The Basic Pattern of Lecture Method in EFL Classes in Nepal

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Abstract

Lecture mode is the most common teaching mode at higher secondary and tertiary levels because it can be used to deliver the same message to a large audience at once. This article primarily examines the pattern of lecturing in EFL classes in Nepal based on a classroom observation and author's own understanding and experience in the area for a decade in Nepal. The piece concludes that Nepalese EFL teachers are using traditional lecture as a teaching method in many respects which follow a common basic pattern: introducing, explaining, summarizing and note-taking.

Key words

Teaching English, Lecture mode, English as foreign language (EFL), ELT pedagogy,

Introduction

Many teachers depend on lecturing in Nepalese EFL settings. Though lecturing facilitates communication with large class enrollments and disseminates a great deal of information in a relatively short time, it is sharply criticized for placing students in a passive rather than an active role and discouraging two-way communication or interactive methods such as discussion, problem-solving. Lecture as a teaching method still remains the predominant teaching approach in the context of large classes. Giving university lectures in front of 100 to 150 students has become common in Nepalese context. The majority of the large classes are the classes of compulsory courses in English right from post secondary to master level. They are certain to create troubles in terms of classroom management, content delivery and fostering interaction in English language among students. However, large classes matter differently in different courses. A large English classroom challenges English teachers primarily in enhancing interaction in various modes if not properly managed. Similarly, one of the reasons students whose native language is other than English appear to have difficulty understanding and retaining lecture information in English is an inability or lack of opportunity to engage in communicative interaction with the second/foreign language teacher or lecturer (Pica, Young, & Doughty, 1987). Despite many drawbacks of lecturing, it is still remained as a major teaching method of language learning and teaching in many parts of the world.

Use of lecture mode in EFL classes

The lecture has its roots deep in history. It is reasonable to suppose that as soon as human being developed language he or she began to pass on his knowledge to the young by telling; this developed into preaching and became tied to the priestly role in early societies. In the classic societies the lecture became formalized as the art of rhetoric and of oratory under such greats as Aristotle and Cicero who gave us the idea that the perfect orator is the perfect man. From that time on lecturing became an integral part of the scholastic process. With the growth of universities from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the formal lecture came into its own (Sutherland, 1976). Throughout much of history, it has been too easily

turned from a means of conveying, interpreting, and inspiring with the thinking, teachings and the diffusion of knowledge via handwritten lecture notes was an essential element of academic life.

A lecture mode is the most common teaching mode in higher education because it provides human contact and it has a few advantages (Jordan, 1997). Lecture is a teaching method where an instructor is the central focus of information transfer. Typically, an instructor will stand before a class and present information for the students to learn. Sometimes, they will write on a board or use an overhead projector to provide visuals for students. Students are expected to take notes while listening to the lecture. Usually, very little exchange occurs between the instructor and the students during a lecture (Kelly, 2012). Lectures are probably the best teaching method in many circumstances and for many students; especially for communicating conceptual knowledge, and where there is a significant knowledge gap between lecturer and audience. Lectures are that they are essentially a form of spoken communication which is delivered to an audience by an actually-present and visible person. It can be said that the main advantage of this mode of teaching is administration because it is cheap in terms of human resources; one lecture can deliver the same message to a large audience. It is also easy to arrange as long as the educational institution has space available. A lecture mode may be used with an English class if the focus is on delivering the content such as in a literature or a linguistics class. However, it is not likely to be suitable if the focus of the class is on communication where interaction to enhance language competence is promoted (Darasawang and Srimavin, 2006). In addition, a lecture mode is difficult for the teacher to provide feedback to the learners; s/he may be able to give feedback to the whole group but not individually. If the lecture mode is to be offered in an English class where communication is emphasized, it can be used when the teacher explains a certain concept such as introducing new language, context, aids or content, objectives goals or rationale, clarifying and dealing with students' problems (Watson Todd, 1997).

Lecture method is considered to be the one of the oldest and overused teaching method. In my experience, lectures are particularly appropriate to convey critical information, history, background, theories, concepts, ideas, principles and laws. Many study shows that lecture method is useful for large groups as it contains experience which inspires the students and stimulates thinking to open discussions. Lecture method is often criticized for its ineffectiveness in making students engaged in various activities and enhancing interaction. Because the lecture method is largely a one-way technology, it is impossible to employ a variety of sound pedagogical techniques. Most lecture courses are notoriously ineffective in engaging students. The traditional format neither encourages active participation nor offers students an opportunity to learn collaboratively from one another (Twigg, 1999, cited in Jones, 2007). Nevertheless, some properties of the didactic lecture have evidently favoured its preservation: it is quantitatively efficient and flexible, in that an audience of 5 to 500 or more students can be presented with the same material simultaneously; it affords the lecturer substantial control over the content and delivery of the material; and according to some research it is as effective as other teaching methods in transmitting information (Bligh, 1998, cited in Jones, 2007). Jones (2007) perceives that the strength of the lecture lies in

its immediacy and presence. Further he suggests that its future survival and evolution must exploit this powerful asset to enhance student learning through engagement and interaction.

