomy between larger and smaller classes necessitates nuanced approaches, emphasizing the teacher's ability to tailor strategies for optimal student engagement and learning outcomes.

#### A. Collaborative and Group-Based Activities for Larger Class.

In larger classes, typically comprising around 35 students, the challenge of managing a larger group size prompts educators to employ collaborative and group-based activities. This resonates with collaborative learning theories, particularly the Social Learning Theory. Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory posits that individuals learn not only from direct experiences but also from observing and interacting with others. In the context of larger classes, collaborative activities become instrumental in fostering peer learning. Group discussions, projects, and interactive assignments create environments where students actively engage with diverse perspectives. This collaborative approach not only addresses the logistical challenges of larger classes but also aligns with

educational theories that highlight the importance of social interactions in the learning process.

#### B. Personalized Approach for Smaller Classes

In contrast, smaller classes with approximately 5 students allow for a more personalized approach, emphasizing individual student needs. This aligns with constructivist theories, which emphasize the active role of learners in constructing their knowledge. In smaller settings, teachers have the capacity to tailor their instruction to the unique needs, learning styles, and preferences of each student. This personalized approach involves targeted feedback, individualized tasks, and a heightened focus on the specific language learning requirements of each learner. The smaller class size allows for a deeper understanding of each student's strengths and challenges, creating an environment conducive to more personalized and tailored language instruction.

#### C. Educational Theories in Practice

The adaptability showcased in the shift between collaborative activities in larger classes and personalized approaches in smaller classes reflects the practical application of educational theories. Effective teachers draw inspiration from pedagogical principles such as Social Learning Theory and Constructivism, adapting their strategies to suit the varying dynamics of class sizes. This dynamic approach not only enhances the effectiveness of language instruction but also aligns with broader theories of learning that emphasize the importance of social interactions, collaboration, and individualized approaches in education.

#### D. Implications for English Language Teaching (ELT)

In the realm of English Language Teaching, the impact of class size on teaching strategies holds significant implications. Collaborative activities in larger classes align with communicative language teaching approaches, where interaction and participation are central to language acquisition. In smaller classes, the personalized approach resonates with the emphasis on individualized language support, catering to the diverse needs of language learners.

In conclusion, the interplay between class size and teaching strategies underscores the adaptability of effective teachers. The thoughtful selection and application of instructional methods based on class size not only address logistical challenges but also align with foundational educational theories. This dynamic approach is essential for fostering inclusive, engaging, and effective English language education environments, where the nuances of class size are carefully considered in the pursuit of optimal learning outcomes.

## **CONCLUSION**

In unraveling the intricate dynamics of English Language Teaching (ELT) across different class sizes in Aceh, Indonesia, this study has shed light on the nuanced challenges faced by educators and the adaptive strategies they employ. The impact of class size on teaching strategies underscores the adaptability of effective teachers, drawing from pedagogical theories to tailor their approaches to the unique dynamics of larger and smaller classrooms.

In larger classes, collaborative and group-based activities emerge as essential components of effective pedagogy. These strategies, aligned with social learning theories, harness the power of peer interaction and collective knowledge construction. The challenges of maintaining discipline and fostering engagement in larger groups necessitate creative instructional approaches that resonate with established educational principles.

Conversely, in smaller classes, a more personalized approach becomes paramount, emphasizing the individual needs of each student. This personalized strategy aligns seamlessly with constructivist theories, recognizing learners as active constructors of knowledge. The intensity of interactions in smaller classes, while fostering a deeper sense of connection, requires a delicate balance to ensure a positive and inclusive learning environment.

The findings of this study contribute valuable insights to the optimization of English Language Teaching in Aceh. The discussion on class size as a key factor in instructional planning underscores the importance of tailoring strategies to the specific challenges posed by diverse classroom sizes. As we navigate the landscape of ELT, the study encourages further exploration into

tailored approaches that consider the multifaceted nature of challenges in both larger and smaller class settings.

Educators, policymakers, and stakeholders in Aceh are urged to consider the implications of class size on teaching strategies as they shape the future of English language education. This involves a thoughtful integration of collaborative and personalized approaches, acknowledging the benefits and challenges associated with different class sizes. By embracing this dynamic perspective, the educational community in Aceh can foster a more inclusive and effective environment for English language learners, ensuring that the nuances of class size are not only recognized but strategically addressed in the pursuit of excellence in language education.

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