



ISSN: 0975-833X

Available online at <http://www.journalcra.com>

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL  
OF CURRENT RESEARCH

*International Journal of Current Research*  
Vol. 11, Issue, 02, pp.1229-1238, February, 2019

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24941/ijcr.34340.02.2019>

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# ASSESSING THE CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES OF TEACHING SPEAKING SKILLS IN LARGE CLASSES: THE CASE OF METTU PREPARATORY SCHOOL

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article History:

Received 25<sup>th</sup> November, 2018

Received in revised form

14<sup>th</sup> December, 2018

Accepted 20<sup>th</sup> January, 2019

Published online 28<sup>th</sup> February, 2019

#### Key Words:

Large Class, Classroom Management, Cooperative Learning, Teaching Strategy, Challenge.

### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to assess the challenges and strategies of teaching speaking skills in large classes. To this end, Mettu preparatory school which is found in Ilu Abba Bora Zone, Oromia region is selected. The respondents of the study were four English language teachers and one hundred twenty students from grade eleven. Descriptive survey-which is known as cross-sectional research design was used to describe the current situation of the study, and purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used to select a number of study units from a defined population. The instruments used to collect data were interview and questionnaires. Then the collected data were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods of data analysis. The findings of the study showed that the teachers lacked different classroom management strategies in teaching speaking skills, and most of them could not effectively play their managerial roles during teaching speaking skills in large classes. The findings also showed that the teachers rarely used different strategies and techniques in order to develop students' speaking skills. The study further revealed that the teachers have considered large classroom as a problematic in teaching speaking skills rather than their teaching methodology. The study also portrayed that students in large classes hardly interact with each other to improve their speaking skills. Furthermore, the study indicated that the teachers frequently used whole class organization at the expense of pair and/or group organizations. Finally, recommendations were forwarded based on the major findings of the study so as to improve the students' speaking skills and use different large class strategies. Hence, it was recommended that English language teachers have to use appropriate strategies to manage large class. Therefore, they must develop the approach that works best for the students based on their learning styles, the characteristics of their students, and the goals and objectives of the lessons.

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**Citation:** Bekele Edessa Dhibba. 2019. "Assessing the Challenges and Strategies of Teaching Speaking Skills in Large Classes: The Case of Mettu Preparatory School", *International Journal of Current Research*, 11, (02), 1229-1238.

## INTRODUCTION

Large class has no exact size; usually it is measured in terms of the number of students per teacher (student-teacher ratio). Shaffer (2006) suggests that in some countries 25-30 students per one teacher is considered large while in other countries this is seen to be normal or even quite small. On the other hand, a class of more than 50 students is usually considered large to those who normally teach 25 or fewer students (Ibid, 2006). Alternatively, Hayes (1997) recommends that there is no quantitative definition of what constitutes a large class; it varies from context to context. He added that sometimes a class with 20 students may be perceived large. Whereas (for example, in China) large class generally refers to that of holding 50-100 students or more. Accordingly, in different context or culture, people have different degrees of tolerance of class size. As Ur (1996) argues what is relevant to the class considered as large is how the teacher perceives the class size in the specific

situation, regardless of the exact number of the students in it. Large classes are often one of the major obstacles to ensure quality education. Many research studies point to the disadvantages of large classes and advocate small classes as a factor to ensure quality education. In spite of this, large classes are a reality in many schools and many countries, often as a direct result of inadequate funding and the absence of sufficient number of teachers and classrooms that would ensure quality education (Shaffer, 2006). He added that the greatest difficulty or challenge of teaching speaking skills in a large class is that there is no time for individual attention and pupils' concentration tends to waver. Besides, it is difficult to implement any remedial action and physical space is limited and not conducive to effective learning in a large class because classrooms become unhealthy places. According to Hayes (1997) a major difficulty in teaching speaking skills in a large class is finding ways to provide feedback. Feedback helps students to see how well they are doing and whether they understand the material that the teacher teaches them. This

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scholar also classified the problems associated with teaching speaking skills in large classes into five categories: 1) control problems (discipline aspects); 2) unable to satisfy all the needs of students who have different interests, personalities and capabilities; 3) to organize efficient class activities due to the constraints of time and space; 4) to provide equal chances for the students to participate and practice; 5) to give timely and effective feedback and evaluation. Thus, classroom management is a crucial issue in the English language speaking classes. Hayes (1997) suggests that teachers often complain about teaching speaking skills in large classes. The teachers not only suffer from the pedagogical shortcomings of large classes, but also from the stress, these classes produce. To teach speaking skills is one of the biggest challenges of teaching a large class. When there are so many students, it is difficult to get them to practice enough in order to continue improving. The other three macro skills (reading, writing and listening) sometimes present difficulties in logistics, organization and mostly marking because of the sheer amount of students' work; however, when it comes to teaching speaking skills, the number of students makes it more difficult to organize activities and foster participation in the classroom (Hayes 1997). Moreover, speaking needs immediate feedback, in order to improve students' oral communication.

According to Atkins *et al.* (1996) in Ethiopian schools, the average class size is likely to be between 60 and 90. Thus, it is necessary to prepare teachers to operate in large classes. From this point of view, large classes usually are considered to pose insurmountable problems for teachers especially in teaching speaking skills. Therefore, large class management is a recognized component of successful teaching and cooperating teachers who actively work with their students in order to improve students speaking skills. Consequently, the challenges of teaching speaking skills in large classes at Mettu Preparatory School were observed and their students were also passive in speaking skills from the researcher's experience while visiting the school for HDP training. After visiting this school for about two months, the researcher has recognized some problems that prevent English language teachers and learners from achieving the aim of speaking proficiency in English skills.