Though lectures are much criticized as a teaching method, majority of universities courses rely on this method. Lecturing is mainly a one-way method of communication that does not involve significant audience participation; nevertheless it has survived in academia as a quick, cheap and efficient way of introducing large numbers of students to a particular field of study. This researcher believes that lecturing can be made effective by enhancing with discussions in two-way or more. Sullivan (1996) mentions that effective lecture involves teacher-student interaction, two-way communication, teacher-student questions, shared responsibility for active learning, small group problem solving activities, limited note taking, variety of supporting media and so on.

Most teachers conventionally use lecture mode in EFL classroom especially when there is a large class. In the literature on solutions to the problems of large classes is that the suggestions are almost entirely presented simply as teaching tips. While the suggested solutions may be very useful for teachers faced with large classes, there is an almost complete lack of research into their effectiveness. They therefore remain tentative suggestions rather than being proven techniques (Watson Todd, 2006). Future attempts need to explore the effectiveness of strategies for large class teaching through practitioner research (Shamim, 2010). Therefore, more active teaching approaches may address some of the problems that are being encountered in such classes. Despite under attack from diverse quarters, this is very interesting that many teachers favour lecture mode in higher education. Even in the context of Nepal, most school and university EFL teachers rely on lecture mode when there are a large number of students though they find numerous hindrances of lecturing.

Reflection on lecturing

I have been working with a group of students of 100 to 150 every year at 12th grade on a course 'The Heritage of Words' which is a selection of reading texts under eight different headings. The selection is to assist students acquire sensitivity and involvement in the act of reading, and look at both the abstract and tangible aspect of life with insight and understanding. This is a compulsory course; I have to teach to this large group of students in a hall where the students attend from different streams such as from commerce, humanities and education. I usually start the lesson with some sort of background knowledge of the theme. But it hasn't always been interesting to them if I started the lesson talking directly to this large group. However when I wrote the same thing on board for 1 or 2 minutes, the classroom pay attention and get ready for interaction. In most lesson I make list of new vocabulary on board and make them copy at the beginning. Then I read the lesson and interpret it in simpler expressions. I don't know how easier it is for them. They nod their heads and seemed to be attentive to me when I sometimes make translation in Nepali language. I never found them paying attention on my lecture for more than five minutes. If I notice they loose their attention to me, I often interact with them, most probably relating the text with their real life situation. They responded nothing in English except 'yes' or 'no'. But they freely express their views in Nepali language. Again I start lecturing. I don't use group work except pair work with worksheets in some lessons. I asked questions in whole

groups. At the end of the lesson I set the home task for them they are often the short and long questions they have to submit next day. I do not forget to mention that they are very important questions for final examination. When I finish giving lecture and there are a few more minutes, I make them note down the summary or central idea of the poems, stories and other reading text. I know I have missed very important aspects of language teaching that is interaction. There is not enough opportunity to interact for all students in English. Therefore the way I deliver lecture with the help of note taking and whole group question answer, is easier for me to handle the class.

One Classroom observation

Suresh has been teaching English at post secondary level for seventeen years in Nepal. He is a M. A. in English literature and B. Ed. in English language education. He has attended a number of training events organized by different institutions. Currently he is in his 17th year of teaching English at post secondary level. He has been working with a large group of students for a decade.

