

Large-Enrollment Classrooms and Students' Opinions

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Background

- During the Fall Semester of 2023, the Introduction to Linguistics (LIN401) class shifted from small independent sections to large enrollment classes.
- Large-enrollment classes create a learning environment which favors anonymity and degrades students' senses of community, impetus to engage with course material.
- Teaching in auditorium-style classrooms severely hinders instructors' ability to assess student understanding in the moment and adjust on the fly to individual students' needs. Furthermore, hands-on activities essential to grasping difficult concepts and which require guidance from instructors become impractical.
- To counter these issues, the teaching team for LIN401 implemented several measures to help increase engagement and help students build community within the large-enrollment format.
- In order to evaluate the teaching methods and students' learning experience in the new large-enrollment context, the instructor and six TAs conducted two informal anonymous comprehensive surveys at the beginning and the end of the semester respectively.

Survey

- Students enrolled in LIN401 in Fall 2023, approximately 180 students in total
- 75% have taken large-enrollment classes (100 or more) before
- Imagine you are part of a small enrollment course (about 20 to 30 students). What are your expectations regarding the following aspects?
- Now imagine you are in a large enrollment course with 100 or more students. What are your expectations regarding the following aspects?

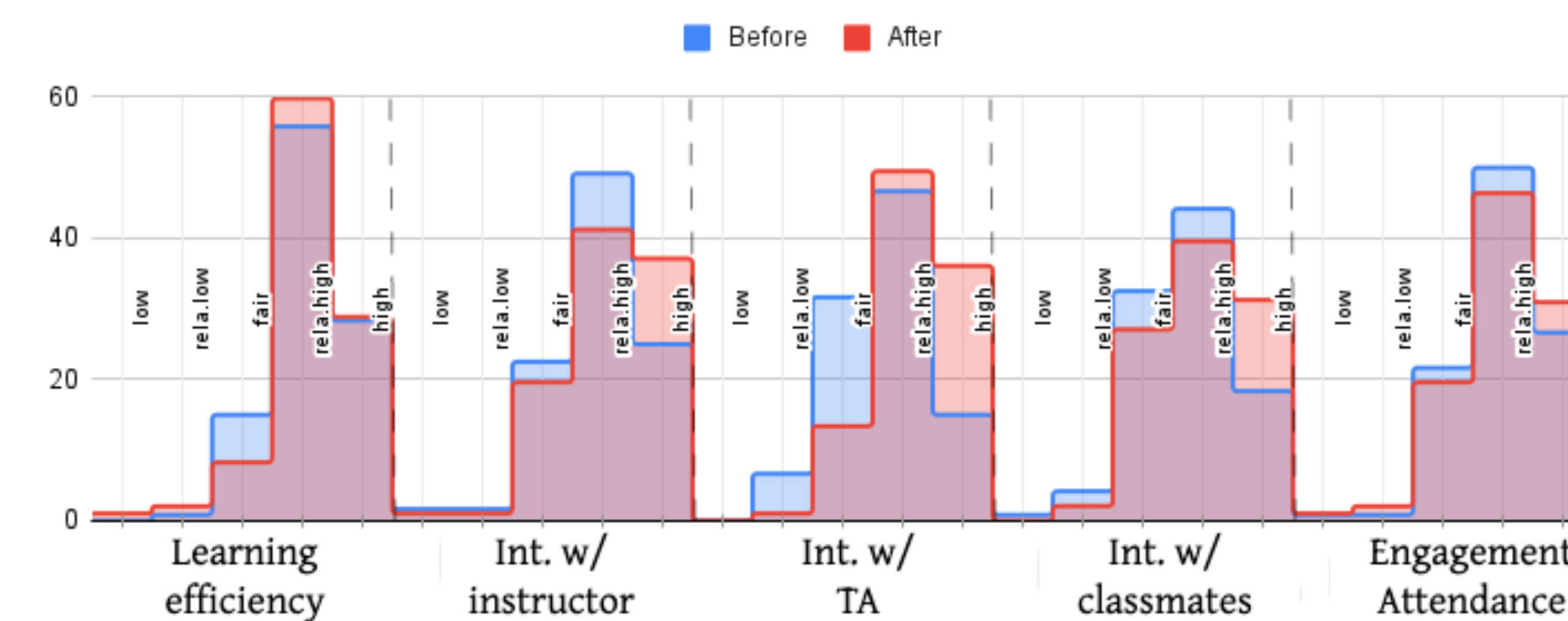
Likert Scale: Low - Relatively Low - Fair - Relatively High - High

- Learning efficiency
- Interaction with instructors
- Interaction with TAs
- Interaction with classmates
- Class engagement and attendance

