



Large Class Assessment

Assessing Large Class

Assessing large class has posed significant limitation on curriculum design. Due to time and resources constraints, teachers often use less time-demanding assessment methods which however, may not always optimize student learning. These constraints are often weighed up with the reliability, the validity and the learning outcomes of the assessment methods. It is important to remember that there is no single effective way to assess large classes. Teachers have to consider the context of their teaching style, background of students and the intended learning outcomes of the course.

Issues of Assessing Large Class

- **Surface learning approach**

Traditionally, teachers rely on time-efficient and exam-based assessment methods for assessing large classes, such as multiple choices and short answer question examinations. These assessments often only assess learning at the lower levels of intellectual complexity. Furthermore, students tend to adopt a surface rote learning approach when preparing these kinds of assessment methods. Higher level learning such as critical thinking and analysis are often not fully assessed.

- **Feedback is often inadequate**

Feedback plays an important role in the learning process of students. Particularly, if students can receive feedback at an early stage of their learning process, this will help them to identify their own problems and improve their learning. However, with a large class, teachers may not have time to give detailed and constructive feedback to every student. Most teachers usually can only afford to give general feedback to their students on written assignments and tests.

- **Inconsistency in marking**

Large class usually consists of a diverse and complex cohort of students. The issues of different perception towards assessments, cultural and educational background, prior knowledge and level of interest to the subject, all pose challenges to the fairness of marking and grading. In addition, with a large class, a number of teachers may involve in the process of marking. Teachers have to take all these into account in order to protect the consistency and fairness in marking and grading, thus clear grading criteria is essential.

- **Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is another challenge in assessing large classes. Some students deliberately cheat in large classes because they think that they are less likely to be identified within a large cohort. In addition, as teachers usually have a heavy workload and tight marking schedule, they do not have enough time to thoroughly check the referencing and even bibliography of the work submitted by their students. To minimize plagiarism, assessment tasks must be well thought out and well-designed.

- **Lack of interaction and engagement**

Students are often not motivated to engage in a large size lecture. When teachers raise questions in large classes, not many students would be willing to respond to them. Students are less likely to interact with teachers because they feel less motivated and tend to hide themselves in a large group. In fact, interacting with



students in class is important for teachers because they can receive immediate feedback from students regarding their quality of teaching.

Tips to address some of the Issues of Assessing Large Class

Diagnostic assessment for early feedback

It is often effective to assess students early in the course on their prior knowledge of the subject, their assessment concept, and their learning expectations, in order to find out any potential problems that may adversely affect student learning. Students receive these early feedbacks so they can identify their weakness earlier and have more time to rectify their mistakes. This would also provide feedback to teachers to adopt more optimized teaching methods or to offer extra support targeted specifically to these students. A short/quick maths test, a 500 words assignment, a MCQ are all possible methods for a quick diagnosis.

General guidelines on assessment and grading criteria for all assessment

General guidelines on assessment including grading structure should be provided and properly explained early in the course. This helps students to understand and be familiarized with the marking criteria and may effectively avoid submission of poor quality work. This can effectively reduce the time for marking because students are clearer about what is expected from their assignments and also enhance the quality of their learning. A quick way for general feedback is to have a standardized grading criteria/rubric for each assessment, so students will know how they are graded.

General guidelines and policy on assessment including grading structure and standardized grading criteria/rubric for each assessment should be provided to all teachers who are involved in marking the assignments. Meetings for marking should be held before the commencement of each semester. In such way, teachers can have opportunities to discuss and agree upon different issues in order to set up a fair and consistent marking guideline for a course. Supplementary sessions for language, mathematics and studying skills etc should be provided for the students who have difficulty in writing, or lack of prior knowledge to the subject.

Model Answers

Provide a list of the most common and typical problems in assignment submissions and examination responses along with explanations and model answers. This helps students to understand the mistakes that were often made by previous students.

Self and Peer assessment

These are good ways to reduce teachers' workload and help students to develop self-reflection, critique and judgment and be more responsible for their own learning

Online Forum and Blog

Students and teachers can share their ideas and give general feedback to others with the use of online discussion forums. Students can assist each other with assignments, and mutually exchange their ideas and perspectives. To reflect on the teaching contents and course materials, students can give feedbacks to each lecture and tutorial through online discussion forums.



Technological Assessment Tools

Teachers can also make use of online assessment tools, such as computer-based exams or tests (electronic assessment tools). A variety of software for assessment is available, such as the Blackboard Learning System, Clickers, Moodle and iQuiz Maker. These online exams and tests systems require little amount of marking time. Students can also check their results online and access the model answers by themselves.

Classroom Response Systems

New technologies such as clickers and electronic classroom response systems are particularly useful for quick assessment and feedback. It also helps to increase interaction between students and teachers.

Interactive Formative Assessment

Other interactive assessment methods such as ordered outcome, poster, concept maps, one minute feedback, gobbets, cloze are all effective formative assessment which are less time-consuming to assess and correct.

Well-designed MCQs with correct and incorrect answers and explanations for both

Feedback can easily be administered for MCQs. They can be implemented online or through written assignments.

Policy on Plagiarism

Definition and policy on plagiarism must be clearly provided to teachers and students. An example of such is a precise definition of collusion when an individual is working in a team but submitting the same work individually as their own. Common and typical examples of plagiarism and collusion of students' work should also be provided.

Workshops on Plagiarism

Organize workshops for helping teachers to identify plagiarism. For example, faculties can ask their experienced staff to share their marking experience on plagiarism with other teachers.

Sessions on referencing (particularly for first year students) should be delivered early in semester. This can make sure the students are familiarized with the referencing system used in their courses, such as the Harvard System and the APA format (American Psychology Association), and also the consequence and punishment of committing plagiarism. Guidelines should be also available online for students to access.

Plagiarism Detection Software

Require students to hand-in an electronic copy of their assignments. This helps teachers to detect their work through some plagiarism detection software.

Web References and Resources

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