With this regard, some scholars carried out researches on different titles. For instance, a study conducted by Kassie (1995) on 'How English Language Teachers Cope with Large Classes with Particular Reference to Grade Ten Teachers.' He carried out the research on selected schools in Addis Ababa. The study reported that teachers used different techniques to cope with large classes, but the techniques seemed to be influenced by the frontal lecture method. In the same way, Adugna (2007) made a study on 'Large classroom management skills of grade eleven Afan Oromo teachers' at two secondary schools of South West Shoa zone. Thus, his major finding indicates that, classroom management problems can occur through three things: lack of good classroom management skills of teachers, the absence of appropriate teaching method and the curriculum itself. The other study conducted by Fasil (2011) was entitled 'Large Classroom Management Techniques of ELT at some selected schools in Addis Ababa grade nine students.' Accordingly, his study revealed that though teachers use different techniques to alleviate the difficulties of large size classes, the problem seem unresolved. He added that, teachers face different difficulties in their large class teachings; such as covering the content of the text books, evaluating students work, controlling classroom

atmosphere and addressing the need of students. However, none of these studies was actually intended to examine the challenges and strategies of teaching speaking skills in large classes. Hence, all the studies did not address about how English language teachers manage large classes in teaching speaking skills. As a result, a particular skill was not emphasized in the studies. Besides, similar studies cannot be automatically the same as the needs, objectives and backgrounds of the participants vary from context to context. On the one hand, the findings discovered somewhere else don't necessarily true for all schools. Therefore, having all these in consideration, the researcher tried to conduct the study on "Challenges and Strategies of Teaching Speaking Skills in Large Classes: the case of Mettu Preparatory School grade eleven, so as to assess the magnitude of the problem through this study. This is the underlying rationale that initiates the researcher to embark upon this study.

The main objective of this study was to assess the challenges and strategies of teaching speaking skills in large classes of grade eleven at Mettu Preparatory School. Hence, the study was specifically aimed to:

- Identify some of the challenges of large classes in teaching speaking skills.
- Assess large classroom management strategies to teach speaking skills.
- Examine the role of English language teachers to teach speaking skills in large classes.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

As indicated in section one, this study was intended to assess the challenges and strategies of teaching speaking skills in large classes. For this purpose, therefore, a descriptive survey research design was chosen to describe the nature of the existing conditions. Descriptive survey study- cross-sectional design was chosen because it allowed the researcher to describe the current situation of the subjects of the study. On the other hand, it is helpful to identify present conditions and point to present needs. In addition, it is useful in showing immediate status of a phenomenon.

**Subjects of the Study:** The subjects of the study were grade eleven students and English language teachers who have been learning and teaching at Mettu Preparatory School to obtain reliable information. The respondents of the study were 120 grade eleven students who were selected randomly from Mettu Preparatory School for the questionnaire. A number of students in each section were 53 who were assigned to each section and totally there were 957 students in grade eleven at the school selected. The four English language teachers who have been teaching in grade eleven of Mettu Preparatory School that is found in Ilu Abba Bora zone were also the subjects of the study.

**Sampling Techniques:** For this study, the researcher used simple random sampling for students and purposive sampling techniques for teacher respondents to gather the required information. Simple random sampling technique eliminates bias and more scientific method of taking samples (Bluman, 2001, Kothari, 2004). In addition, it is free from subjectivity. In this technique each and every individual in the population has

equal chance. In purposive sampling, on the other hand, the goal is to select subjects that are likely to be information-rich with respect to the purpose of the study. In order to make the sampling techniques used clear for sampling schools, grade levels, sections, teachers and students are presented separately one after the other as follows: Mettu Preparatory School was selected based on convenience sampling and the researcher familiarity to this research area. Convenience sampling is the most common sampling method in educational studies at present time as it allows the researcher to have easy access to particular research area (Mujis, 2004). The school is found in south-west of Oromia region and located in Ilu Abba Bora zone (Mettu town) at the distance of almost 636km from Finfinnee /Addis Ababa. Grade eleven was selected through purposive sampling. In purposive sampling, the researcher aimed at selecting the subjects who are relevant to the study to get in-depth information. The rationale behind choosing this grade level is the availability for the researcher to observe while teaching weekend program and HDP training in the school. Generally, there were 18 grade eleven sections in 2011/2018 academic year. The total number of students assigned in each section was 53. Of these, six and/or seven students from each section who were totally 120 students were randomly selected to fill the questionnaire. The study included four English language teachers of grade eleven in the school as the subject of the study for the interview and questionnaire.

**Instruments of Data Collections:** In order to gather valuable information for the study, the researcher used interview for English language teachers, and a combination of open-ended and close ended items in the questionnaires for both students and teachers.

**Interview:** The researcher used interview as it is an effective qualitative method for getting people to talk about their personal feelings, opinions, and experiences in face to face contact (Kothari, 2004). Therefore, the researcher used semi-structured interview to involve a series of questions based on the topic areas the researcher wants to cover it. Semi structured types of interview was chosen because the same types of questions can be presented in the same manner to every interviewee and to get chances of flexibility and to elicit necessary information. On one hand, the interview questions were prepared based on the objectives of the research in a similar way with that of the other tools. Thus, the four English teachers were interviewed.

**Questionnaires:** The questionnaire is a widely used and useful technique for collecting survey information, providing structured and often numerical data (Morrison et. al., 2000). In addition, Best and Kahan (1989) and Sharma (2000) state that a questionnaire enables a researcher to collect data from large groups of individuals within a short period of time; and it is also easy to administer to a number of subjects in one place at a time. Two sets of questionnaires (one for students and another for teachers) were designed and administered. The teachers' questionnaire contained both close-ended and open-ended questions. Since the researcher felt that the students might not adequately understand and respond to the questions, it was

translated into Afan Oromo in order to avoid communication barriers.

