T. O. Piontkovska

PhD, assistant professor

Pavlo Tychyna Uman State Pedagogical University

ENGLISH TUTORIALS: A VIEW FROM THE INSIDE

Higher education in Portugal is organized as a binary system, with university education oriented towards the provision of solid academic training, combining the efforts and responsibilities of both teaching and research units, whilst polytechnic education concentrates particularly on vocational and advanced technical training that is professionally orientated.

The University of Porto (Portugal) is among the world's oldest organizations.

The article presents our view of the problems and challenges facing the Portuguese Higher Education system (on the basis of the University of Porto).

Our aim is to reveal the relationships between the traditional methods in teaching English and the trend of attending tutorial classes.

The objectives of this article are as follows: 1) to find out the reasons that make teachers use tutorial classes; 2) to see the effectiveness of attending tutorial classes; 3) to distinguish whether this phenomenon is related to the mode of nowadays education system.

Problems faced

The budget cut for education in 2012 was €1.5 billion, and the national investment in education only now stands at 4.4 per cent of GDP, which is clearly not enough to ensure students with quality education. From 2006-2012, while 23,000 teachers reached retirement age, only 396 were hired as replacements [2].

Changes in curriculum have been approved to further cut the education budget. This includes the *enormous increase of class size*. The austerity measures also require

less working hours for teachers in class which consequently leads to lower education quality.

Hayes says there is no quantitative definition of what constitutes a large class, as people's perception of this varies from context to context [3, 1]. In our home University (Uman State Pedagogical University), for example, a class with 20 students may be perceived large at all non-language departments and super large at Foreign Languages Department.

In comparison, in Porto University now it is very common for English teachers to teach a class with more than 40 or even 50 students in groups with specialities: Applied Languages, Languages and International Relations, Languages, Literature and Cultures.

It can be seen that in different context or culture, people have different degrees of tolerance of class size. As Ur concludes, what is relevant to the class considered as large one is how the teacher perceives the class size in the specific situation, regardless of the exact number of the students in it. Therefore large class is one with more students than the teacher prefers to manage and available resources can support, from this point of view, large classes usually are considered to pose insurmountable problems for teachers [4, 56].

There is no consensus when it comes to the effects of class size on students' Learning achievements, but many language teachers hold a negative view on teaching English in large classes. Often can we hear them to say such words as "out of control", "hard to organize class activities" or "impossible to communicate". Kennedy and Kennedy feel that it is difficult to control what happens when the number of group passes a certain number.

Similar worries are also shared by Porto University English teachers who emphasized such main problems associated with teaching in large classes: 1) Control problems (discipline aspects); 2) Lack of individual attentions; 3) Difficulty on evaluation; 4) Learning effectiveness. As we see, these problems can be physical, psychological but to a great extent technical.

It is difficult for teachers to contact with the students sitting at the back and for students to get the individual attention, and it is even impossible to organize dynamic and creative teaching and learning sessions. This also indicates that teachers need more technical strategies in large class. And they do their best providing more chances for students to participate through individual work, pair work, group work and whole class work and organizing cooperative learning activities such as think-pair-share, three-step interview. They are constantly jigsawing to develop students' comprehensive language competence and cooperative skills. But, no matter how hard they try to encourage students to participate, how often they move around during the class or what modern means of teaching they use, they still fail to provide equal chances for 40 – 50 students, to give feedback in time and to mark students' assignments.

Solutions

Changing the traditional teaching method may be one of the solutions. In Porto University English on all levels comprises two different kinds of teaching – traditional English classes and tutorial sessions. The role of both student and teacher is different in each.

Let take a course programme 2013 – 2014 for the students of B2.3 level. The first term lasts 14 weeks; total number of hours - 58. No final exam, no "recurso" exam, no public holidays. The division of hours between types of classes are as follows: 38 hours for group activity (26 h of skills and vocabulary work / 12 h of test practice), 20 h for tutorial sessions (16 h of group tutorials / 4 h of evaluated tutorials).

We should emphasize that at the Faculty of Arts, Porto University the tutorial course can be classified as tutorial groups and evaluated tutorials. For the last type, it is usually obligatory and for the purpose of putting more focus on students academic results.

Tutorial groups are smaller gatherings of students with a tutor (a special group class at the Faculty consists of 16 or more students on different level who are

instructed together). Tutorial groups are formed at the beginning of the academic year and you will be in the same group for the whole year.

Tutorials are more communicatively focused than traditional English classes on the doing of a particular task (e.g. reading a poem, an article, discussing a piece of music or art), and sometimes in their concentration on a particular topic. But the most important difference between common classes and tutorials is that the students do most of the talking in the tutorials – to each other, and to the teacher. Students do nearly all the work of the tutorials.

In Porto University tutorial groups are very course-specific, require advanced enrollment, and generally meet once a week. Regular attendance is required to maintain enrollment. Each session is a minimum of 2 instructional hours per week. Special group classes usually follow a regular schedule.

The ultimate goal of *evaluated tutorials* is to monitor student progress and to ensure that all students are successful in attaining proficiency on state and district standards. Evaluated tutorials are worth one third of overall marks for each year of English.

Unlike many people's suspicion of the benefits of tutorial classes, the survey results indicated how the positive impact of tutorial classes attracted students.

There can be a lot of benefits of having groups within the course. Key among them to our thinking are:

 (1) the capacity to monitor and check grades by group rather than entire cohort (It makes a lot easier to check grades. For example, if we tend to check things class by class in every day work, we may go and sit down with a group and check how the whole group is going. If we have got them grouped within the course we can just call up the relevant grade of that particular group and not have to wait through every single student that is enrolled in every single way in that course);

(2) allocating specific tasks or content to particular groups (facilitating customisation) (it allows you to make a variety of mini courses within the one course. With group mode it would allowed to create targeted activities and content for to

specific traits and specific groups of learners. You can set the tasks that are relevant to you. It's the way to have multiple options within one course);

(3) setting up collaborative tasks or projects to be handled in designated groups (the other useful motive of groups is collaborative projects. When you've got learners together into a group they can actually work on projects together within a course and have access to each other within the group).

Other than that, it can also provide quite a lot of benefits to students such as getting knowledge and having more confidence, as well as providing benefits to the teacher, because students are able to speak English better. In addition, tutorials require all students to participate (even shy or quiet people).

However, it was observed also that tutorial sessions have a lot of problems as well. Among the most important we can mentioned the following:

1). Requires significant investment of resources, especially tutor time.

2). Depends on the facilitation skills of the tutor and so may be variable in quality.

3). Needs to be organized and well managed to allow discussion but to also ensure that the specific learning outcomes for the session are met.

4). May be less effective if all students do not prepare adequately (ensuring students come to class having done their reading or pre-work is a fairly common difficulty, especially in mandatory modules).

So, tutorials can be viewed as a useful assisting tool for teaching students besides the normal class as students' interest in learning will be aroused and students can develop critical thinking instead of just receiving what have been told, by using 2-ways interaction. But, it also appears likely that the success or failure of tutorials is largely dependent on teacher attitudes and group preparation.

RESOURCES

1. Budz J. College English / J. Budz, T. Grabar [Електронний ресурс]. Режим доступу: http://www.jstor.org/stable/376464.

2. Education in crisis [Електронний ресурс]. Режим доступу: http://educationincrisis.net/country-profiles/europe/item/411-portugal.

3. Hayes U. Helping teachers to cope with large classes / U. Hayes // ELT Journal. – 1997. – P. 31–38.

4. Ur P. A Course in Language Teaching / P. Ur. – Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. – 142 p.