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Factors that affect the English language teaching-learning
process in Ecuadorian public high schools.

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DEDICATION

I lovingly dedicate this thesis to my wife, who has always believed in me and has never hesitated to show me her support whenever I needed it.

Cueva Wolegang

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to show my appreciation and gratitude to my family and friends for encouraging me to carry on with my work at times when I felt frustrated and wanted to give up when things were looking down.

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

The present research aims to identify and analyze the factors that affect the English language teaching-learning process in Ecuadorian public high schools.

The general approach of the current work was quantitative. Surveys and note-taking techniques were considered as well as instruments such as observation formats and questionnaires were used to perform this study.

To achieve the objectives of this research, five public high schools from Quito were selected. In each of these schools, three English teachers and three of their students were asked to participate in this research work.

The results obtained revealed that numerous factors such as large classes, poor teaching resources, small classrooms and inadequate seating arrangement certainly affect the English language teaching-learning process. Besides this fact, inexperienced teachers, the excessive use of Spanish in classes and boring and repetitive tasks do not contribute to motivate students' language acquisition.

KEY WORDS: EFL teaching, public high schools, factors, motivation, surveys.

RESUMEN

El presente estudio busca identificar y analizar los factores que afectan el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje del idioma inglés en colegios públicos del Ecuador.

Para la elaboración de este trabajo se hizo uso de varias técnicas tales como encuestas y el uso de notas así como de instrumentos tales como cuestionarios y hojas de observación.

Para lograr alcanzar los objetivos de esta investigación se seleccionaron cinco colegios públicos de la ciudad de Quito. De cada uno de estos colegios a su vez se solicitó la participación aleatoria de tres profesores de Inglés así como de tres de sus estudiantes.

Los resultados obtenidos revelaron que varios factores definitivamente afectan el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje del idioma Inglés. Entre ellos se observó por ejemplo la insuficiente aplicación de estrategias efectivas para la enseñanza del idioma, aulas que no brindan el espacio suficiente para potenciar la enseñanza-aprendizaje del mismo así como una inadecuada distribución de los pupitres solo por mencionar unos cuantos. Además, fue claro que la falta de experiencia en la enseñanza, el excesivo uso del idioma Español en clase y la aplicación repetitiva de las mismas actividades de clase no contribuyen a motivar en los estudiantes el aprendizaje del idioma Inglés.

PALABRAS CLAVES: enseñanza de inglés como idioma extranjero, colegios públicos, factores, motivación, encuestas.

INTRODUCTION

In terms of globalization it is broadly indispensable to learn English from the very first school stages.

In Ecuador, English language teaching-learning in public high schools has not been considered a priority. In fact, for a long time in our country students at public high schools have had serious issues to master the English language.

This issue has caused Ecuador to be a step behind when compared to similar nations that have definitely made an important investment in a high quality bilingual education.

The mastering of the English language really makes a difference in this more and more competitive global society and Ecuadorian citizens have no choice but to adapt and advance toward a future that demands us to be fully bilingual. This fact motivated the current research work since by identifying the factors that cause learners' lack of knowledge and language ability then something can be done now in order to overcome this deficiency.

This research seeks to analyze the factors that affect the English language teaching-learning process in Ecuadorian public high schools. To accomplish this study, three specific objectives were considered; the first one was to determine the classroom conditions in which English lessons take place, the second objective was to identify the characteristics of in-service English teachers, and the last but not the least was to determine teachers' instructional competency.

Earlier studies on the factors that affect the English language teaching-learning process, for instance Rahimi, Riazi & Saif (2004), have emphasized on the importance of modifying the language curriculum to include activities that truly

involve learners in the actual use of the target language since they found that the fact of having an outdated national curriculum became a limitation at the time they were conducting an investigation into the factors affecting the use of language learning strategies by EFL learners in their country.

Another investigation conducted by Palacios (1995) to determine learners' degree of awareness in their use of language learning strategies concluded that several factors such as sex, age, learning style, motivation, and social background must be deeply considered for future studies because they may affect learners' choice of right strategies in order to learn English. Palacios got to this recommendation after identifying lack of time and research instruments as limitations for his research.

Besides this, another study of Chang & Goswami (2010) on the factors affecting the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching in College English Classes determined that teachers will have more time to conduct communicative activities if class size is reduced and instructional hours are increased. This investigation also emphasized on the importance of teachers' appropriate training to facilitate the implementation of satisfactory CLT strategies.

Even another study on some factors affecting English learning at tertiary level conducted by Narayanan, Rajasekaran, & Iyyappan (2008) concluded that factors such as motivation, attitude, language anxiety, and gender have a great impact or affecting students' English learning, as a consequence the researchers stated that if the learner wants to foster linguistic skills effectively he/she needs to be highly motivated, (to have a) positive attitude towards the language, and (to show) low language anxiety. However, limitations such as a same age group of the learners

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used for the study, the time of the study, the use of ineffective statistical calculations, and the application of questionnaires only and not ability tests to the participants have to be considered for similar studies in the future.

Even though, the researcher was pleased with this study and its outcomes; however, some limitations lied in the insufficient number of observed teachers and classes. The observation of a greater number of classes and teachers in a greater number of schools may lead to get a better evidence to support this work.

A more serious limitation lied in the time assigned to conduct the field research at the moment of collecting data because schools were on summer vacation. This issue became quite frustrating at the moment of having to start the field investigation because all the process had to be done in about three weeks. Having more time may result in a deeper and more complex analysis of the current research topic.

Despite these difficulties and setbacks, the present study attempts to help students, teachers, educational institutions, and government authorities to design effective procedures to solve issues such as students' needs, teacher training, institutional equipment purchases, and development of smartly analyzed policies that will undoubtedly improve our current educational system.

METHOD

Setting and Participants

Five public high schools where English is taught were selected. Out of each of these high schools located to the south of the capital city of Quito, three English teachers and some students *(males and females between 13-17 years old from low to middle-low economic class)* attending their classes were chosen as the participants of this research work.

Besides, the interviewed students were Ecuadorians having Spanish as their first language. All of them were from six different grades from 8th, 9th, 10th years of basic education, and 1st, 2nd, and 3rd senior high school.

Procedures

Once the problem and the objectives of the current research were set, it was important to start working on the literature review, which consisted in selecting relevant information out of various sources of information that included books, newspapers, internet sites, booklets, official documents, interviews, etc. about a number of assigned topics which were directly related to this research. This bibliographical work intended to develop serious and credible scientific contents to build up this research.

After having completed this step, the field research was conducted. Five public high schools within the city of Quito were chosen in order to observe a number of classes.

Three data collection techniques were used for this study: interviews, surveys, and observations. In fact, three different questionnaires were prepared and the data was collected mainly in written way. These forms included

students' questionnaires, teachers' questionnaires, and class observation sheets. A quantitative sampling method was followed.

Fifteen classes were observed and a number of details that had to do with factors concerning teachers, students, classrooms, and their educational institutions were carefully registered in pre-designed class observation sheets.

At the end of every observed class, questionnaires were given away to the teacher and to one of his/her randomly selected student. Besides this, an oral interview was conducted to every teacher to determine his/her English level considering the variables given by the Common European Framework.

Once this was done, the results of these observations and the information collected in the questionnaires applied to teachers and students as well as the notes of the interviews to these teachers were tabulated into pie graphs. The information in each of these pie graphs was carefully analyzed considering the advantages, disadvantages, pros and cons as well as comparing and contrasting the results of the different categories shown in them in order to get to the final conclusions and recommendations of this research study.

DISCUSSION

LITERATURE REVIEW

The teaching of English in Ecuadorian public schools has often been limited to only a few classes per week. As a result, students' academic performance in this area has been observed to be weak. Pesantez (2012) states that according to a recent analysis of the Ministry of Education the average grade in this area is 13 out of 20, according to the evaluations that were performed at tenth grade and third baccalaureate students in public schools in Ecuador.

But the problem is not just students. The underlying problem is the teachers as well as the environment in which classes are taught. Pesantez (2012) explains that Maria Isabel Cruz, assistant secretary of the National Secretariat of Higher Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (Senescyt) announced that of a total of 5 022 teachers evaluated on four levels, 74% are in the A1 and A2 education, according to the European framework. This means that a considerable group of teachers are at the initial level, where students play on information learned by heart and also have limited communication with simple conversations.

The facts mentioned above definitely affect the English language teaching-learning process in Ecuadorian public schools. Considering this, the general objective of the present research work is to contribute to find solutions to the exposed problem by identifying and analyzing the factors that mainly affect this process.

Teaching Approaches and Methods

Teaching a language, for instance English, is a systematic process that requires of a carefully designed plan. Let us start from the beginning. Let us analyze some

methods and approaches that may help us to teach it.

The Grammar Translation Method first appeared in the nineteenth century and is practiced to this day in too many educational contexts. According to Brown (2001) this method is characterized by the deductive teaching of grammar rules and tons of applied translation exercises. Students' native language is the medium of instruction. It does not emphasize speaking skills but focuses more on reading and writing tasks.

On the other hand, Mukalel (1998) states that the Direct Method was created in reaction to the Grammar Translation Method. This method focuses on the target language. Grammar rules are taught in context and oral skills are frequently applied. Students learn vocabulary inductively through dialogues and translation is completely avoided.

The Audio-Lingual Method prioritizes the aural-oral skills to communicate through the language. It is teacher-centered and the teaching of grammar is inductive. It also focuses on systematic training by multiple repetitions (Mukalel 1998).

The Task-Based Language Learning consists on concrete tasks in the target language. This method builds up learners' fluency and confidence in the language. Grammar and vocabulary are taught previously to the task assignment. (Sánchez 2011)

Sanchez (2011) explains that the Lexical Approach promotes the teaching of the target language through idiomatic expressions and word combinations-chunks. Lexis (all word forms having meaning or grammatical function) takes place before the teaching of grammar structures and not after as it traditionally happens when

other methods are used.

As we can see the methods and approaches are numerous, there is not a good or bad method, each of them has strengths and weaknesses; it means that teachers have to be able to analyze the right time, place and group of students to use them with. This decision is quite important because it can make the difference between success or failure of the teaching-learning process.

Teaching Techniques

We have already taken a look at some of the most relevant methods and approaches that are still used up to this day. Having a method or methods in mind is one thing, but what about the strategies we might use in classroom to make these approaches and methods work properly.

Some useful techniques Ashworth (2000) suggests are advance organizers for instance. He explains that outlines, key visuals, charts or summaries help students predict the information they are likely to encounter when reading a selected passage. According to Ashworth, the learning outcome of these techniques is to provide students important information that will help them during the new unit of study.

Ashworth explains the benefits of some of these techniques. Peer editing, for example, motivates students to work together to give and receive feedback on each other's written work. Key visuals may include visuals of any kind-films, film strips, posters and artifacts can inspire discussion and writing. The use of music through singing and chanting in groups provides learners with non-threatening, enjoyable opportunities to use English. Drama, theatre and role playing provide insights into the majority culture, but students need to see others in action before they can copy

speech, movement and gestures. Field trips open up local opportunities in work and play. Journal writing provides a chance for students to write something everyday and receive feedback from the teacher. The topics selected may be personal or related to local or world news. Interviews may be one to one, or the class may interview a visitor. Questions are worked out before the interview takes place.

One more technique that is quite interesting and that learners may like is the use of comic strips. Csabay (2006) explains that it is very important to arouse students' interest in the language class by taking something new into it from time to time. Comic strips for example, may be helpful if new grammatical points have to be introduced and practiced and it would be an excellent alternative to get new vocabulary or to reinforce one previously taught.

Managing Learning

It is clear that teaching English is definitely not a simple task. As seen before, there are many issues that a teacher has to consider at the moment of standing up in front of a group of students who are avid to learn the language. Marzano (2003, p. 1) supports this idea when he states that "teachers play various roles in a typical classroom, but surely one of the most important is that of classroom manager." And as classroom managers teachers have the responsibility to show learners the right path to follow in the teaching-learning highway. One way to achieve this purpose is by providing the right feedback at the right time. Experienced teachers know well that the major benefit feedback has on learners is that it radically improves learning.