**Data Organization and Analysis:** To analyze the data collected through different tools, both qualitative and quantitative method of data analysis were used. In both cases, the data with similar categories were organized in a way that they would easily be analyzed. Furthermore, both the qualitative and quantitative data were grouped to complement one another during the analysis. Tally form was used to organize and systematically frame the data by coding. The data gathered were analyzed by comparing the responses provided by the respondents. Percentage was used to emphasize on where the problems were very magnified by the participants. The interview responses were designed and analyzed by the researcher. To sum up, qualitative analysis has been carried out to analyze the data gathered through interview and the open-ended questions. From the quantitative methods, the percentage and frequency were dominantly used in close-ended questions. The researcher also attempted to describe each theme by synthesizing the data obtained. Thus, thematic data analyses were applied.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section deals with the discussion of the results obtained through interview and questionnaires. The data collected through these tools were tabulated, analyzed and discussed thematically by linking similar ideas together. Thus, it was categorized into three groups. The first part deals with the analysis of challenges of teaching speaking skills in large classes. The second part presents the analysis of strategies to teach speaking skills in large classroom. Following that the analysis of English language teachers' role was presented. Therefore, the data were discussed in light of the objectives mentioned above.

**The Challenges of Teaching Speaking Skills in Large Classes:** The following tables (tables 1 and 2) are intended to examine result of teachers' and students' responses for items which deal with the challenges of large classes in teaching speaking skills respectively. The first table deals with teachers' perception towards large classes with regard to teaching speaking skills. Table 1 indicated that, the four teachers were asked if large class causes problems for teaching speaking skills, three of them 'strongly agreed and one of the teachers agreed to the idea, and the mean value with this score is 4.8. This shows that a large number of teachers think that teaching speaking skills in large classes are demanding. Similarly Hayes (1997) recommended that one of the biggest challenges of teaching a large class is to teach speaking skills; the number of students makes it more difficult to organize activities and foster participation in the classroom, but this is not necessarily true. Students in large classes can learn just as well as those in small ones. Concerning the statement, large class is not a problem but it is a pretext for teachers' complaints, one of the respondents undecided, two of them disagreed and one of them strongly disagreed respectively. The mean value for this item is 2.0 which is below the average and this shows that the teachers believe that teaching in large classroom is challenging and they have unfavorable attitude towards the statement. Regarding this Kennedy and Siegfried (1997) suggested that problems and difficulties of teaching associated with large classes can also be found in smaller classes.

Table 1. Items related to challenges of large classes in speaking skills (teachers' responses)

No	Items	F or %	Strongly agree (5)	Agree (4)	Undecided (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly disagree (1)	total	mean
1.1	Large class causes problems for teaching speaking skills.	F %	3 75	1 25				4 100	4.8
1.2	Large class is not a problem but it is a pretext for teachers' complaints	F %			1 25	250	1 25	4 100	2.0
1.3	Large class is unavoidable as far as various constraints such as economic, man power, etc. exists	F %		3 75	1 25			4 100	3.8
1.4	Large class can be managed effectively if teachers use appropriate methods and techniques.	F %	1 25	3 75				4 100	4.3
1.5	Problems associated with large class are solved only by reducing the number of students admitted in each class.	F %	1 25		1 25	2 50		4100	3.0
1.6	Large class provides greater opportunities for creativity and innovation than smaller classes	F %			1 25	2 50	1 25	4 100	2.0
1.7	Class size is the determining factor of teaching efficiency	F %	1 25	3 75				4 100	4.3
1.8	There is strong relationship between class size and students achievement	F %	1 25	3 75				4 100	4.3
1.9	Students in large class can learn just as well as those in small ones	F %			1 25	1 25	2 50	4 100	1.8
1.10	It is the teaching methodology rather than class size that contributes best to the effectiveness of teaching	F %	1 25	2 50	1 25			4 100	4.0

Table 2. Responses of students' preference of learning speaking skills in large classes

No	Items	Freq or %	Always (5)	usually (4)	sometimes (3)	Rarely (2)	never (1)	total	mean
2.1	I participate in pair and group work	F %	42 35	40 33.3	35 29.2	3 2.5		120 100	4.0
2.2	I talk without disturbing others and take turns and talk	F %	54 45	45 37.5	12 10	4 3.3	5 4.2	120 100	4.2
2.3	I am a good tutor (giving remedial help to another students)	F %	26 21.6	44 36.6	41 34.2	6 5	3 2.5	120 100	3.8
2.4	I am a good tutee and a good leader in the group work	F %	67 55.8	36 30	17 14.2			120 100	4.4
2.5	I am a good member of the group	F %	79 65.8	27 22.5	8 6.6	5 4.2	1 0.8	120 100	4.5
2.6	I prefer working in group than individually.	F %	7 5.8	8 6.6	53 44.2	14 11.6	38 31.6	120 100	2.4
2.7	I ask my teacher for clarification when I don't understand	F %	28 23.3	31 25.8	42 35	17 14.2	2 1.6	120 100	3.6
2.8	I ask my teacher or class-mates for correction of errors in my speaking.	F %	35 29.2	36 30	29 24.2	14 11.6	6 5	120 100	3.7

Table 3. Teachers' response to large class management strategies in teaching speaking skills

No	Items	Fr. or %	Always (5)	Usually (4)	Sometimes (3)	Rarely (2)	Never (1)	Total	Mean
3.1	I get students' attention before giving instructions in order to manage a large class.	F %	3 75	1 25				4 100	4.8
3.2	I give clear and specific directions	F %	2 50	2 50				4 100	4.5
3.3	I set explicit time limits for task completion to evaluate my students	F %	2 50		2 50			4 100	4.0
3.4	I circulate among students at work to avoid disruptive behaviors.	F %	1 25	2 50	1 25			4 100	4.0
3.5	I enrich my classroom (with posters, visual aids, etc.) to improve students' motivation	F %			3 75	1 25		4 100	2.8
3.6	I have clear and specific rules in order to manage large classes	F %	3 75	1 25				4 100	4.8
3.7	I use nonverbal and social actions to reinforce behavior of which I support	F %	2 50		2 50			4 100	4.0