Suresh is in the stage of summarizing the essay 'Look at the Tea Cup' at 11the grade. He greets the students and reminds them about the previous lecture in a minute. He writes some comprehension type of questions on board and students starts murmuring at the back. Almost all students were writing. Then he starts explaining something about 'mother'. There is a long silence for five to ten minutes. He draws a diagram on 'brain storm map' and students copies the diagram. Again he describes the map. He gives examples of 'Mahabharat' and some others related to the lesson. Students listen to him; some of them are looking onto the pages of book. He continuously explains the over the topic. After 30 minutes he asked them whether they understand. A few students quickly respond that they understood. Then he asks them to write down some questions and answers. He writes four questions followed by their answers on board. He is using his notebook while writing. He spends around 25-28 minutes in this note making. Students note them down in silence. While writing he pronounces the sentence correctly with slow pace and spells the words where necessary. As the time of the lesson is over and he states that he would deal remaining questions the next day.
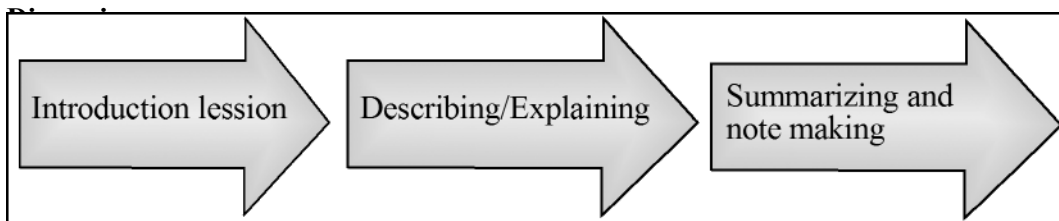
Impression on lesson

I found that Suresh immediately entered into the lesson at the beginning. He tried his best to pronounce the words correctly at slow pace so that students can imitate. There was no interaction at all except some 'yes/no' type of responses. He used English only in the classroom. No translation. Some students did not have books and teacher did not pay individual attention. He used whiteboard properly but he rarely turned to the students while writing. Some students seemed to have been in trouble to note down, may be it's because of his handwriting and lowering whiteboard. He never made fun in the classroom. The classroom setting seemed to be more formal and mechanical.

The lesson stages

Teachers	Initial/opening of lecture	Middle of the lecturing	Ending

The author	Greeting and giving background information (in spoken and written form)	Lecturing with short chatting, pair work, whole group question	Summarizing, Note making, home assignment and reminding for exam
Duration (in minutes	5	35	20
Suresh	Greeting and introducing the topic followed by long silence for ten minutes	Explaining with the help of diagram, note and examples	Note making (it takes long time) and sudden ending
Duration	1	30	25-28 minute

Teacher spends more time in describing, explaining and giving examples. It shows that they rarely engage students for interaction. I attempt to analysize classroom procedures, strengths and weaknesses of lecture mode.

Classroom procedures: Most of the English teachers generally follow following classroom procedures.

- Preparing and planning lecture. (Preparation)
- Generating an outline and delivering lecture (Presentation)
- Choosing examples (Exemplifying)
- Using gestures and making eye contact (Body language)
- Whole group question answer (Whole group interaction)
- Rewarding students' response and answering (Giving short feedback)
- Reviewing and repeating the important points (Summarizing)
- Making students write down (Note making/taking)

Major strengths:

- The lectures allow the teachers to determine precisely the aims, content, organization, pace, and direction of delivering lecture.
- It is economical and teachers stay in 'comfort zone'.
- Lecture method disseminates a great deal of information in a relatively short time.
- Some students depend upon the structure provided by highly teacher-centered methods.
- Lecture method facilitates communication in courses with large class enrollments.
- Students seem to feel relaxed in these lessons.

Major weaknesses:
- Lecture method also places students in a passive rather than an active role which hinders language learning.
- It encourages one-way communication and does not enhance learner centred activities.
- Lecturer are not aware of student problems and student understanding of content.
- It does not allow interactive methods such as discussion, problem-solving sessions
- Teacher need to to have or to learn effective writing, speaking and modeling skills.

Conclusion

There are many similarities in all lectures. Lecture mode is mostly used in large classes. In Nepalese context many teacher rely on lecturing but lecture as a teaching method often exclude the interaction and involvement of students in leaning English language in the classroom. Theoretically, in the true lecture, little or no active student participation is involved. In practice over the period of time of course we have much variation in how closely this format is adheredto. There is a varying degree on use of the boards, other teaching aids and question and answer sessions, but all of these variants involve the lecturer asthe primary agent in the instruction. Thus the lecture is distinct from the other major recognized methods of instruction.

EFL teacher can make his or her lecture effective by adding some activities suitable for large classes in teaching English language, we can enhance teacher student interaction, small group problem solving activities, limited note taking, and we may take media and technology support. Teacher can provide worksheet so that students can be made more engaged in their own in large classes. My observation and understanding accomplishes the point that majority of teachers at post secondary and university level in Nepal use traditional lecture as a teaching method. I do not see any significant changes on using lecture over the period of time. A few teachers in urban setting make lecture interesting using audio-visual materials, on the other parts of the country, particularly in under-resourced situation, teacher wholly depend on their oratory skill. Introducing the topic, explaining (with examples), summarizing and note taking seem to be the basic structure of lecture as a teaching method.

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