Long (2006) rightly expresses that is quite indispensable to offer feedback to students since it helps create a supportive teaching environment in classes. He adds that this feedback can be given in the form of error correction, self-editing, peer

feedback, or conferencing, no matter the way as far as it is provided to learners. However, it is important that students receive feedback as soon as possible after assignments have been turned in, this will definitely increase their learning rate and motivate them to continue being active agents in the teaching-learning process. Let us not forget that feedback is also a research-based strategy that teachers and students can practice to improve their success.

Lesson Design

As was mentioned before, keeping students motivated is a plus in any class, that is why it is a factor to be taken into account when designing lessons.

A teacher should not leave home without having a lesson plan in mind and of course should not start a class without one. Having a lesson plan is essential for good instruction. A well designed lesson plan must include at least three elements: Objectives, Procedure and Assessment. Gainey (1999) considers the following phases: lesson objectives, teaching methods and activities, the materials needed, the procedures, and the amount of time to be spent on each lesson activity.

Having objectives will let you clarify what you want your learners to learn. In the procedure, you need to specify what you will do in order to reach those objectives and in the assessment phase you will know if your students achieved the initial objectives.

Glanz (2009) affirms that a written plan is compulsory since it serves as a reminder of topics, concepts, skills, and activities that the teacher wants to be sure to use at some point. A plan book has four common sections, beginning with the heading which includes title, subject, grade, materials, and lesson duration; then, the objectives which include general and specific aims; next, the lesson development

that includes introduction, activities, instructional strategies, and closure; finally, the assessment section which includes guided practice and homework assignments.

A well planned lesson will surely improve your classroom management and increase your students' learning. On the contrary, if you decide not to have one your class will turn disorganized and you will be more likely to have classroom management troubles.

Class Size

If we have to think about troubles, then, large populated classes are something we really have to worry about.

Ramadevi (2002) explains that teaching a language, English for instance, is not like teaching other subjects where information is merely transmitted to learners. He emphasizes that "Language is a skill subject, where the skills of language have to be actively practiced by the learner, if they are to be mastered and effectively used." If we consider this valid theory, then, having large classes becomes a serious problem. Let us think about it, how can a teacher ensure that all his/her students (40, 50, 60, or more) get enough practice in the use of the language so they may master it efficiently? It would certainly be quite difficult. The most a teacher in this situation would be able to do is to ask learners to repeat some vocabulary words out of a lesson, or to ask them to answer to a question in a chorus, and probably the method to be used more frequently would be the Grammar Translation one because of the facilities it provides.

On the other hand, Mora (2009, p. 138) assures that "small classes can provide conditions for better academic performance…" and Blatchford (2003, p. 741) confirms that according to some experimental research in the United States,

"children educated in small classes will academically outperform those taught in large classes…" It is a fact that in smaller classes learners can get more individual support and may have the opportunity of a very active participation in class discussions as well as in group and peer work. Moreover, teachers may focus more on speaking and reading activities that will lead learners to master the language faster and better as a high-quality language program demands.

Classroom Space

Good teaching results are closely related to class size and class size is directly related to classroom space and its efficient use. McLeod (2003, p. 3) states that "classroom space affects your (teachers') instructional program directly." He also says that "they (teachers) know that the richness of students' experiences are enhanced or diminished by their surroundings." As a result, classroom space determines the good or not so good quality of experiences teachers share with their students.

Partin (2009, p. 3) emphasizes McLeod's conclusion when he says that "the physical arrangement of your (teachers') classroom can influence your students' behavior and learning. The placement of desks, bookshelves, pencil sharpeners, and cabinets can influence traffic flow, student interaction, as well as noise, attention, or disruption levels."

Based on these assertions it is not difficult to conclude that classroom space directly affects aspects such as the way teachers manage behavior in classes, therefore, well-organized classrooms equals good behavior management; the quality of interactions between learners and teachers, in consequence, proper classroom arrangement equals great interactions between subjects; the students' learning pace,

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consequently, well- organized classrooms equals students' fast learning; and the teaching efficiency, therefore, proper classroom arrangement equals high teaching standards.

Seating Arrangement

We have already analyzed the effects of class size and classroom space in learners and teachers performance. But, what happens if the way we organize students' desks is inadequate and in consequence does not favor the teaching and learning process? Do teachers have to keep the same seating arrangement all school-year long? Well, there are some points to consider about this issue.

Branson, J. (2005, p 44) points out that "The seating and grouping arrangements of the classroom help to prevent poor and unproductive relationships between students becoming embedded, and also reinforce the notion that students need to learn to work with a range of others in a variety of ways." This assertion clarifies the idea that seating arrangement does influence learners' behavior and as we all know learners' behavior does affect classroom management and the learning process.

Gainey (1999, p. 95) firmly believes in forming "learning stations" in the classroom. He states that "The traditional rows of five and six students facing the teacher's desk may soon become clusters of four and six where students are facing each other rather than looking at one another's backs." He explains that this kind of seating arrangement favors "small group interaction among students, helping them fine-tune their communication and collaboration skills. At the same time, teachers have an opportunity to move about the classroom challenging each group to become innovative, independent learners."

On his account, Dean (2001, p. 38) corroborates that clusters also help to "keep noise to a minimum as students work together or support one another in the tasks assigned." This is of course under a close and careful teacher's control.

One thing is clear, seating arrangement *(in rows, clusters, learning stations, or any other)* in classrooms can and should be always manipulated by teachers depending on the type of activities, topic of the class, or any other objective the teacher would like to achieve in order to increase learners mastering of the language.

Classroom and/or teaching resources

Teachers' aim is always to motivate students to learn in the best way possible. In order to achieve this goal, teachers should be ready to use any resource at hand inside or outside classrooms. The more resources a teacher uses efficiently the better teaching- learning results he/she will obtain.

"Resources are books, any person, animal, plant or any object, that make teaching and learning easier, clearer and more interesting." Baker (2000, p. 155). The use of resources such as newspapers, comics, posters, videos, audiotapes, costumes, worksheets, etc. will definitely "make learning more realistic and help students understand. It is much more helpful to hold a real orange in your hands when you are asking the price of that orange or asking about its shape or color."

Rubdy (2003, p. 57) qualifies resources as "a powerful stimuli for generating learning." So, the next time you are about to plan a lesson, do not forget to consider making a good use of realia in your class, for sure your learners will be thankful, motivated, and anxious to see you the next time.

Classroom Observation

Based on my own experience, I may confess that I feel somehow uncomfortable when my class is being observed by other teachers or my Head of Department. Probably some teachers may have felt the same way in similar situations or maybe not. But, what is the real purpose of these observations? Are they really necessary? Do they influence the teaching-learning process?

Muresan (2007, p. 50) states, "In language education, class observation is a key component of quality assurance and human resources management, as well as teacher training and development." And White (2005, p. 14) confirms Muresan's statement when he says "Senior managers and subject coordinators need to observe classroom practice so that the outcomes of the whole system of the school's planning can be monitored (and improved)."

As it can be read, class observation is directly related to teaching quality and teaching quality, of course, benefits learners.

Class observation should be as objective as possible. This means that the information gained should be reliable and positively oriented to improve teachers' work in the classroom. After data has been gathered, it has to be carefully analyzed and teachers should get the feedback at the earliest possible moment so that the memories of what just happened are still clear in mind. This feedback may be delivered verbally, visually, or in a written way.

Student's Motivation

The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English defines *motivation* as "the eagerness and willingness to do something without needing to be told or forced to do it." Without a doubt motivation is the force that pushes us all to perform any task.

Motivation may come from inside of us or it can be the result of external factors. Brown (2001, p. 59) says "The most powerful rewards are those that are intrinsically motivated within the learner." In consequence, he adds "If all learners were intrinsically motivated to perform all classroom tasks, we might not even need teachers!" But the thing is that it is fairly difficult to keep our intrinsic motivation level high all the time due to the numerous situations we have to face and solve in our daily lives. That is why, external motivation becomes also indispensable to learners and it is then when teachers have to assume the responsibility to offer it to them. As Berlin (2005) says, it is our job to help learners to overcome any difficulty they may have during the process of acquisition.

Hinkel (2004, p. 47) affirms that "Students' motivation to study and learn usually increases markedly if the teacher explains that L2 learning takes a great deal of hard work and persistence, and there are a few ways known to humanity of how to make it either easier or quicker." This means that if we say to learners that a task is easy and that we are there to help them to perform it, then, learners may start convincing themselves that they will be capable to do the job. This will certainly increase the opportunities for success of all the classroom techniques thought by teachers to favor learners' acquisition (Brown 2001). But now the question is ¿do all learners acquire knowledge in the same exact way? Is there any learners' preference to learn?

Learning Styles

Dunn (1995, p.13) defines learning styles as the way how people prefer to learn. To learn, we depend on our senses (sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell) to process the information we acquire. Many specialized psychologists have basically

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identified seven learning styles. The visual/spatial for learners who prefer using pictures, images, and spatial understanding; the aural/auditory-musical for learners who prefer using sound and music; the verbal/linguistic for learners who get motivated by the use of words, both in speech and writing; the physical/kinesthetic for learners who prefer using their body, hands and sense of touch; the logical/mathematical for learners who get motivated by the use of logic, reasoning and systems; the social/interpersonal for learners who prefer to learn in groups or with other people; and the solitary/intrapersonal for learners who prefer to work alone and use self-study.

Learners do not use only one learning style; in fact learners make use of different learning style combinations. This assertion explains why some students perform better in schools while others (brothers, sisters or friends) do not. Teachers might, at a point, help learners discover their learning styles in order for them to develop a better performance in classes.

If teachers pay careful attention to students' learning styles, they will be able to design right teaching techniques and students will be exposed to successful acquisition making the teaching-learning process flow openly.

We have already mentioned that students do have learning preferences, but have you ever wonder why while some students try very hard to learn English; others seem not to do any apparent effort and even though they learn it?

Students Intelligence or Aptitude to Learn English

Some learners sometimes amaze us due to their ability to learn the language and you wonder what is behind it? Well, the word aptitude may help us understand this. The Oxford dictionary defines *aptitude* as the natural ability an individual has

to do something. In fact, the sentence *he has a remarkable aptitude for learning English* is used by teachers and parents from time to time.

Hall (2011, p. 128) confirms the fact that some learners do have language aptitude when he says that "some people have a 'flair' for language learning." This ability causes not only the teachers to feel motivated within their classes but the students too.

Mishan (2005, p. 27) states "Attitude is, of course, in itself a factor of motivation." And that is perfect for any language class since, as we already mentioned, it increases the opportunities for learning success.

However, "while language aptitude is a recognizable learner attribute that, in part, shapes how language courses and classes are designed and managed, it does not, by itself, explain language learning success and learner behavior." Hall (2011, p. 128). This means that if it is true a student may have aptitude to learn English this does not necessarily guarantee his/her learning success, and on the other hand if a student seems not to posses this ability it does not mean he/she cannot successfully learn the language because as we have already learned the teaching-learning process encloses many variables in which teachers' work plays a great and fundamental part.

In the following pages, some studies on the *factors that affect English language teaching-learning process* will be considered in order to support the current investigation.

Rahimi, Riazi, & Saif (2004) conducted a study to find answers to these two questions: What variables affect EFL learners' choice of strategies? and What is the relationship, if any, between these variables and learners' patterns

of strategy use?

To accomplish this research they decided to call one hundred ninety-six male (79) and female (117) students from two postsecondary institutions in Iran, the Shiraz University and the Shiraz Open University. Three intact classes were randomly selected from each institution. All students in these classes participated in the experiment. The participants were all English majors and all participants were native speakers of Persian and they were ranged between 18 and 25 years in age.

Data was collected over a period of three weeks in fall 2003 using four different instruments: the TOEFL, the SILL, Soloman and Felder's 2001 learning style questionnaire, and a motivation questionnaire adapted by Salimi (2000) from Laine's 1988 model.

Generally speaking, the results of the study highlight the fact that strategy use is a complex phenomenon that interacts with a number of variables. These variables affect overall strategy use as well as the use of the strategy categories and individual strategies in different ways. More specifically, the results of the present research show that the context of language learning plays an important role in determining the nature and extent of this effect.

Rahimi, Riazi, & Saif recommend that curriculum developers, especially at early stages of language learning, provide adequate links between the objectives of the language course and their application to real-life contexts. Moreover, they say it is essential to modify the language curriculum to include activities that involve the students in the actual use of the target language.

Palacios (1995) conducted an investigation on the learning strategies used by

secondary school and university students of English in Spain.