Table 4. Items related to the strategies used to manage large class (students response)

No	Items	Freq or %	strongly agree (5)	Agree (4)	Undecided (3)	Disagree (2)	strongly disagree(1)	total	Mean
4.1	Help students to discover the best ways of learning for developing speaking skills.	F %	20 16.6	65 54.2	21 17.5	13 10.8	1 0.8	120 100	3.8
4.2	Help students to keep on talking through teaching speaking strategies such as using gestures.	F %	13 10.8	50 41.6	19 15.8	20 16.6	18 15	120 100	3.2
4.3	Help students to ask for error correction	F %	37 30.8	53 44.2	15 12.5	9 7.5	6 5	120 100	3.8
4.4	Encourage students to speak English outside the classroom	F %	16 13.3	26 21.6	20 16.6	27 22.5	31 25.8	120 100	2.7
4.5	Help students not to be so much concerned with accuracy.	F %	19 15.8	33 27.5	15 12.5	28 23.3	25 20.8	120 100	2.9

Table 5. Items related to activities used for developing speaking in large classes (teachers' response) How often do teachers let their students perform these activities?

No	Items	Ferq. or %	Always (5)	Usually (4)	Sometimes (3)	Rarely (2)	Never (1)	total	mean
5.1	I let the students use information gap activities (such as sharing ideas with each other).		1 25	1 25	2 50			4 100	3.8
5.2	I let them exercise problem solving activities (puzzles)		1 25		3 75			4 100	2.8
5.3	I let my students exercise role plays activities		1 25		3 75			4 100	2.8
5.4	I let the students use pair/group discussions		2 50	1 25	1 25			4 100	4.3
5.5	I make them practice project based activities (activities based on pictures, charts, etc.)				3 75	1 25		4 100	2.0
5.6	I make the learners prepare monologue (ask to prepare a talk)				4 100			4 100	3.0
5.7	I let them practice dialogues ( in which one person asks a question and another gives an answer)			2 50	2 50			4 100	3.5
5.8	I make them give reasoning gap activities in which they give reasons					4 100		4 100	2.0

**Table 6. Items related to teachers' role in teaching speaking skills in large classes (students' response)**

No	Items	F or %	very high (5)	High (4)	Average (3)	Low (2)	very low (1)	total	mean
6.1	Arranging and organizing group discussion.	F %	8 6.6	43 35.8	37 30.8	29 24.2	3 2.5	120 100	3.2
6.2	Giving chances to participate in different activities	F %	14 11.6	32 26.6	42 35	25 20.8	7 5.8	120 100	3.6
6.3	Encouraging to say something in English	F %	19 15.8	36 30	27 22.5	29 24.2	9 7.5	120 100	3.2
6.4	Giving appropriate amount of practice	F %	6 5	27 22.5	37 30.8	33 27.5	17 14.2	120 100	2.8
6.5	Guiding and supervising during group/pair discussion	F %	28 23.3	41 34.2	24 20	13 10.8	14 11.6	120 100	3.5

They also added that teachers need to view large classes from a different perspective and recognize that despite a lot of disadvantages they can also provide many opportunities for teaching and learning. Relating to the suggestion about large class is unavoidable as far as various constraints such as economic, man power, etc. exists, the teachers replied as follows: three of them agreed and one teacher undecided. However Kennedy and Siegfried (1997) recommended that, teachers need to view large classes from a different perspective and recognize that despite a lot of disadvantages they can also provide many opportunities for teaching and learning. The respondents were asked if large class can be managed effectively if teachers use appropriate methods and techniques, one of them strongly agreed and the rest of the respondents agreed to the item. The mean value of this item is 4.3 which shows favorable attitude towards the statement. From this, it is possible to deduce that large classroom can be manageable while teaching speaking skills. These thought were supported by scholars in that class size is not the determining factor of teaching efficiency. Teachers need to enhance their innovative awareness and capabilities for developing effective ways for dealing with large classes based on the characteristics of large classes. Thus, class size does not automatically show a relationship with students learning. As far as problems associated with large class are solved only by reducing the number of students admitted in each class is concerned, one of the respondents strongly agreed, one of them undecided and two of them disagreed respectively. Coming to the next item, if large class provides greater opportunities for creativity and innovation than smaller classes, one of the respondents' undecided, two of them disagreed and one of them strongly disagreed. When the mean value is computed, it is 2.0 which are below the average.

This could be an indication of generalizing the challenges of large class to teach speaking. In contrast some researchers such as Ur (2000) and Hess (2001) argued that large classes can provide richer human resources and greater opportunities for creativity than smaller class. Thus more students mean more ideas and provide more opinions and possibilities. Large class can also provide more opportunities for co-students' interaction, foster an atmosphere of cooperation and encourage creativity and innovation. In response to item, 'class size is the determining factor of teaching efficiency and the relationship between class size and students' achievement are concerned,' one of the respondents strongly agreed and three of them agreed. However, the results of some studies Hancock (1996) showed that, no significant relationship between class size and student performance. Concerning the question students in large class can learn just as well as those in small ones is concerned one of the teachers undecided, one of them disagreed and two of them strongly disagreed respectively. The mean value of this item is 1.8 which is below the average scale and that shows teachers are disagreed to the statement and they think students in large class cannot learn as well as those in small classes. The next statement which is intended to answer the teaching methodology rather than class size that contributes best to the effectiveness of teaching, one of them strongly agreed,