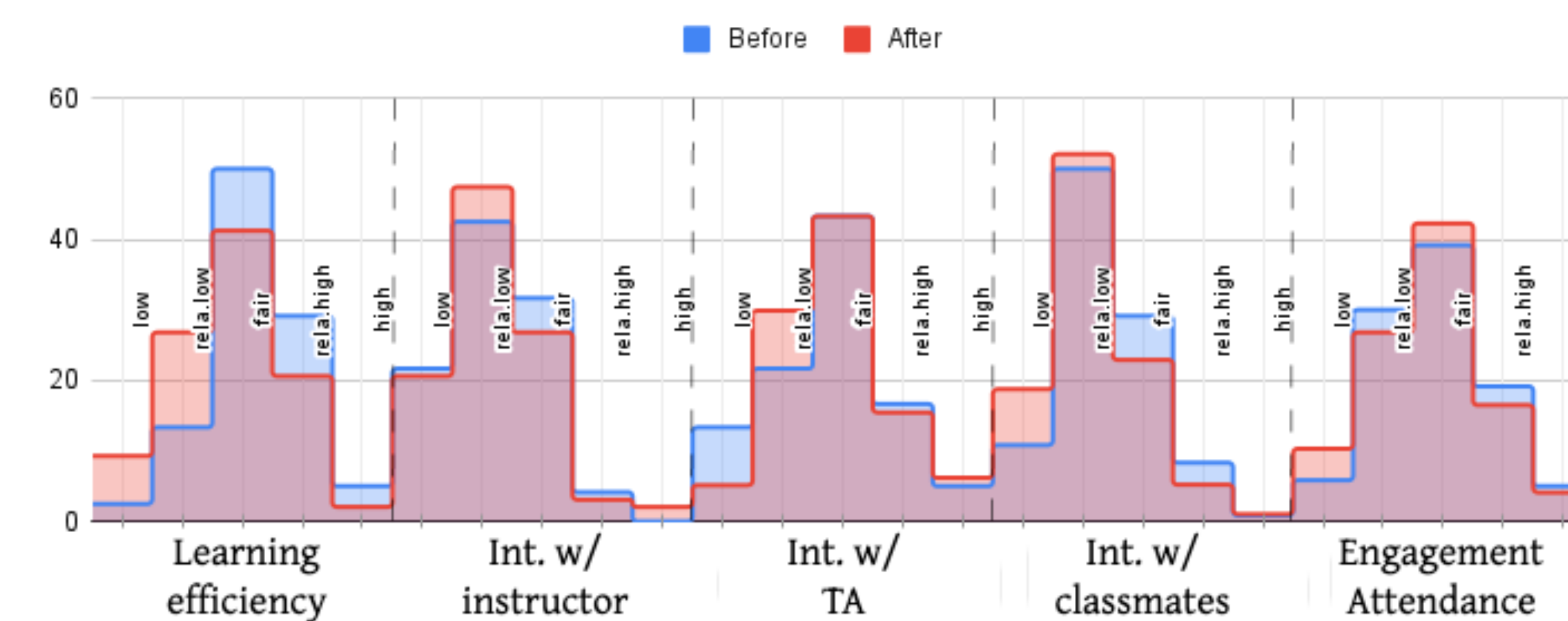
- Do you prefer small- or large-size classes? Why?

Results

Small-size class



Large-size class



Preference for class size



Teaching Strategy

- Expanded out-of-the-classroom support with **help rooms** and **group work** to approximate some characteristics of small-enrollment classes
- Added help rooms once or twice a week and **a variety of options for office hours** in addition to weekly labs in small classes.
- In all, students had access to **6 optional hours** of additional help each week. Furthermore, we created group-work to foster in-class community.

Discussion

- Even though measures have been taken to mitigate the challenges of a large enrollment course, and students thought that the instructor and TAs did well, the amount of students who preferred small enrollment courses increased.
- To deal with these issues, there are a couple potential solutions
 - For classes where learning outcomes are significantly hindered (and learning standards lowered), it is preferable to return to small enrollment courses when possible.
 - If not possible, we need to find a way to build community in a large class in a meaningful way (beyond group homework assignments).
 - This could involve more interactive recitation sessions which focus on specific topics relevant to the students' interests that foster group discussions.
 - Increase students' interaction with TAs. However, with more TAs, the need to ensure TA enthusiasm is important.

I PREFER SMALL-SIZE CLASSES, BECAUSE ...

forced to pay attention
connect with classmates
interaction with professor and TAs
more comfortable to ask questions
understand the content better
feel pushed to attend

I PREFER LARGE-SIZE CLASSES, BECAUSE ...

- There is less chance that I have to speak in front of the class.
- I can focus on my own study.
- I feel more comfortable and spread out rather than worrying about everyone staring at me.
- Less student participation.
- Because of the anonymity.
- There is less pressure to answer questions.
- There is no wasting time in group work or discussions