The first purpose of this research was to investigate the students' degree of awareness in their use of language learning strategies. The second aim was to determine to what extent secondary school teachers and university lecturers of English were acquainted with the learners' use of strategies, and the final aim of this work was to come up with a series of pedagogical implications that could be of special relevance for language teaching.

Interviews were carried out in the spring semesters of 1989 and 1990 with 50 secondary school students; aged 14 to 20, from six different high-schools located in urban and rural settings of Galicia, and with 30 English Philology students, aged 18 to 24, from the University of Santiago de Compostela.

Two data collection instruments were used in this study: a student interview form and a teacher interview form. These interviews were divided into three main parts: the first section was a simple introduction explaining the purpose of the study, the second section, the central one, consisted of the elicitation from the subjects interviewed of the language learning strategies used with seven language activities: pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, listening, reading, writing and oral expression, and the last section was reserved for any further comments students wished to make or any questions they wanted to ask.

The results of the study showed that the majority of the interviewees appeared to be aware of their use of learning strategies and they were also able to verbalize them. The types of strategies which obtained the highest number of mentions were: repetition, creating mental images, applying sounds and pictures, translation, using linguistic and non-linguistic clues, working with the dictionary and, lastly, seeking

for opportunities to practice. As for the teachers' perception of students' strategy use, the information collected indicated that most of the teachers interviewed at both secondary and university levels were not fully aware of the students' use of learning strategies.

Several pedagogical implications for language teaching can be gathered from this research. Firstly, the great variety of mechanisms and strategies mentioned by the learners in this study give the researcher insights into the difficulties students come across when learning a foreign language, i.e. keeping new words in memory and strong need for language practice. Secondly, everything seems to indicate that this factor plays a central role in the learning of a foreign language and, therefore, teachers should have a full understanding of the different strategies used by their students for learning it as this will shed light on important areas of their teaching. Thirdly, it is reasonable to think that students' autonomy and self-direction should be promoted if teachers make them reflect upon their learning and train them in learning how to learn.

Based on the results of this study and for future investigations, the researcher recommended considering variables such as sex, age, learning style, motivation, and social background of the participants since they may affect secondary school students' choice of strategies.

Another study conducted by Chang & Goswami (2010) aimed to find the answers to these questions: What factors promote the implementation of *C*ommunicative *L*anguage *T*eaching by Taiwanese college English teachers? and What factors hinder the implementation of CLT by Taiwanese college English teachers?

The researchers conducted interviews with participants in order to collect qualitative data. The participants in this study were eight teachers from two universities in Southern Taiwan that integrate CLT into the English curriculum. For the purpose of this study, the researchers conducted face-to-face, semi-structured interviews to investigate the participants' perceptions and experiences regarding the research questions.

The interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese, which is the native language of the interviewees. During the interviews, Researcher 1 asked the interviewees predetermined, open-ended questions, allowing for flexibility in follow-up questions. Two open ended questions were asked to investigate factors that promote or hinder the teachers' implementation of CLT. During the interviews, Researcher 1 listened to the interviewees' responses for clues to probe for additional information. After the interviews, Researcher 1 translated and transcribed each interview into English. Further, the translations were verified by two reviewers who are experts in translation from Chinese to English.

The results of the current study showed first, that teacher's professional training can provide knowledge about CLT, help the teachers overcome difficulties they encounter in the classrooms, and encourage the teachers to keep experimenting with CLT. Second, the practice of CLT involves not only teachers, but also students. The students' willingness and motivation to use English in the classroom can have a positive impact on teachers' CLT practice. Third, school support encourages teachers to implement CLT while exam-oriented teaching, limited teaching hours, and large classes impede the teachers' practicing CLT effectively. Teachers will have more time to conduct communicative activities if class size is reduced, instructional hours

are increased, or students' performance is not evaluated by exams.

The following research work carried out by Narayanan, Rajasekaran, & Iyyappan (2008) aimed at studying some factors affecting in relation to the learning of English as a second language at the tertiary level. Besides, the project analyzed the most important socio-psychological factors such as motivation, attitude, and language anxiety.

For this study the researchers conducted a survey to four hundred and eight (138 female and 270 male) first year engineering and technology students from five engineering colleges in and around Chennai, India. Questionnaires were prepared and the data were collected mainly in written modes.

It is viewed from the results of the research findings that most of the male students found English is difficult to learn and they feel shy and uncomfortable to use English in and outside of the classroom. Moreover, they preferred to learn English in a small group. This strong agreement and higher mean average shows that male students have low self-esteem or efficacy or confidence towards learning English. However, female students have higher mean average and strong agreement in the following statements: "I can improve my English", "I find listening to English easy", "I find understanding English grammar easy", "I find reading English easy".

Furthermore, the results showed that the factors such as motivation, attitude, language anxiety and gender have a great impact or affecting students' English learning. In short, if the learner wants to foster linguistics skills effectively he/she needs to be highly motivated, to have a positive attitude towards the language, and to show low language anxiety.

Description, Analysis, and Interpretation of Results

This section comprises the analysis and interpretation of the findings resulting from this study. The analysis and interpretation of data is based on the results of the questionnaires as well as on the results of the observation sheets.

The information gotten from the students and teachers questionnaire was quantified; then it was presented in percentage forms. This analysis is presented in tabular form in the form of pie charts. The researcher used pie charts containing two or more variables in a single graph.

Quantitative Analysis

Factors Concerning Teachers

Which level of education do teachers have?

GRAPH 1

English Master's D. 7%

HS Diploma 13%

English Bach. D. 80%
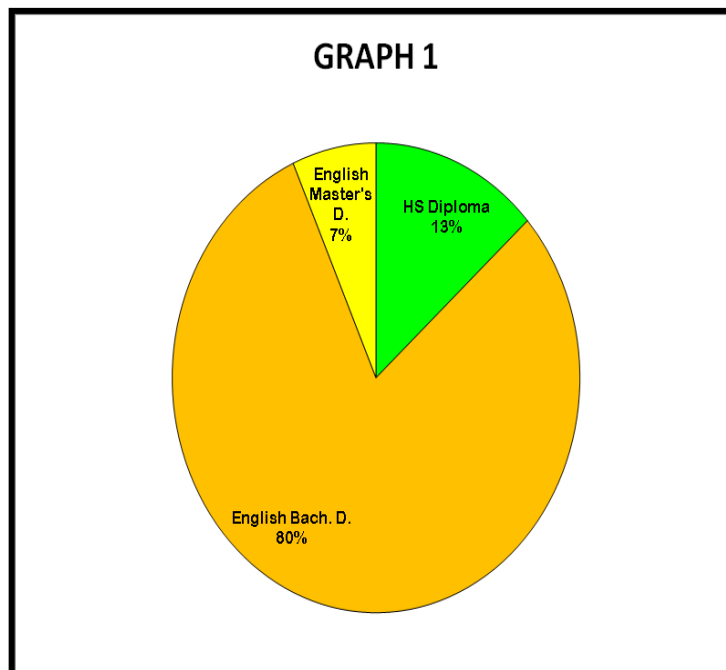
Author: Wolfgang Cueva Miller
Source: Teacher's Questionnaire

The pie chart above shows in percentages the level of education the interviewed teachers have. As it can be observed, 13% corresponds to teachers who did not have a professional diploma in education, 80% represents to teachers who

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have already obtained an English Bachelor's degree, and only a 7% to teachers who have a master's degree.

Based on the information above, 87% of the interviewed teachers ensured to have a degree in education, which may mean that they have all the necessary tools to be efficient in what they everyday do in their classes with their students. This fact may, somehow, guarantee the success of the teaching-learning process. However, even though the fact that a broad range of English teachers (87%) have a degree in education, this does not necessarily mean that their English level is satisfactory.

As part of this research work, all the English teachers who were subject of this analysis were interviewed in order to determine not only their level of education but also their language proficiency. According to the results obtained out of these interviews, most teachers fit in a B1 level of English regarding the Common European Framework. This means that these teachers may be classified as "Independent Users" meaning that they are able to understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. These teachers may also deal with most situations while travelling in an area where the English is spoken. Besides, they may be able to produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest; and finally, they might be able to describe experiences, events and ambitions and in a brief way give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans (Council of Europe 2001).

Nevertheless, a B1 level may not be enough. According to Jean-Michel Mosquera, Project Manager of English for the Ministry of Education, the objective is to ensure that all teachers of EFL reach a B2 level in English (as defined by the Common European Framework of Reference) and to improve their ability to teach

EFL.

Considering what has been stated, professionalization of teachers, for instance their intellectual ability, teaching experience, and academic preparation, positively affect students' proficiency as well as their own performance, but it is also true that teachers must cover this gap from a B1 to a B2, meaning that teachers need to be at least sufficient in the language being taught so that their students' mastery of the target language is guaranteed. Applying this formula will certainly make a difference in the language teaching and learning process for good.

Which of the following methods was used in the observed classes?

GRAPH 2

WLA 13%
TPR 7%
TBLT 7%
CLL 6%
CLT 67%
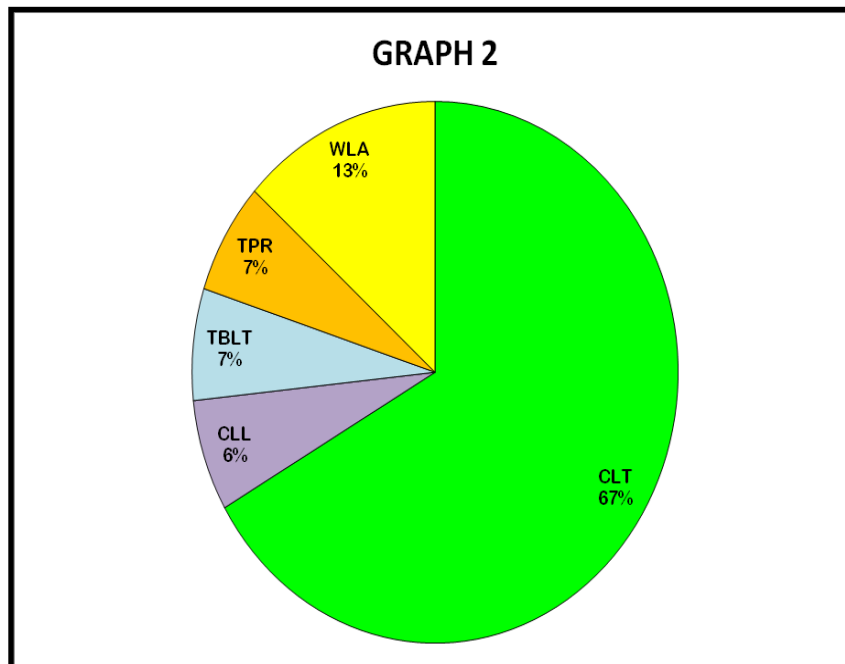
Author: Wolfgang Cueva Miller
Source: Teacher's Questionnaire

The chart above shows the most common teaching methods used by the interviewed teachers. According to the research, most teachers (67%) prefer to use the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method which aims to involve social interaction activities, such as dialogues, role plays, and other conversation and discussion tasks (Orwig 1999). Besides, 13% of the teachers confessed to make use

of the Whole Language Approach (WLA), a method that emphasizes learning through experimenting and creative writing, listening, speaking, and reading activities at the same time.

On the other hand, 7% of the teachers stated to use mostly the Total Physical Response (TPR) method in their classes. In these classes the teacher acted or modeled some actions, and then learners performed those commands imitating what they saw or listened. Another 7% commented feeling comfortable using the Task-Based Language Teaching method, this is, through tasks and activities derived from the students' needs toward the language. These needs become the backbone of what would be covered in the lesson, the teacher simply monitored and reinforced what learners were performing, and the remaining 6% preferred to use the *Cooperative Language Learning* approach in which learners get together into working groups to help each other and learn from one another.

However, based on the class observation, there were a few or no class activities that showed these methods were being used. Almost all of the class activities were more part of the Grammar Translation Method. Vocabulary for instance, was learned through direct translation from the target language and grammar was taught with extensive explanations in the native language, and only later applied by learners in the production of sentences through translation from one language to the other.

Based on the observations performed, it might be said that only a few teachers were completely aware of the method they said were using. Most of the interviewed teachers thought they were making use of one method when in fact the activities in their classes were clearly part of a different method or methods.