two of them agreed and the remaining one undecided. On the other hand, Kennedy and Siegfried (1997) recommended that class size does not automatically correlate with students learning. Students in large classes can learn just as well as those in small ones. What counts is not the size of the class, but the quality of the teaching. Alternatively, teachers thought that, class size is one of the determining factors and recognize since it has a lot of disadvantages to teach speaking skills. However class size does not automatically correlate with students learning and there is no strong relationship between class size and achievement. Thus, students in large classes can learn like those in small ones. What counts is not the size of the class, but the quality of the teaching. The interview made with teachers regarding challenges of large classes, the teachers replied that, it is too difficult to motivate and give immediate feedback to all students due to a large number of students in the classroom. In addition, the teachers said that during teaching speaking skills in large classes some students may keep silent and are dominated by others. In contrast using group discussion and applying active learning approach are the possible solution forwarded by the teachers. Generally, regarding the challenges of large classroom the majorities of the respondents reported that students in large class find it difficult to participate because they afraid of making mistakes. They added that, students in large classes need translating every word or phrase into their own mother tongue. Thus, students speak in their own language during class. In large classes, it is also difficult to provide every student a feedback in order to identify which of them need more personalized feedback. By contrary the teachers have concluded that problems related with large classes are solved by minimizing the numbers of students in the class. However, Shaeffer (2006) recommended that good teachers of large classes reflect on their teaching. They don't reflect on the problems of having many students in a classroom. Similarly Table 2 deals with the data obtained through students' questionnaire which intended to identify the challenges of large classes and how English language teachers handle it while teaching speaking skills. Therefore, to differentiate if working together in large classes were challenging or not different questions were organized for the respondent learners. Thus, can learners perform the following activities in large classes in order to develop their speaking skills? As can be seen from table above, from the total of the respondents, relating to the item, participating in pair and group work, 42 (35%) and 40 (33.3%) students replied 'always' and 'usually' respectively. Whereas the remaining 35(29.2%) and 3(2.5%) answered 'sometimes' and 'rarely' in that order. The mean value for this response is 4.0 which is above the average scale of favorable attitude towards the statement. This shows that students believe working cooperatively in large class provides more opportunities for them to practice speaking. In the similar manner, when an interview was made with English teachers, majority of the interviewees answered that their students kept silent and do separately. However, Chips (1993), states that cooperative learning gives students opportunities to learn from one another rather than receiving instruction from the teacher alone. Appropriate cooperative tasks also stimulate students to higher levels of thinking, preparing for academic learning and

testing. Regarding how to talk without disturbing other learners 54(45%) and 45 (37.5%) were replied 'always' and 'usually' respectively. The others 12(10%), 4(3.3%) and 5(4.2%) of them answered 'sometimes', 'rarely' and 'never' correspondingly. The mean value for this item is 4.2. This indicates that students don't disturb other students while discussing in the classroom. Relating to a statement about taking turns and talk during pair/group work 67(55.8%) and 38(31.6%) replied 'always', and 'usually' respectively. The rest of the respondents 10(8.3%), 3(2.5%) and 2(1.6%) answered 'sometimes', 'rarely' and 'never'. This showed that there was mass participation rather than one by one, but this is not advisable according to Harmer (2001). He believed that in class room management the teacher has a role of controlling in order to make the classroom appropriate for learning. Concerning a statement about giving remedial help to other students is concerned 26(21.6%) and 44(36.6%) of the students responded 'always' and 'usually' respectively. Whereas, almost half of them 41(34.2%), 6(5%) and 3(2.5%) answered 'sometimes', 'rarely' and 'never' respectively. But Cohen (1984) indicated that cooperative learning in groups produces higher levels of academic achievement involving conceptual learning and problem solving across a variety of curriculum areas than do individualistic learning. In relation to being a good leader in the group work, 33(27.5%) said 'always', 53(44.2%) replied 'usually' and 22(18.3%) answered 'sometimes'. The rest of the respondents 7(5.8%) and 5(4.2%) replied 'rarely' and 'never' respectively and the mean value with this score is 4.4; this shows that a large number of students aware of being a good leader during group work.

As far as being a good member of the group is concerned almost all of the respondents 79(65.8%) and 27(22.5 %) replied 'always' and 'usually' respectively. Whereas a few of them 8(6.6%), 5(4.2%) answered 'sometimes' and 'rarely'; only one of them replied 'never'. According to Nation (1989), stated in Nunan (1993), group work enables students learn a new language easier and develop fluency in the use of language they have already learned. Besides, it promotes higher academic achievement, and greater self-stem. Therefore, it should be successfully organized in order to achieve the desired goals. As per to working in group than individually, majority of the students 53(44.2%) and 38(31.6%) answered 'sometimes' and 'never' respectively, but the rest of the respondents 7(0%), 8(0%) and 14(0%) replied 'always', 'usually' and 'rarely' correspondingly. The mean value of this item is 2.4 which is below the average scale and that shows students are disagreed to the statement and they think that working separately is more important than cooperative learning. Nevertheless, according to Seid (2012) stated in his study that the longer cooperative group exists, the greater the social support they will provide for each other's success, and the more influence members will have over each other. The students responded for the statement of asking their teachers' for clarification if they don't understand 28(23%) and 31(25.8%) replied 'always' and 'usually'. The majority of the respondents 42(35%) answered 'sometimes' to the statement. On the one hand, 17(14.2%) and 2(1.6%) of them answered 'rarely' and 'never' respectively. As mentioned earlier the data from interview also indicated that the students rarely ask their teachers either for clarification or general understanding. Pertaining to asking their teacher or class-mates for correction of errors in their speaking 35(29.2%), 36(30%) and 29(24.2%) answered 'always', 'usually' and 'sometimes' respectively, but a few students 14(11.6%) and 6(5%) of them replied 'rarely' and 'never' respectively. Hence, in response to

this item, students with the mean score of 3.7 were aware that they agree in self-correction and to be corrected by their classmate. In general, responses of the students showed that working together in a large class was challenging in order to develop speaking skills.

