


Chapter 6

Instructional Approaches for Learner Engagement in Large Classes

Philip Christopher


 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5469-1773>

The University of Melbourne, Australia

Richard Nero

The University of Melbourne, Australia

Lu Aye

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5495-1683>

The University of Melbourne, Australia

ABSTRACT

Large class sizes are frequently necessitated by financial, resource, and logistical constraints. Teaching large classes presents pedagogical challenges impacting instructional quality and student learning, with student engagement emerging as a critical issue. This chapter explores instructional approaches to mitigate potential negative effects on engagement and learning, based on a rapid literature review. Key approaches identified include instructional strategies, active learning, collaborative learning, technology integration, flipped classrooms, peer instruction, learning assistants, and frequent formative assessments. Results highlight active learning and technology-enhanced strategies as strongly correlated with improved student engagement and academic outcomes, particularly when effectively integrated. The practical implementation challenges are resource demands, and increased instructor preparation. The chapter concludes with recommendations for prioritising structured collaborative activities, interactive technologies, and targeted instructor training

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to enhance engagement.

INTRODUCTION

Large class sizes have increasingly become a reality in higher education institutions globally, driven by financial constraints, increased numbers of students, resource limitations, and logistical pressures. The necessity to manage resources efficiently whilst also accommodating increased demand often necessitates the adoption of large class formats. These large classes can present pedagogical challenges, including limited personal interaction, student isolation and increased complexity in classroom management. These challenges can have a direct adverse effect on student engagement, satisfaction, learning outcomes, and ultimately, institutional reputation (Bond et al., 2020; Fredricks et al., 2004).

Maintaining student engagement in large classes is important because of the risk of students feeling disconnected or passive, leading to reduced participation, lower academic success and higher dropout rates. Engagement itself has multiple dimensions, including behavioural, emotional, and cognitive (Fredricks et al., 2004; Kahu, 2013). Behavioural engagement involves active participation in class activities, emotional engagement relates to students' feelings towards educators and learning environments, and cognitive engagement requires deeper mental investment/intellectual commitment in understanding the class material (Henrie et al., 2015; Zepke, 2015). Because of this complex nature of engagement, fostering an effective environment in large classes requires thoughtful, evidence-based instructional approaches tailored to mitigate these inherent challenges.

This chapter aims to address a critical gap in the existing literature by systematically evaluating strategies focused on enhancing student engagement in large class contexts. Using a rapid literature review approach (Smela et al., 2023; Tricco et al., 2015), aided with a generative AI tool, this work synthesises recent empirical studies that employed direct methods to measure student engagement. The effectiveness of instructional interventions, including active learning, collaborative learning, technology integration, flipped classroom models, peer instruction, learning assistants, instructional strategies, and frequent formative assessments, are assessed in this chapter.

The key research question in this chapter is: “What instructional approaches enhance student engagement in large classes?” To address this question, the following specific objectives were developed:

1. Identifying instructional interventions tailored for large classes.

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