Do teachers use whole-group activities to teach their lessons?

GRAPH 3

NO
20%

YES
80%
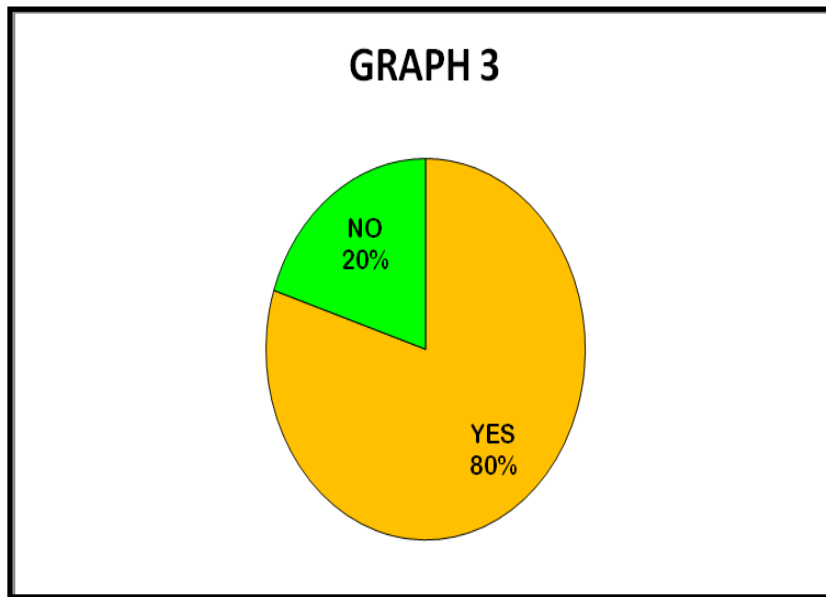
Author: Wolfgang Cueva Miller
Source: Teacher's Questionnaire

The chart above shows that 80% of the interviewed teachers use whole-group activities in their classes and 20% of them prefer other strategies to teach their lessons. Teachers who accepted using these whole group activities argued they prefer to use this strategy since the level of ability of their students was between basic and lower intermediate and this source let them record students' progress easily as well as keeping good discipline. On the other hand, those teachers who said not to use this kind of activity too often expressed their preference for group-work activities instead. They mentioned the jigsaw strategy for instance, in which learners become experts on one aspect of the topic assigned and then they share their expertise with their classmates so that everyone participates and at the same time learns out of it.

According to Tanveer (2010) the greatest advantage of whole-class activities is the bonding together of the whole group. Moreover, whole class speaking activities such as discussions, for example, generally encourage fluency

and a meaningful exchange of ideas among all the participants. This greatly contributes to the learning process.

However, based on what was observed, the amount of whole group activities in classes was very limited, teachers tended to follow a textbook and all the tasks that were cited in there were done mechanically. Furthermore, the opportunities students had to participate actively in classes were almost null. Whole class activities were a few times used at the end of a lesson to summarize briefly what has been taught or done in that particular lesson.

Finally, based on the observations performed, it is very recommendable to provide students with more opportunities to share their ideas with one another, since this motivates them to speak English, which is one of the major aims when teaching a foreign language.

Do teachers use individual activities to teach their lessons?
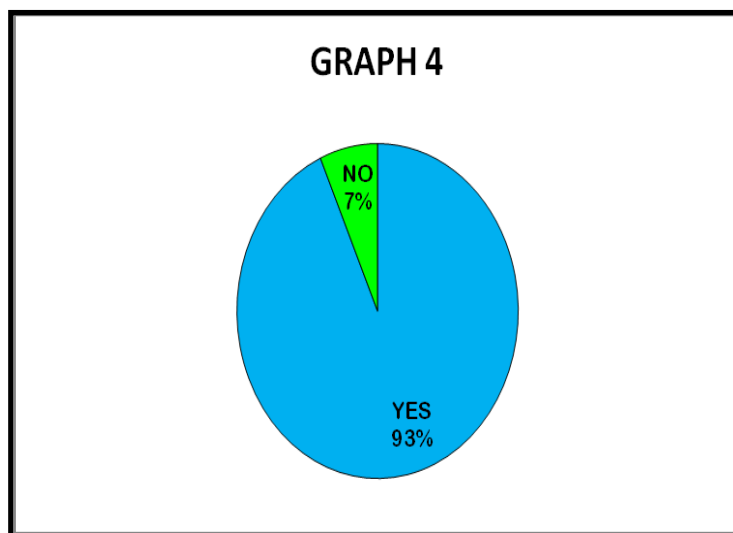
Author: Wolfgang Cueva Miller
Source: Teacher's Questionnaire

As it is shown in the chart above 93% of the teachers accepted using individual activities in their classes. According to what was observed, this was the most used

strategy by teachers. They said their students have the opportunity to work at their own pace and this issue lets them feel confident about what they are learning. Students confirmed this opinion by indicating that through these activities they can use their own learning styles and strategies to learn. Besides this, the interviewed teachers pointed out that individual activities must always serve as a challenge to students, so they can feel motivated enough to perform them until they are completed.

On the contrary, the remaining 7% of teachers still favored group-work activities from time to time since, according to them, activities such as character collages and brochures generate cooperative learning which aims to develop student's knowledge, communication skills, collaborative skills, critical thinking skills, and attitudes.

According to what was observed, the activities that were used the most included gap filling which was used to reinforce just learned vocabulary; reading comprehension through questions and answers in the textbook which was used to evaluate students' comprehension of texts under different topics; writing sets of sentences in different grammar tenses which was thought for students to apply some grammar rules they were just taught; listening to simple dialogues out of a CD which was thought to motivate students' listening-comprehension skills among others.

Do teachers use group work activities to teach their lessons?

GRAPH 5

NO
13%

YES
87%
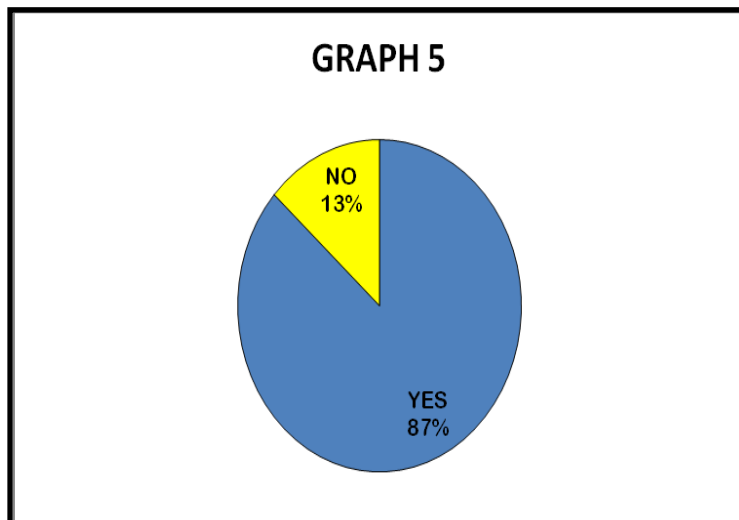
Author: Wolfgang Cueva Miller
Source: Teacher's Questionnaire

The chart above shows that 87% of the interviewed teachers said they make use of group activities in their classes while 13% were not in favor of them because, in their opinion, there are communication difficulties most of the time, also because it demands a lot of and careful organization so it is time consuming, and the classroom physical space is not accessible.

All the interviewed teachers who were in favor argued that group activities positively tend to involve students in class activities, where they are forced to use real everyday language. Besides this issue, it was clear for them the fact that students learn to work in collaboration with one another and to find solutions to probable problems that might emerge while working together. They also commented that these activities help develop students' listening and speaking skills. However, teachers made use of this strategy in none of the observed classes. Even though teachers were clearly in favor of group work activities because of the advantages mentioned, they expressed that discipline becomes a problem since

learners do not get seriously involved in the tasks assigned.

Baker & Vestrup (2003) state that group work activities give all students lots of real speaking practice, allow weaker learners to speak to another student instead of speaking in front of the whole class, and teach students to help each other with their learning.

However, if teachers want these activities to work properly in their classrooms there are some guidelines they need to think about. For instance, it is important to make sure we give very clear instructions about the task to be performed so students know exactly what to do, it would be a good idea to write these instructions on the board. Besides, teachers should ask students to make positive noise only so that all the groups may work without distraction. Another consideration is time; students should know when to start and when to finish the activity. Furthermore, it is very recommendable for the teacher to be constantly moving around the classroom to check groups' work as well as to give timely feedback.

This strategy is an asset in the teaching-learning process since students learn to work with each other and their attention is not focused in the teacher only.

Do teachers use English most of the time in their classes?
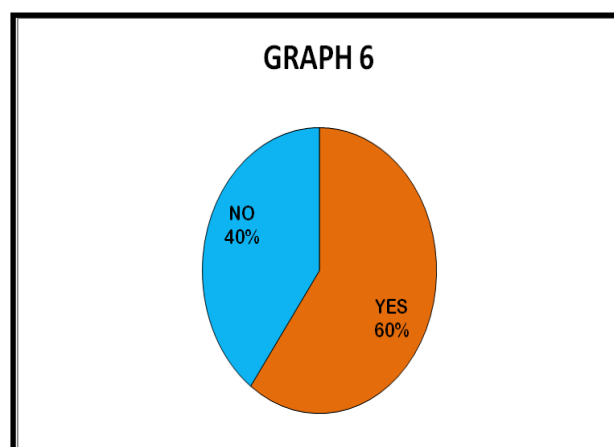
GRAPH 6

NO 40%

YES 60%

Author: Wolfgang Cueva Miller
Source: Teacher's Questionnaire

As it is shown in the chart above only 60% of the interviewed teachers admitted using English most of the time in their classes.

The interviewed teachers recognized that the frequent use of English in classes definitely enhances students learning of the language as well as their language skills. Teachers also said that at the beginning it is always difficult for students to understand, but little by little they are able to get used to use the language in classes.

Even though most of the interviewed teachers recognized the advantages of using English most of the time in classes, the reality was different. Teachers did make use of Spanish (L1) in classes and learners were allowed to speak Spanish at any time during the lesson even to make very simple requests among them or to the teacher.

On the contrary, the 40% of teachers think that there is nothing wrong with using L1 in class since, according to their explanation, the use of the native language eases teachers work a lot and students seem to feel comfortable when their teachers do it.

However, Baker & Vestrup (2003) state that it is always a good idea to use as much English as possible during lessons, as this may be the only chance students have to hear the language.

As for students who might have difficulties understanding the language, Baker & Vestrup recommend to start giving instructions in their first language, followed immediately by the same phrase in English. However, it is indispensable to slowly start using English alone so that students get used to the language.

Based on the observations performed, it is very recommendable to provide students with more opportunities to speak English in classes, to use the language,

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through, for instance, activities such as Hangman or Simon Says for beginners or Forming Sentences with Words, World Travel Trip or Who Wants to be a Millionaire for more advance groups. By doing this, students will be able to master the language sooner and better.

Do teachers plan their lessons?

GRAPH 7

NO
0%

YES
100%
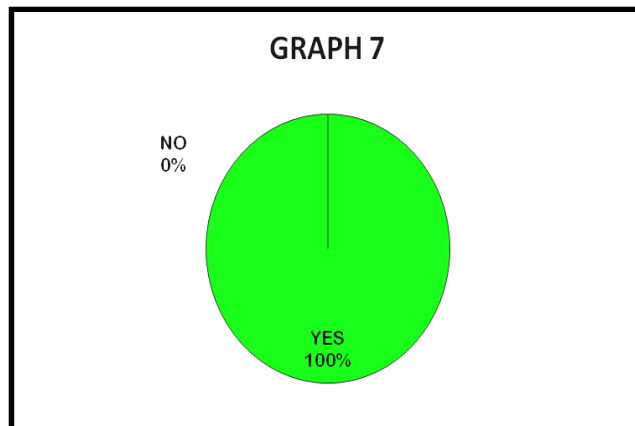
Author: Wolfgang Cueva Miller
Source: Teacher's Questionnaire

The chart above shows that all of the interviewed teachers said to plan their lessons. According to these teachers, planning lessons is a requirement in their institutions, but besides this, they considered of extreme importance the fact of having a plan before starting a lesson because, as they said, the success of a class much depends on effective planning.