### **Strategies of Teaching Speaking Skills in Large Classroom:**

A Strategy of large classroom management, in teaching speaking skills was analyzed using descriptive statistics as follows. All the data gathered through interview and questionnaire were analyzed one after the other by linking them together according to their similarities. Table 3 below is, therefore, intended to examine the attitude of teachers' towards implementing different strategies in large classes. As a result, English language teachers were asked different questions as regards strategies of managing large classes to teach speaking skills. Table 3 showed that, from the total of respondents, concerning the question of getting students' attention before giving instructions in order to manage a large class, three of them replied 'always' and the remaining one answered 'usually'. The mean value with this score is 4.8. This shows that a large number of teachers aware that they get attention of the students before ahead, but the interview showed that majority of the teachers didn't get students' attention before giving instruction. Similarly, the students responded that as soon as they entered the class, they directly rushed to the lesson. Relating to the item, giving clear and specific directions to the students, two of the teachers answered 'always' and half of them replied 'usually' to the item and the mean value for this response is 4.5 which are in the average of favorable attitude scale. This indicated that teachers believe that giving clear and specific instruction before the lesson is important. So, in order to manage a large class in teaching speaking skills teachers ought to get students attentions and give them clear and specific direction. Regarding this, Johnson and Johnson (1999) mentioned that if teachers only put students in to group without instruction or paying attention to positive interdependence or individual accountability cooperative learning may be failed. They also revealed that instructors should pay attention to the potential barriers to group effectiveness such as group maturity, motivation, losses due to perceived in equality, lack of sufficient heterogeneity, uncritically giving one's dominant response and lack of teamwork skills. Regarding, 'setting explicit time limits for task completion' half of the teachers replied 'always' and the rest said 'sometimes' respectively. When the mean value is computed for this item, it is 4.0 and this indicate that teachers believed that giving a limited time for task completion is the best method to create a sense of competition among learners. Thus, for a given activity/task a limited time should be given to treat all students equally. As far as 'circulating among students during group/pair work' is concerned only one of the teachers replied 'always, two of them 'usually' and one of them 'sometimes' respectively. Accordingly, in response to this item, teachers with the mean score of 4.0 were aware that it is essential to circulate among students during cooperative learning. Similarly the data from interview indicated that group work was not supervised by the teachers well. Atkins (1996) furthermore suggests that, group work can be an extremely useful in a large class. Not only does peer discussion help students understand and retain material, but it helps them develop better communication skills. Similarly, the teachers were asked if they enrich the classroom (with posters, visual aids, etc.) to improve students' motivation, three of the teachers answered 'sometimes' and one of them 'rarely' respectively.

The mean value of this item is 2.8 which is almost the average scale and that shows teachers are sometimes use the teaching aids. In the same way the interview made with teachers indicated that none of them was found using any teaching material. This indicates that they were not playing active role in developing their learners' speaking skills. Therefore, teachers should use teaching materials in order to motivate the students. Regarding having clear and specific rules while teaching in order to manage a large class, three of the teachers were replied 'always' and one of the teachers answered 'usually' to the statement and the mean value with this score is 4.8. This shows that a large number of teachers aware that using specific rules help them to facilitate and monitor. Scholars suggest that teachers are ultimately responsible for classroom rules and the rules should not contradict school rules. Therefore, all teachers should use and apply similar rules in order to manage a large class in teaching speaking skills. Relating to the activity of using nonverbal and social actions to reinforce behavior which can be approved, two of the respondents replied 'usually' and two of them answered 'sometimes' respectively. The mean value of this item is 4.0 which shows favorable attitude towards the statement. From this, we can deduce that teachers improve the communication skills of their learners by using nonverbal communication. In the same way, the interview made with teachers concerning strategies used by English teachers in large classes to teach speaking skills, they replied that they often use group discussion. They believe that, it is because to address the lesson in an appropriate way. In addition in group discussion students have an opportunity to learn from one another.

In general, the data obtained from the respondents showed that the strategies used by teachers in large classes to teach speaking skills rarely encouraged the students to use the language in real life. Therefore, to create healthy environment in a large classroom and to develop students' speaking skills, teachers should use appropriate strategies for managing classroom activities. Table 4 deals out about students' response regarding the strategies of managing large classes in teaching speaking skills. Thus, as can be seen from Table 4 above showed that, the students were asked if the teachers help them discover what ways of learning work best for the students in developing speaking skills in large classes, 20(16.6%) and 65(54.2%) strongly agreed and 'agreed' respectively, but the remaining 21(17.5%) and 13(10.8%) undecided and 'disagreed' to the question. Only one student strongly disagreed to the question. When this is described in terms of mean, the mean value is 3.8 which is in the favorable attitude with regard to the scale. Thus, this result shows us the teachers hardly help the students to be independent learner in discovering what ways of learning works best for them. Regarding teaching different strategies of speaking to keep on talking in English in large classes, from the total of the respondents 18 (15%), 20 (16.6%) and 19 (15.8%) strongly disagreed, disagreed and undecided respectively. Whereas, the rest 50 (41.6%) and 13 (10.8%) agreed and strongly agreed to the question. The mean value for this item is 3.2 which is above the average. Therefore, students should be taught different speaking strategies in order to improve their speaking skills. To the statement, the encouragement that was given for students by their teachers to ask for error correction 37(30.8%) and 53 (44.2%) of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed with the statement respectively; the rest 15 (12.5%), 9(7.5%) and 6 (5%) of the students also undecided, disagreed and strongly disagreed to the question respectively. The mean value of the responses for this item is 3.8. This shows that students' were more or less

seen asking for error correction. In the same way as stated earlier the classroom observations also showed that students were not seen asking for error correction. Therefore, teachers' should encourage students to ask for error correction and give them an appropriate feedback. As far as encouraging students to speak English outside the classroom is concerned, half of the respondents 31(25.8%) and 27(22.5%) strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively. 16 (13.3%) and 26 (21.6%) strongly agreed and agreed correspondingly; the remaining 20 (16.6%) of the students undecided to the statement. When this is described in terms of mean, the mean value of the responses for this item is 2.7 which is around the average scale. This indicated that students are undecided to the statement. Hence, English language teachers should encourage their students to use English where and when ever as much as possible. In relation to helping students not to be so much worried about accuracy, 25 (20.8%) strongly disagreed, 28 (23.3%) disagreed, and 15 (%) undecided. 19 (15.8%) strongly agreed and 33 (27.5%) agreed to the statement. The mean score for this response is 2.9. Thus, it is clear that the average of the students have shown their positive attitude towards learning without giving emphasis for accuracy. Even if Rubin and Thompson (1982: 165) recommend the priority of fluency to accuracy for speaking skills development, the data from interview made with the four teachers indicated that, the teachers were seen giving due attention to correcting language items-grammar. Therefore, students did not take risk to speak the language because they may fear in order not to make an error. Thus, this approach does not help the students to improve speaking skills. So, errors should be tolerated. Generally, teachers should encourage their students in order to develop speaking skills using different approaches. Besides, students' errors should be tolerated as they building up their competence.

***The Role of the Teachers in Teaching Speaking Skills in Large Classes:*** Table 5 below is intended to present the results of teachers' responses to aspects of frequencies of their classroom practices with regard to teach speaking skills in large classes based on the results of the teachers' questionnaire. As can be seen from the Table 5, half of the teachers stated that information gap activities were sometimes done in the classroom. As to one of the respondents information gap activities were always practiced whereas the other one replied usually to the statement. The mean value of the responses for this item is 3.8. This shows teachers' believe that information gap activities are very essential to improve the ability of students in speaking skills. From this we can understand that the teachers have positive implication towards this type of activities. The interview made with the four English language teachers also showed that teachers usually used information gap activities. Concerning problem solving activities, role plays and project based activities, one of the respondents always let his learners practice problem solving activities, but majority of them use the specific activity sometimes. The mean value for this item is 2.8 which is nearly the average. This tells us that problem solving activities develop students' speaking skills in a large classroom. The data from interview with the teachers also indicated that the activities have been almost used to develop students speaking skills in large classes. To the statement 'letting the students exercise role plays activities,' only one of the teachers responded that dialogues, opinion and reasoning gap activities, are the kind of activities always done in the classroom. Three of them replied that the activities are sometimes practiced to develop students speaking skills. The same was true for the data obtained from the interview

conducted with the four English language teachers. Regarding making the students discuss in pair/group, half of them always let their students discuss in pair/group in a large class to improve speaking skills. One of the respondents has used usually and the rest one has allowed the learners practiced this type of cooperative learning in large classes. The mean value is 4.3 which indicate positive implication to the scale. This shows that pair /group work plays an important role to improve students' speaking skills in large classroom. With this regard, Crandall (1999), as cited in Seid (2012), the importance of using cooperative learning in second and foreign language classroom is gaining acceptance in multitude of language learning classrooms, mainly because of its contribution to improving supportive and expanding opportunities for learners to use the language. Cooperative language creates more positive effective climate in the classroom. It also individualizes instruction and raises students' motivation. Copola (2007) also states that cooperative learning promotes positive social behavior which is necessary for all students; it enhances self-determination and self- efficiency which are crucial for student development. Regarding to the item making the students practice project based activities which are based on pictures, charts, etc. is concerned the activities have been sometimes used by three of the respondents. One of the informant replied that he has rarely used this type of activity in the classroom to practice students in order to improve their speaking skills. The mean value for this item is 2.0 which is below the average and it shows that the teachers almost not make them practice speaking skills in large classes based such activities.

The four teachers were asked if they make the learners prepare monologue, all of them have sometimes made the learners to prepare a monologue or ask them to prepare a talk, and the mean value of this item is 3.0 that shows almost positive outlook towards the statement. Hence, from this, we can deduce that teachers enhance students speaking skills through making them prepare long speech by individual students. Coming to the next item, which reads, 'let the students practice dialogues,' half of the teachers allowed the learners exercise different dialogues, and two of them responded that dialogues have been sometimes practiced by their students. So, one person asks a question and another gives an answer. Regards to making the students give reasoning gap activities, four of the respondents let the students practice this type of activity rarely. Accordingly, the mean value for this statement is 2.0 which is below the average and this indicates that the teachers have undesirable attitude towards the activity. Generally, teachers' and students' responses, and the interview made with teachers showed that teachers were hardly using the activities which enable students to learn speaking skills in large classes. The data indicated that teachers were usually not using different activities. Thus, it lets learners passive in speaking skills. As can be seen from Table 6, from the total of 120 students who gave responses to 'the role of teachers in arranging and organizing group discussion,' 8(6.6%), and 43(35.8%) answered 'very high' and 'high' respectively. Some of the respondents 37(30.8%) and 29(24.2%) responded that the roles of their teachers are 'average' and 'low' in the order given above. Only 3(2.5%) replied 'very low' and the mean value for this statement is 3.2. This indicates that more than the average of the respondents agreed that teachers arrange and organize group discussions. Similarly, the data from interview made with teachers also showed that teachers usually let the students discuss in pair/ group, thus the teacher has the role of