According to what was observed, the aspects of the lesson plan that were applied the most in classes were the lesson topic, objectives, guided and individual practice, materials, and resources. On the other hand, aspects such as time, warm-up activities, appropriate introduction of the new topic, and relevant feedback were poorly used or simply were not considered by the observed teachers.

An effective planning ensures a right balance among all the language skills (reading, speaking, listening, and writing) that is why it is indispensable to

consider students' different learning styles, interests, and unique abilities for a successful lesson.

Farrell (2002) is completely right when he states that teachers plan in order to feel more confident, to learn the subject matter better, to enable lesson to run more smoothly, and to anticipate problems before they happen.

Certainly, having a lesson planned becomes a must before starting any class. Due to the importance of lesson planning, it is essential to know the correct elements to include in a plan book.

There are a number of approaches of lesson planning. According to Gainey (1999) lesson plans must include: lesson objectives, teaching methods and activities, the materials needed, the procedures, and the amount of time to be spent on each lesson activity.

Having a lesson map clear as well as following it carefully step by step will surely improve classroom management and increase students' learning.

Do teachers consider aspects such as discipline, timing, feedback, and instruction to teach their lessons?

GRAPH 8

NO
0%

YES
100%
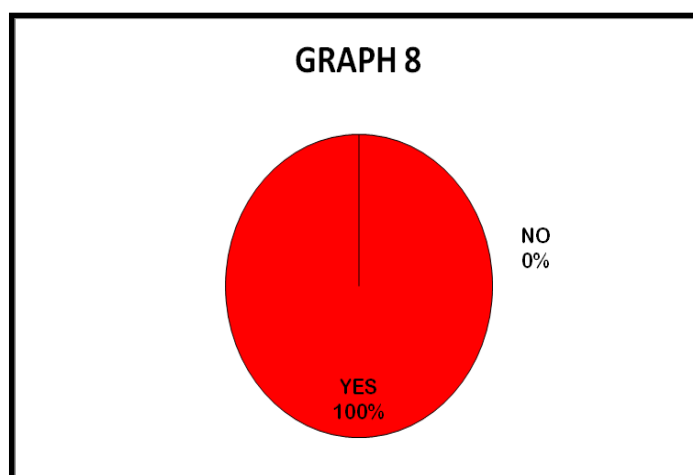
Author: Wolfgang Cueva Miller
Source: Teacher's Questionnaire

Graph 8 shows that 100% of the interviewed teachers consider discipline, timing, feedback, and instruction at the moment of teaching their lessons.

The interviewed teachers agreed that having students involved actively in every lesson is the best way to deal with discipline in classes. It was clarified that setting clear rules and having students understand the consequences of following them or not is really necessary to avoid inconveniences in the future.

However, to this respect, Orlich, Harder, Callahan, Trevisan & Brown (2010) clearly state that controlling discipline in classes does not necessarily involve punishment, instead, they believe that classroom discipline problems can be solved in ways that express care and concern on the part of the teacher with direct student involvement.

According to the interviewed teachers, to consider discipline, timing, feedback, and instruction at the moment of teaching lessons really makes a difference between a successful lesson or to have students bored and unmotivated.

If we think carefully about this idea, then, it may be said that human beings respond better to positive stimuli rather than to negative comments.

Orlich, Harder, Callahan, Trevisan & Brown (2010) recommend the use of a discipline plan that allows the teacher to detail classroom rules and the corresponding behaviors that are expected from students. They argue that a plan like this should include: clearly stated rules, positive recognition, and a list of consequences organized in a hierarchy from one to five, being five for those situations in which severe misbehavior is shown.

By following these recommendations, it will certainly contribute to a friendly classroom environment and students will feel more self-confident when attending

classes.

Feedback is another aspect teachers commented about as being of extreme importance for students. They also said that providing feedback to learners enhances their improvement of their language skills day by day, and that it keeps a positive attitude towards their classes.

Long (2006) confirms this fact when he states that offering feedback to students helps to create a supportive teaching environment in classes. He adds that this feedback can be given in the form of error correction, self-editing, peer feedback, or conferencing.

However, based on class observations, feedback was not provided as often as it was required. In some situations, it was observed that some learners preferred not to ask the teacher or even state any comment and remained silent, probably because students did not feel motivated enough to do so.

Considering this fact, it might be concluded that providing feedback as well as receiving feedback from learners may be another useful tool for those teachers whose main objective is to encourage their students to participate actively in classes and also to be confident enough to use the language as often as possible, at least within their English classroom walls.

Do teachers consider students' needs to teach English successfully?

GRAPH 9

NO
13%

YES
87%
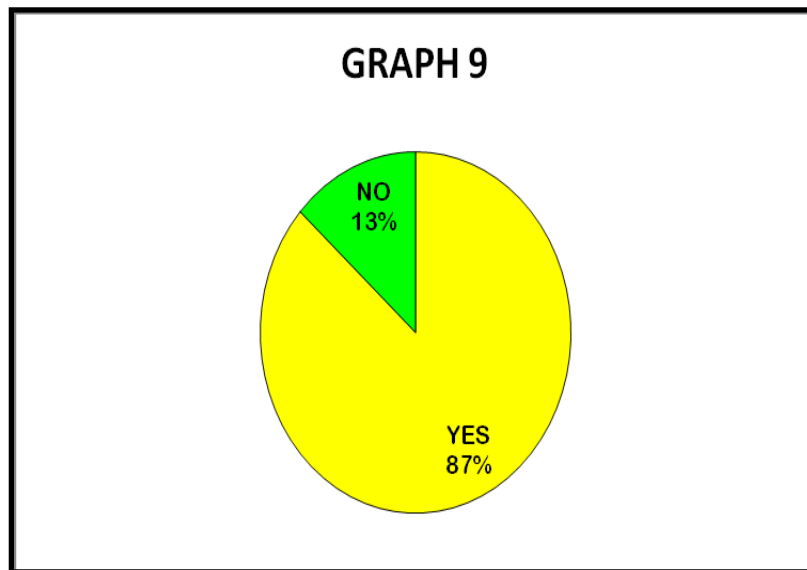
Author: Wolfgang Cueva Miller
Source: Teacher's Questionnaire

Graph 9 shows that 87% of the interviewed teachers said they consider

students' needs such as age, personality, attitude, aptitude, motivation, and learning

styles to teach English. On the contrary, 13% explained that it is difficult to teach

based on students' needs since the number of learners is too large for only one

teacher to be in charge of a group and also because of the so different abilities,

English level, and learning ways each learner has.

According to what was observed, some teachers did little or nothing to

motivate students' language production, and students on their account, did little

effort to learn the language. In addition, most classes were teacher-centered and

learners were given little opportunities to interact. In some classes there were groups

of students who had difficulties understanding teachers' instructions; however,

teachers did not pay much attention to this issue, in consequence students tried to

help one another in order to do what they were asked to. It was evident the use of

Spanish in both teachers and students. Students on their account expressed their performance as well as their learning pace would improve if only the teacher guided them step by step all through the tasks assigned in classes.

Talking about motivation and learning, Theobald (2006) recognizes that motivation to learn is a mindset and that it first comes from within oneself. However, it is known that extrinsic motivation is also essential to learn English properly.

There are some things teachers can do to help students' motivation increase. For instance, teachers can start recognizing that all learners have the same aptitude to learn as well as their own learning style toward the language so that they might be treated fairly and patiently. Teachers might permit their students to make mistakes so that students may also benefit from those experiences. Besides, teachers may maximize students' achievements and minimize students' failures so that students might feel more confident to learn (Theobald, 2006).

As it can be seen, teachers may really influence positively or negatively in their students' performance in classes. Learners' success or failure in the learning process is in teachers' hands. It is a great responsibility.

Do teachers consider students' level to teach English successfully?

GRAPH 10

NO
20%

YES
80%
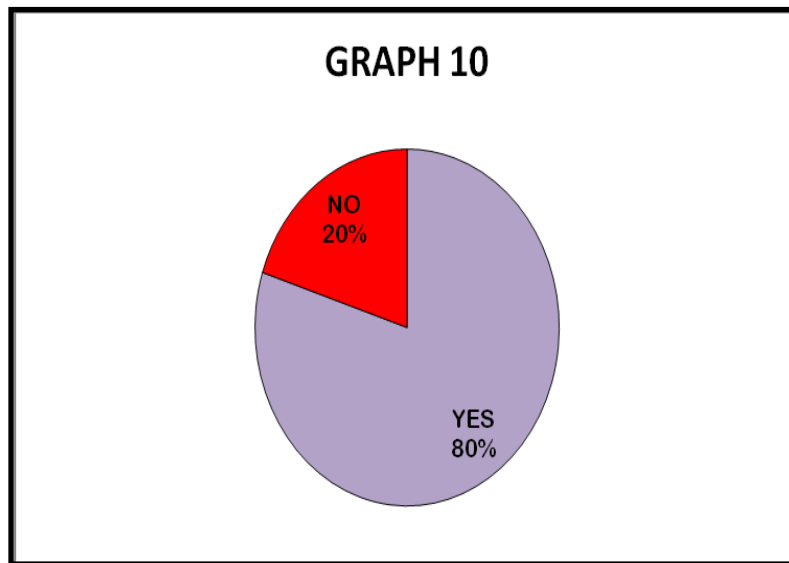
Author: Wolfgang Cueva Miller
Source: Teacher's Questionnaire

According to graph 10, most of the interviewed teachers (80%) do consider their students' language level to teach English while a 20% expressed that it is extremely complicated to teach based on their students' level since there is a totally uneven number of different levels of language ability in each of their classes.

On the account of the first group of teachers, even though the groups of students in Public high schools are numerous, they commented they have to think about reaching, if not all, at least most of their students through different activities planned for every lesson. For example, they said these activities may go from simple, such as asking students to repeat vocabulary words after them or writing simple sentences, to intermediate such as letting learners with a relative higher level answer direct questions from the teacher or even express their opinions about a determined topic through the writing of a few paragraphs.

It was common to observe that most of the visited classes were multi-level. To teach this type of groups becomes a challenge for teachers since it is difficult to find

appropriate teaching material that fits all students. Besides this, it is hard to determine the individual needs of all the students as well as to have an 'only English' environment. Nevertheless, if teachers give the right support, English learners can learn at the highest academic levels (Carr & Bertrando 2012).

Considering students' English skills, most of them said that the activities set by their teachers were mostly difficult to do; therefore, students felt unmotivated to attend these teachers' classes and to learn the language.

When facing a situation like this, first, it is essential to establish the language level of every learner in order to have a departure point. This can be done through the application of diagnostic tests. Then, since it is difficult to have appropriate textbooks for multi-level classes, it is advisable to keep students working on different activities based on the same theme. These activities may go from simple to more challenging depending on students' skills. Next, a variety of individual and especially group tasks would make students feel interested in the lesson. Having students interested in the lesson may give teachers the opportunity to walk around the classroom providing feedback to low- learners as well as reinforcing the content of the theme being studied.

Which is the level of their students?
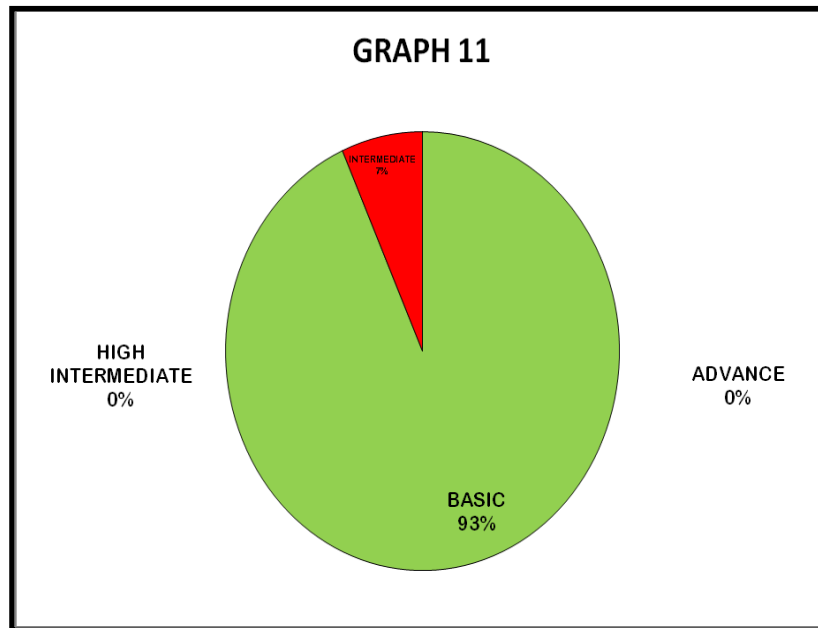
GRAPH 11

INTERMEDIATE
7%

HIGH
INTERMEDIATE
0%

ADVANCE
0%

BASIC
93%

Author: Wolfgang Cueva Miller
Source: Teacher's Questionnaire

As it is shown in the chart above, 93% of the interviewed teachers pointed out that the English level of their students is basic and only 7% accepted their students' level reaches the intermediate level.