organizing. Accordingly, Harmer (2001) supports this idea as follows: organizing is perhaps the most important and difficult role the teacher has to play. The success of many activities depends on good organization and on the students knowing exactly what they are to do. The teachers believed that they could not play active role because there was no appropriate and comfortable seats to arrange and organize group discussions well. Regarding the role of the teachers in giving chances to students to participate in different activities, only 14(11.6%) of the respondents answered that the teachers play 'very high' role and 32(26.6%) of them were replied 'high'. On the other hand, the greater part of the students 42(35%), 25(20.8%) and 7(5.8%) answered that the role of the teachers is limited to 'average', 'low' and 'very low' respectively. As indicated in the interview, it also showed that the four teachers mainly introduced the language items students need to practice through explanation. All activities were dominated by teacher talk rather than students participation. Regards this, Johnson and Johnson (2009), states the importance of letting learners to take responsibility for their own learning make them to be self-reliant, and it requires each pupil in the group to develop a sense of personal responsibility to learn and to help the rest of the group. Concerning encouraging students to speak in English 19(15.8%) and 36(30%) of the respondents answered 'very high' and 'high' respectively. But the majority of them 27(22.5%) and 29(24.2%) said that the teachers' role is 'average' and 'low' in the respective order. A few of them 9(7.5%) replied that the teachers encourage their students to speak English 'very low'. Therefore, students should be encouraged in order to improve their speaking skills. Although Harmer (2001) suggested that, one of the roles of a teacher is as prompter, the encouragement of students to speak English is not seen from the interview made with the English language teachers. This means, often the teacher needs to encourage students to participate or needs to make suggestion about how students may produce in an activity when there is a silence or when they are confused about what to do next. The students were rarely participating in different activities in the classroom. As far as giving appropriate amount of practice is concerned, the data showed that only 6 (5%) and 27(22.5%) of the respondents replied 'very high' and 'high' to the teachers' role to the point under discussion.

The other respondents 37(30.8%), 33(27.5%) and 17(14.2%), answered 'average', 'low' and 'very low' respectively. The mean value for this item is 2.8 which is almost close to the average and this shows that the students believe that providing them an appropriate amount of practice for their own learning is vital and they have optimistic attitude towards the statement. On the same way, the interview made with the four English language teachers showed that the four teachers not often give an appropriate amount of practice in order to improve students speaking skills in a large class rather it is limited to explaining language items by their own. Thus, the students were hardly involved in the practices contrary to Nunan (1991) suggestions. He comments that at this stage it is the students who do most of the talking through practice activities. The students responded for the role of the teachers in guiding and supervising during group or pair work in large classes, 28(23.3%) and 41 (34.2%) replied 'very high' and 'high' respectively. The others 24(20%), 13(10.8%) and 14(11.6%) answered 'average', 'low' and 'very low' respectively. The mean value for this item is 3.5. This indicates that students perceive that it is the duty of the teacher to guide and supervise group/pair work. Likewise, the interview also showed that arranging the class in to

manageable group, move round the group while the learners discuss in group and following students' performance were some of the role of teachers in large classes to teach speaking skills. Regarding this concern, Shaeffer (2006, p. 46) suggested that during group work, teachers need to move around the classroom to see what progress learners are making and what problems are coming up. They should give advice, encouragement, and extra individual help where it is needed. To that end, Hedge (2000) mentions the teachers' role and says:

*... it is possible to identify the teacher in a number of roles in his lesson: as controller in eliciting nationality words; as assessor of accuracy as students try to pronounce the words; as corrector of pronunciation; as organizer in giving instructions for the pair work; initiating it monitoring it, and organizing feedback; as promoter while students are working together; and as resource if students need help with words and structures during the pair work (Hedge 2000).*

Generally, responses of the majority of participant students and the interview of the teachers indicated that the role of teachers in teaching speaking skills in large classes and the way they manage a large classes was found to be average.

## Conclusion

This study was aimed at assessing the challenges and strategies of teaching speaking skills in large classroom at Mettu Preparatory Schools (grade eleven in focus). Basically, the study was intended to respond to questions about the challenges of large classes in teaching speaking skills and strategies used to manage large classes in teaching speaking skills. In addition it was proposed to answer the roles of English language teachers in teaching speaking skills in large classes. Accordingly, the data were collected from 120 systematically selected students and four grade eleven English language teachers through questionnaires and interview. Then the data collected through different tools were analyzed. The study discovered that the teachers were unable to manage large classes in teaching speaking skills and most of them could not effectively play their managerial roles when they taught speaking skills in large classes. Similarly, it was found that in large classroom to teach speaking skills the teachers regularly used question and answers. Although group work was sometimes practiced, it was not arranged and organized well. Moreover, the teachers didn't often use different strategies and techniques in order to develop students speaking skills. The study also revealed that students in large classes almost didn't interact both with their teacher and friends to improve their speaking skills. Additionally, the study showed that the teachers frequently used whole class organization at the expense of pair and/or group organizations. Despite the fact that teachers claim that large classes are the major problems that hindering communicative skills of the students. However, scholars recommended that large classes are always not problematic rather it provides greater opportunities for creativity and innovation than smaller classes. Large classes can be managed effectively if teachers use appropriate methods and techniques. Therefore, the results indicated that, teachers seem to be less concerned with teaching speaking skills in large classes. In order to manage large classes special consideration was not given to different strategies and techniques. Thus, group discussion and question and answer were the only method used by the teachers to develop speaking skills. From

the teachers' point of view, it was realized that large classes are challenging in teaching speaking skills rather than the teaching methodology and classroom management skills. For that reason, English language teachers should identify and use different classroom management strategies in teaching speaking skills. To teach speaking skills in large classes the teacher should act as a controller, assessor, organizer, prompter, participant, a resource and investigator.

**Acknowledgment:** First and for most, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Directors of Mettupreparatory school for their support throughout the course of the study. Next, I would like to thank English language teachers and students of the school who scarified their precious time in filling the questionnaire and attending the interview for the study. Finally, I would like to extend my special thanks to my wife Hulagerish Ensermu and my dearest children Nimona, Kenenitu and Hika who in one way or another rendered their help and shared my pains as well as for their strong moral support in my life.

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