The interviewed teachers said that most of their students are always struggling to keep up with instruction because of their low level of English. They added that students at this level are always depending on the teacher to help them solve even any little difficulty with the language, they simply do not risk themselves to issue an answer without the consent of the teacher.

According to the teachers, one of the major barriers their students have to face is the panic they feel to make mistakes and to feel embarrassed in front of their classmates due to their lack of self-confidence caused by their insufficient knowledge of the language.

Based on students' participation in all of the observed lessons and considering

the classification of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, it is to be said that students' language level may correspond to an A1 or A2. This means that students could write short, simple notes and messages relating to matters in areas of immediate need; they showed a basic vocabulary repertoire of isolated words and phrases related to particular situations only; also, students could answer simple questions and respond to simple statements in an interview; they could communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information; they could understand questions and instructions addressed carefully and slowly to them and follow short, simple directions; and they could identify specific information in simpler written material they encountered such as letters, brochures, and short newspaper articles.

Factors Concerning Classrooms

How many students are there in the observed classrooms?
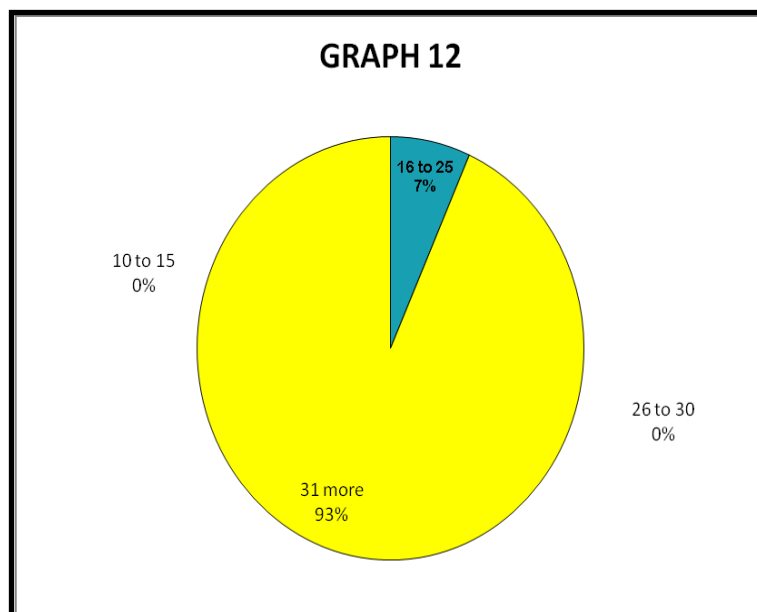
Author: Wolfgang Cueva Miller
Source: Teacher's Questionnaire

According to graph 12, there were more than 31 students in 93% of the observed classrooms.

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The teachers in charge of those classes, with more than 31 students, expressed that it becomes quite complex to teach English when classes are that large. They pointed out that teaching large groups present some difficulties such as keeping all students motivated, dealing with the noise level, and controlling students' distractions.

Besides this, grading homework and quizzes is very time consuming; therefore, providing feedback to students becomes a serious problem. Sometimes discipline may also turn into out of control especially when students are assigned to work in pairs or in groups.

It is a fact that most teachers prefer to work with small groups of students because small classes are easier to manage; they also indicated that with these groups many more and varied group activities may be used and students may feel more motivated to participate; subsequently, learning may be monitored constantly and teachers may give feedback timely.

Most of the interviewed students expressed their preference for small classes too. They said that if their classes were smaller, they would be able to focus more on the tasks planned by their teachers and in this way distractions would be avoided; besides this, they also mentioned that probably because of the large number of peers in their classrooms, sometimes their needs are not fully solved by their teachers. Students also ensured that if their classes were smaller, they would feel more confident to participate in classes as well as to show a more active and positive behavior.

Mora (2009) backs up these facts when he states that small classes can provide conditions for better academic performance. In small classes teachers may not

worry about issues such as misbehavior or unmotivated students so that they can focus more on speaking and reading activities that result in learners' more active participation making the teaching-learning process one of a high-quality.

Do teachers feel comfortable with the number of students they are working with?
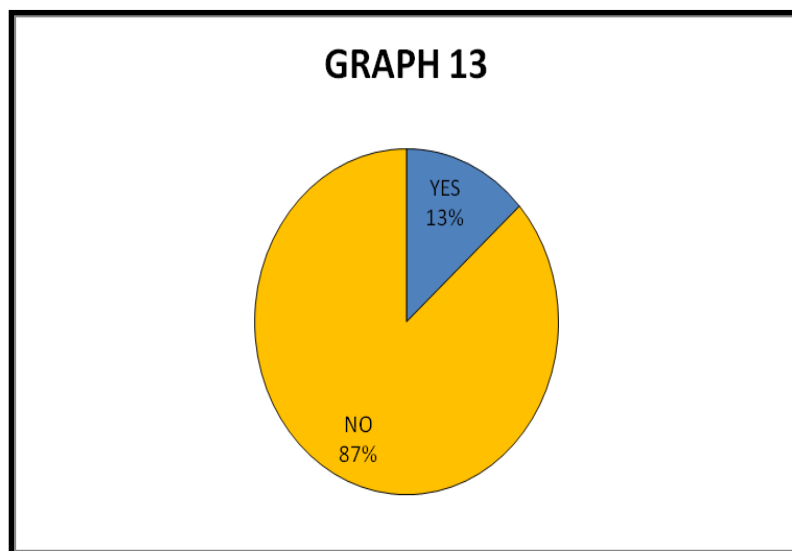
Author: Wolfgang Cueva Miller
Source: Teacher's Questionnaire

The information in the chart above shows that 13% of the interviewed teachers said not to have any problem teaching their large classes basically due to the fact that they are used to do it; however, they pointed out that it would be more beneficial to their students to be in smaller groups in order to maximize their learning pace and current abilities.

On the contrary, 87% of the interviewed teachers ensured not to feel comfortable teaching to large classes. They mentioned some of the difficulties they find when entering their classrooms; these issues go from having high levels of anxiety caused by the large number of students to the inability to help lower level learners as well as grading assignments and the amount of time this requires, preparing additional material, and the huge number of photocopies

this demands, unbearable noise level and disciplinary issues, and limited space for group work, TPR activities, role plays etc.

Based on their experiences, teachers concluded that teaching would be more enjoyable if they would have the opportunity to have smaller groups of students in their classrooms. This positive change would make the teaching-learning process completely manageable in many aspects and would favor language acquisition.

Unfortunately, they observed, maybe due to budgets, space, or lack of teachers, many public high schools have no choice, but to offer large classes regardless of all the complications this decision may imply.

Do teachers have enough space to work with the group of students they have been assigned?

GRAPH 14

YES
33%

NO
67%
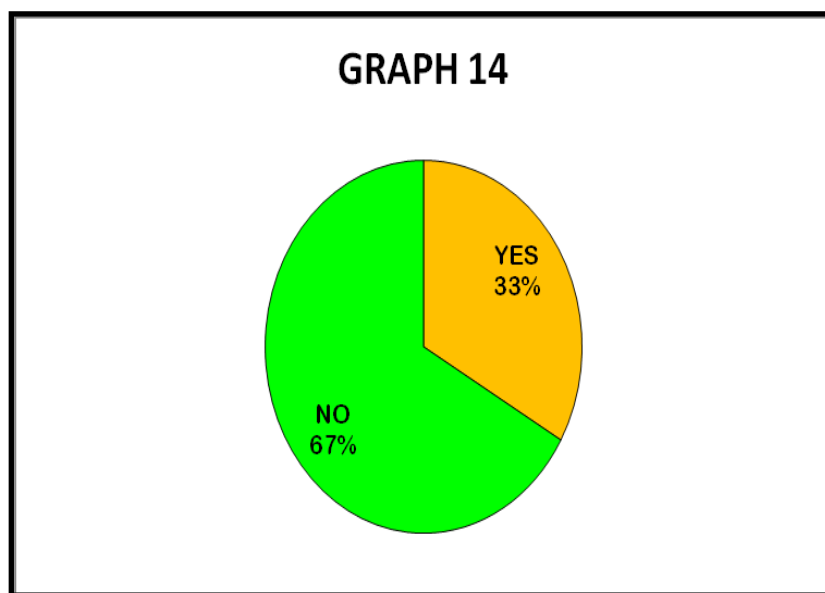
Author: Wolfgang Cueva Miller
Source: Teacher's Questionnaire

Graph 14 shows that 67% of the interviewed teachers considered having enough space to work with their group of students while 33% felt uncomfortable since the space they had in their classrooms was not pedagogically appropriate for

the number of students they were in charge of.

Teachers were convinced that having enough space in their classrooms is extremely important for successful classes. Capacious rooms influence directly in students' positive behavior, they said, because they can see the teacher clearly and the teacher as well can see his/her students and have eye contact with them which contributes to good discipline issues.

Another point that was mentioned as positive to create an enjoyable environment in classes was the one related to the arrangement of the furniture and supplementary material in the classroom. Having all organized stuff contributes to avoid frustration because students may feel they have a complete access to any material in the classroom at the moment it is required. Besides this, a good organization facilitates the effective use of the instructional time minimizing distractions in consequence all tasks planned by the teacher for that specific lesson may be performed opportunely.

Most of the students, who were asked about the classroom space that they have to work agreed that their performance in classes would improve if they were given larger classrooms. To this respect, McLeod (2003) states that any teacher's instructional program is directly affected by classroom space and that the success of students' experiences are enhanced or diminished by their surroundings. In consequence, McLeod's ideas do nothing but confirm the fact that class size has a positive or negative effect on students' learning especially when it has to do with language learning.

Do teachers arrange student's seats in relation to the activities planned for their classes?

GRAPH 15

NO
47%

YES
53%
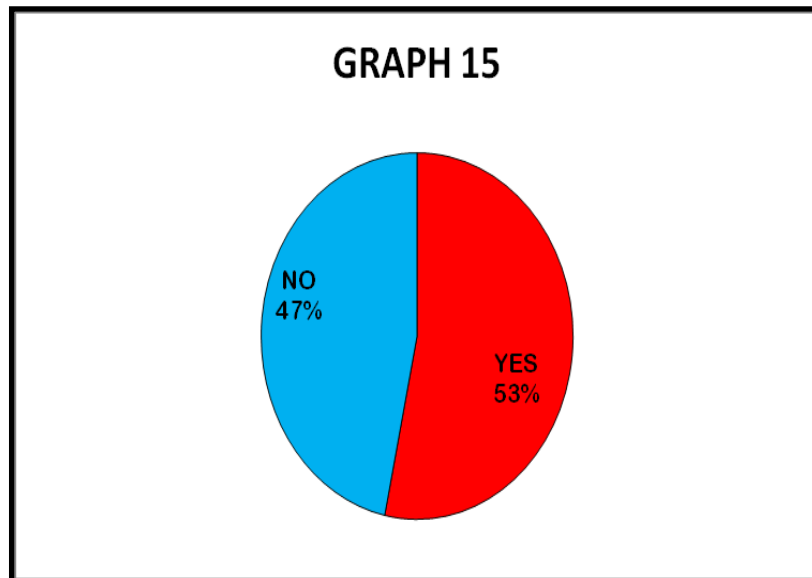
Author: Wolfgang Cueva Miller
Source: Teacher's Questionnaire

Graph 15 shows that 47% of the teachers accepted not to rearrange seats in relation to the activities planned for their classes due to the fact that, according to their opinion, rearranging seats do not make any significant difference in performing class activities. On the other hand, 53% of the interviewed teachers said they do arrange student's seats according to the activities planned for their classes.

However, based on the observations made, seats were never rearranged, but they remained the same, probably because all of the observed classes were teacher-centered and students were given no opportunities to work in pairs or in groups; even though, some teachers said to believe in the advantages of this strategy.

Despite the observations, the second group of the interviewed teachers commented on the benefits of having different seating arrangements depending on the activities lessons demand. They appointed that language production is enhanced

whenever seats are set up taking into account the purpose of the activity for the class.

On the other hand, a great amount of students expressed they liked when their teachers asked them to arrange their seats into groups of four-five seated at a table and face each other. Students say assignments are much easier to complete because they work together and have each other to cooperate with. Students think this type of seating arrangement positively promotes social skills in the area of communication.

Gainey (1999) supports this way of thinking when he states that 'clusters' of four to six students facing each other motivates learners' communication and collaboration skills more than the traditional rows of five and six students facing the teacher.

Undoubtedly, if it has to be thought about some advantages of seating arrangement, then, language production is one. This means, for instance, that dialogue or role play activities would work better if students are asked to sit in circles so that they may face each other at the moment they are performing the assigned task.

On the other hand, for reading activities or grammar explanations from the teacher, then, the rows set-up would be a better alternative.

How many students do teachers think is the appropriate number to teach English?
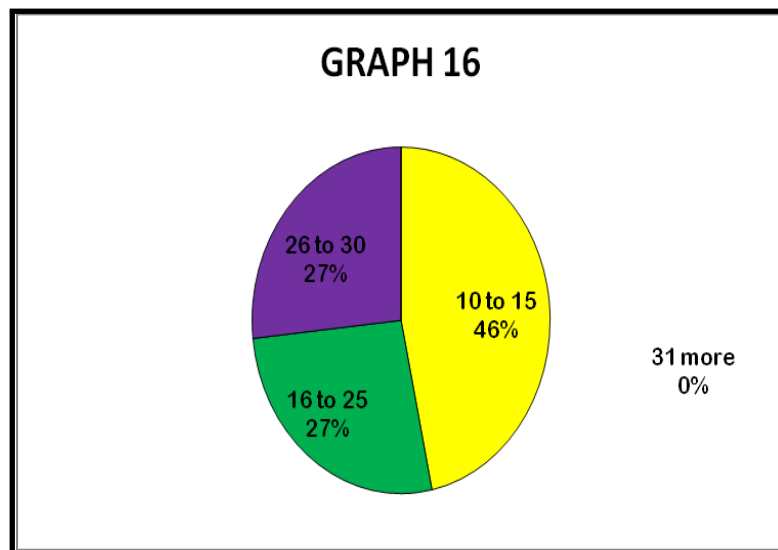
GRAPH 16

Author: Wolfgang Cueva Miller
Source: Teacher's Questionnaire

According to graph 16, most of the interviewed teachers (46%) think that 10-15 is the ideal number of learners to teach English. However, according to the reality in Ecuador, it was also said that a number up to 30 students may be handled without too much difficulty. Even though teachers said this, it was clarified by all of them that the ideal number would be from 10-15 students per class.

Nevertheless, the reality in the visited public high schools is somehow different because the average number of students attending a class is at least three times bigger than the ideal group pointed out by most of the interviewed teachers. As it was stated before, most of the interviewed teachers see this issue as something negative that affects the teaching-learning process.

Richards & Renandya (2002) state that when teachers have to work with classes of fifty students or more, the teaching methodology is automatically set into teacher- centered. They argue that this methodology largely ignores students' individual differences and promotes poor learning.

Interviewed teachers think that effective learning demands a number of opportunities for students to become actively involved in their education. These opportunities cannot be achieved when teachers are faced with large classes. Teachers agreed that the greater the number of students in class, the fewer the opportunities for students to participate orally. They said that because of this fact teachers tend to concentrate more on mechanics rather than on style and content.

Based on the researcher's experiences, it has to be said that large classes limit the achievement of learning objectives as well as the number of class or home assignments that might be used to reinforce the just acquired knowledge. Large classes motivate poor academic performance and encourage learners' insatisfaction. *Do teachers use teaching resources (TV, Tape/CD recorder, computer(s), projector(s), smartboard, and supplementary materials)?*

GRAPH 17

NO
13%

YES
87%
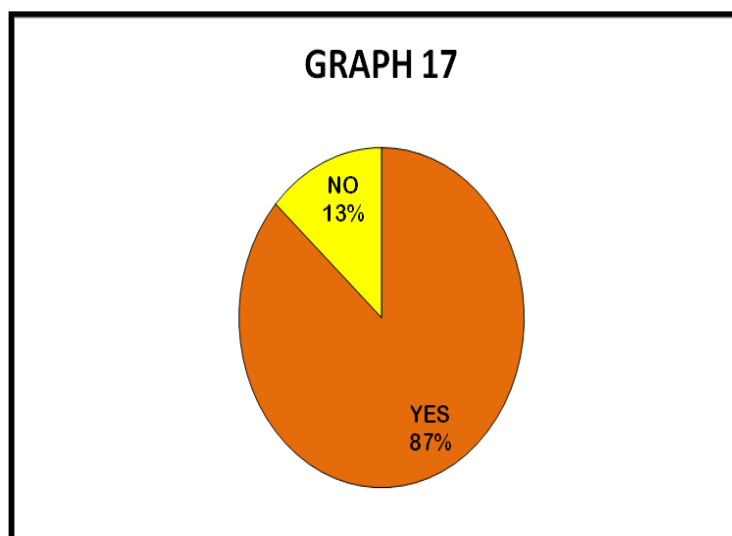
Author: Wolfgang Cueva Miller
Source: Teacher's Questionnaire

According to the graph above, 13% of teachers indicate they do not use teaching resources for teaching English; while, 87 % of the interviewed teachers stated to use various teaching resources in their classes. Based on the observed

lessons, the most used resources were CD players (60%), TVs (20%) and projectors (20%).

Teachers reported that whenever teaching materials are used in their classes students get more interested and motivated to participate actively in classes. This participation encourages learning and teaching becomes pleasantly easier.

This fact is supported by Baker (2000) who states that the use of resources (newspapers, videos, audiotapes, etc.) makes learning more realistic and contributes to students' performance in classes.

In the observed classes, CD players were mostly used for listening to dialogues, which were written in the textbooks used by the students. Teachers ensured that this activity provides an excellent opportunity for students to listen to the English that is spoken by different people in many different situations.

Another teaching aid teachers said to use from time to time is the TV. They commented students like when they can watch videos for instance, documentaries and movies with English or Spanish subtitles. Even though students get motivated by the use of this resource, teachers recognized they cannot use it very often, due to the few TVs available at their schools, and also, because of the large amount of topics that need to be taught all along the school year.

The interviewed students, on the other hand, expressed their preference for the use of other language learning resources rather than the traditional textbooks. For instance, they asked for language projects that include arts, music, and even technology. They commented that learning English would be more exciting if their teachers would take the decision to go further in their teaching methodologies.

Do teachers consider appropriate the resources they have in class?
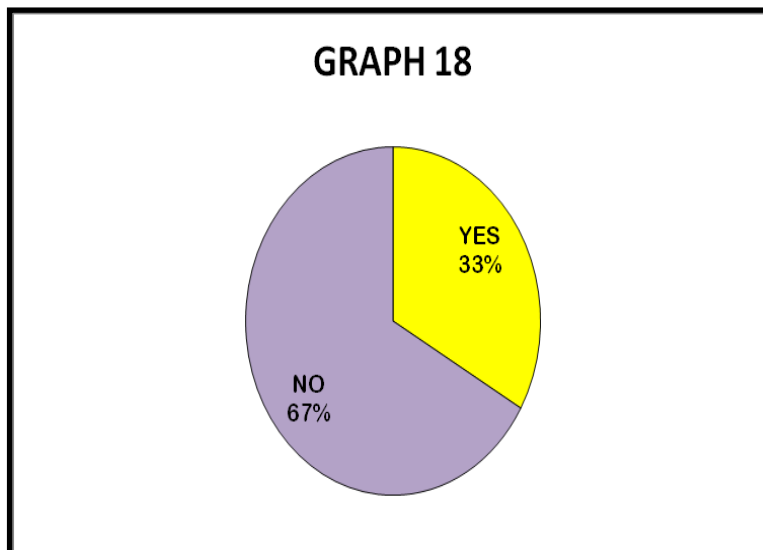
GRAPH 18

YES
33%

NO
67%

Author: Wolfgang Cueva Miller
Source: Teacher's Questionnaire

The information in the chart above shows that 33% of the interviewed teachers consider appropriate the resources they have in classes now, in comparison with the total lack of resources they were used to have years ago. They said that today at least they have a tape recorder that even it is not new it still works. This resource lets them do some listening activities in class which they consider help learners to develop their language skills in a better way; however, they insisted that not having resources is an issue they have got used to.

On the contrary, 67% of the interviewed teachers considered the resources they have in classes are not appropriate.

The interviewed teachers concentrated mostly in talking about their textbooks, because this is the resource they said to use more often. They explained that the textbooks they have been asked to use are fully appropriate considering that these textbooks have mainly been thought to instruct students according to their age or grade level regardless of their language proficiency. This issue, they commented,

makes teaching as well as learning a complex task to fulfill since, for example, more skillful students get sometimes bored and start losing interest in the lesson being taught, while low learners may feel frustrated at times when certain activities are too challenging for them; so, do not thinking about students' language proficiency is a mistake.

Considering the researcher's own experience, English textbooks should group a variety of activities to reach all students in a class; English textbooks should be thought to consider different levels of difficulty in their exercises; English textbooks should include interesting and relevant information about a variety of current issues that might call learners' attention; but above all, English textbooks should be media friendly since this issue motivates learners' language acquisition.

However, let us not forget that it is not a textbook the one which teaches a lesson but the teacher the one that makes a difference. This means that resources may be as appropriate as teachers decide they are. Brown (2001) makes us remember that teachers are called to find 'creative' use for the textbooks that have been handed in to them. The good use teachers can make of a teaching resource is completely in teachers' hands. Effective teachers can always make the difference.

Factors Concerning Educational institutions

Do the institutions review teachers' lesson plans?

GRAPH 19
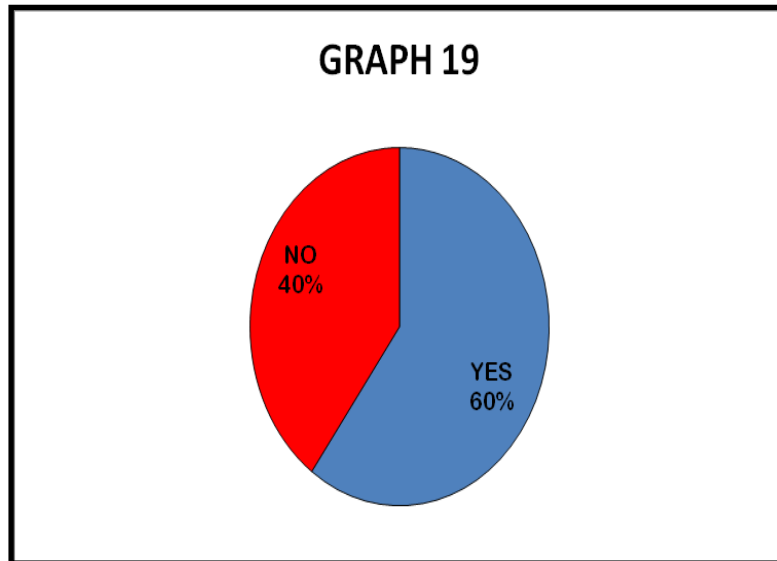
Author: Wolfgang Cueva Miller
Source: Teacher's Questionnaire

It was found that 60% of the interviewed teachers said their institutions do review their lesson plans and the remaining 40% indicated that their lessons are not reviewed.

According to the interviews done, the planning of 64% of these teachers is reviewed once a week, 12% of the teachers accepted their planning is reviewed once a month, other 12% of the teachers reported their planning is reviewed once a year, and the remaining 12% accepted their planning is reviewed once every five months. However, as shown on the graph above, 40% of the interviewed teachers stated their planning is not reviewed by their institutions.

Teachers consider positive the fact that their institutions review their lesson plans because, as they explain, it is important to keep track of teachers' work, so in that way, the teaching and learning process might be improved year after year considering its strengths and weaknesses. Teachers agree that lesson plans should be

reviewed eventually once a week because this would let them make any necessary

change on time in order to benefit students. Nevertheless, on their side, teachers

recognize this would demand a lot of effort and time to be performed.

Does the institution monitor teacher's classes?
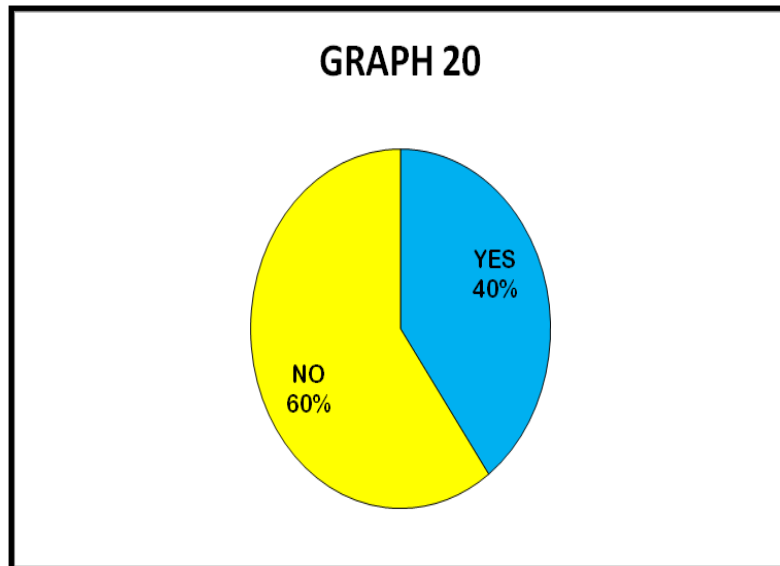
Author: Wolfgang Cueva Miller
Source: Teacher's Questionnaire

The pie chart above shows that 60% of the interviewed teachers reported that

their institutions do not monitor their classes.

However, the other 40% of teachers appointed that their teaching is certainly

monitored by their institutions. Out of this percentage of teachers, the 20% said their

teaching is monitored once a month, 40% expressed it is monitored once a week, and

the remaining 40% ensured their teaching is monitored twice a year.

Teachers consider that monitoring the teaching process is essential to

determine the effectiveness of a curriculum and through this the success or not of the

teaching- learning process being used at an institution.

Muresan (2007) explains that monitoring teaching is a key component of

quality assurance and human resources management, as well as of teacher training

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and development.

This is also true when we talk about self-monitoring. To this respect, Richards (1990) states that if teachers expect to continue growing professionally, then, teachers need feedback on what they do and how well they do it. He also points out that self- monitoring gives teachers the opportunity to reflect critically on their teaching so that changes for good may be made.

It is a fact that monitoring and self-monitoring teaching with responsibility would result in better teaching standards and as a logical consequence would improve learners' skills toward the mastering of the English language.

Conclusions

- The absence of teaching resources and supplementary materials in the classroom is an obstacle for an effective English teaching and does not help to promote language learning.

- Educational institutions fail at the moment of designing appropriate self-standards and organizational parameters to monitor English teaching and English teachers' lesson plans affecting negatively their own attempts to help students learn the language.

- Teachers' excessive use of Spanish in EFL classes do not encourage learners' language production, but pushes them to learn by translating every single word making students learn English the wrong way and causing future language misconceptions.

- The discipline and physical space are factors that do not contribute to an effective English language acquisition because learners are not given enough opportunities to make a real use of the language in the classroom; instead, they are confined to weary lessons remaining passively in their seats.

- Most English teachers do not consider students' needs and language level due to having to teach multileveled classes causing learners' demotivation and English language rejection.

- Teachers' level of education was acceptable; most of them had a Bachelors and master's degree, although there are some of them who only reach a high school diploma.

Recommendations

- School authorities should do everything possible to provide teachers and students with a variety of teaching and learning tools as well as supplementary materials to improve the teaching and learning process and therefore to ease the language acquisition.

- The government should provide public high schools with modern technological teaching resources to encourage not only effective English language teaching, but also an interactive and globalized way to learn the language.

- The government should keep on offering English teachers in public schools a great variety of updated teaching training opportunities through workshops and seminars on the latest teaching techniques and strategies so they may maximize their students' performance and success in learning English.

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UNIVERSIDAD TÉCNICA PARTICULAR DE LOJA
La Universidad Católica de Loja
MODALIDA ABIERTA Y A DISTANCIA CARRERA DE INGLES
STUDENT'S QUESTIONNAIRE

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION:	
DATE:	
YEAR:	

1. **¿Te gusta aprender Inglés?**

YES   ( )   NO   ( )

2. **¿Las actividades (juegos, trabajos en grupo y trabajos individuales) que se realizan en clase te motivan a aprender Inglés?**

YES   ( )   NO   ( )

3. **Consideras que las actividades realizadas en clase son:**

Muy fáciles ( )	Fáciles ( )	Difíciles ( )	Muy difíciles ( )

4. **¿Te gusta la forma de enseñanza del idioma Inglés que usa tu profesor?**

YES   ( )   NO   ( )

   ¿Por qué?

   _____

5. **¿Tu profesor realiza actividades variadas que te permiten interactuar con tus compañeros de clase?**

YES   ( )   NO   ( )

6. **¿Tu profesor utiliza Inglés la mayor parte del tiempo en la clase?**

YES   ( )   NO   ( )

7. **¿Tu profesor controla la disciplina en la clase?**

YES   ( )   NO   ( )

8. **¿Tu profesor les asigna un tiempo determinado para el desarrollo de cada actividad?**

YES   ( )   NO   ( )

9. **¿Luego de cada actividad realizada, tu profesor te explica en qué fallaste y en qué debes mejorar?**

YES ( )	NO ( )

10. **¿Las instrucciones que da el profesor para realizar las actividades en clase y extra clase son claras?**

YES ( )	NO ( )

11. **¿Consideras que el tamaño del salón de clase te permite trabajar de una manera cómoda?**

YES ( )	NO ( )

12. **¿Consideras que el número de estudiantes te favorece para aprende de mejor manera el Inglés?**

YES ( )	NO ( )

13. **¿Te gusta la forma en la que el profesor adecúa los pupitres para trabajar en los diferentes tipos de actividades?**

YES ( )	NO ( )

14. **¿Se utilizan en clase recursos tales como televisión, grabadora, computadora, pizarras inteligentes, etc.?**

YES ( )	NO ( )

GRACIAS!!!!!

MODALIDA ABIERTA Y A DISTANCIA CARRERA DE INGLES

TEACHER'S QUESTIONNAIRE

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION:	
DATE:	
YEAR:	

1. Which level of education do you have?

High school diploma ( )	English Bachelor's Degree ( )	English Master's degree ( )
Others: _____		

2. Do you consider Students' needs to teach English successfully?

Students' Needs *(age, personality, attitude, aptitude, motivation, and learning styles)*
YES ( ) NO ( )

3. Do you consider Students' level to teach English successfully?

Students' Level *(Basic, Intermediate, High Intermediate , and Advanced)*
YES ( ) NO ( )

4. Which is the level of your students?

*Students' Level			
Basic ( )	Intermediate ( )	High Intermediate ( )	Advanced ( )

5. Which of the following methods was used in this class? *(check only 1)*

Communicative Language Teaching	( )
The Natural Approach	( )
Cooperative Language Learning	( )
Content-Based Instruction	( )
Task-Based Language Teaching	( )
Cognitive Academic Language Learning	( )
Total Physical Response	( )
Whole Language Approach	( )
Grammar Translation Method	( )
Others _____	( )

6. Do you use whole- group activities to teach your lessons?

YES ( )	NO ( )	
Why? _____		

7. Do you use individual activities to teach your lessons?

YES ( )	NO ( )	
Why? _____		

8. Do you use group work activities to teach your lessons?

YES ( )	NO ( )	
Why? _____		

9. Do you use English most of the time in your classes?

YES ( )	NO ( )

10. Do you plan your lessons?

YES ( )	NO ( )

11. Do you consider aspects such as discipline, timing, feedback, and instruction to teach your lessons?

YES ( )	NO ( )

12. How many students do you have in this class?

10 - 15 ( )	16 - 25 ( )	26 - 30 ( )	31 - more ( )

13. Do you feel comfortable working with this number of students?

YES ( )	NO ( )

14. Do you have enough space to work with this group of students?

YES ( )	NO ( )

15. Do you arrange students' seats in relation to the activities planned for your classes?

YES ( )	NO ( )

16. How many students do you think is the appropriate number to teach English? *(check only 1)*

10 – 15 ( )	16 – 25 ( )	26 – 30 ( )	31 – more ( )

17. Do you use teaching resources (TV, Tape/Cd recorder, Computer(s), Projector(s), Smartboard, and supplementary materials)?

YES ( )	NO ( )	
Which ones? _____		

18. Do you consider appropriate the resources you have in class?

YES ( )	NO ( )	
Why? _____		

19. Does the institution review your lesson plans?

YES ( )	NO ( )	
If yes, how frequently?		
Once a week	Once a month	Other_____

20. Does the institution monitor your teaching?

YES ( )	NO ( )	
If yes, how frequently?		
Once a week	Once a month	Other_____

Thanks for your cooperation!!!!!!

UNIVERSIDAD TÉCNICA PARTICULAR DE LOJA

La Universidad Católica de Loja

MODALIDA ABIERTA Y A DISTANCIA CARRERA DE INGLES

OBSERVATION SHEET

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION:	
DATE:	
YEAR(desde 8vo básica a 3ro bachillerato):	

1. Does the teacher consider Students' needs to teach English?

Students' Needs(age, personality, attitude, aptitude, motivation, and learning styles)	
YES ( )	NO ( )

* It can be recognized based on the variety of activities (visual, audio, audiovisual, realia, and on- line) applied, and students' reaction to them.

2. Which is the level of the students?*(Check 1)*

*Students' Level			
Basic ( )	Intermediate ( )	High Intermediate ( )	Advanced ( )

* It can be recognized based on the material they are using or placement done by the institution.

3. Which of the following methods are used?

Communicative Language Teaching	( )
The Natural Approach	( )
Cooperative Language Learning	( )
Content-Based Instruction	( )
Task-Based Language Teaching	( )

Cognitive Academic Language Learning	( )
Total Physical Response	( )
Whole Language Approach	( )
Grammar Translation Method	( )
Others _____	( )

4. Which of the following activities are used?

Whole-group activities	( )
Individual activities	( )
Group work activities	( )

5. Which of the following aspects of the lesson plan were applied in the class?

Time	( )
Lesson topic	( )
Objectives	( )
Warm-up activities	( )
Introduction of the new topic	( )
Guided or individual practice	( )
Review/Assessment/Feedback	( )
Materials and resources	( )

6. Which of the following aspects have been considered by the teacher?

Discipline	( )
Feedback	( )
Activities management	( )
Time management	( )

7. How many students are there in the classroom?

10 – 15 ( )	16 – 25 ( )	26 – 30 ( )	31 - more ( )

8. Do students have enough space to move and participate in dynamic activities?

YES ( )	NO ( )

9. Is the seating arrangement appropriate for the teaching-learning process?

YES ( )	NO ( )
NOTES: _____	

10. Which of the following resources are there in the classroom to facilitate teaching?

TV	( )
Tape/Cd recorder	( )
Computer(s)	( )
Projector(s)	( )
Smartboard	( )
Supplementary materials	( )
Others	( )

11. In which percentage does the teacher use English in class?

25 % ( )	50 % ( )	75 % ( )	100 % ( )

TEACHER'S INTERVIEW

A1	Where are you from? Where do you live?
A2	Where did you learn English? How long have you studied English? Which subject was the most difficult during your major?
B1	How long have you been teaching English? Which skill is easier for you to teach? Would you like to continue studying? Why?
B2	What are the advantages or disadvantages of teaching English in a "non-English speaking country"? What are the main problems a teacher faces when teaching English in Ecuador?
C1	What social benefits are derived from learning English? What is the most important reward of teaching English as a profession?
C2	What are the benefits that come from teachers staying more time in the educational institutions? What is the difference between teaching English as foreign language (EFL) and teaching English as a second language (ESL)?

TEACHER'S LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY:					
C2 ( )	C1 ( )	B2 ( )	B1 ( )	A2 ( )	A1 ( )