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

TRABAJO DE FIN DE TITULACIÓN

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DEDICATION

To my husband and children,
for their love and support.

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I have to thank my research director, Doctor Carmen Benitez Correa. Without her assistance, involvement, support and understanding in every step throughout the process, I would have never accomplished this paper.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to identify and analyze the factors that affect the English language teaching-learning process in Ecuadorian private high schools. It was carried out in Quito in five private schools that are located in the northern area of the city and attend middle class students.

Students' and teachers' questionnaires as well as observation forms were used for the data collection. Class observations allowed getting first-hand information on the teaching-learning process. After-class interviews held with the teachers provided additional background for the discussion and elements to draw conclusions.

According to the results, ninety-three percent of the teachers have a B.A. degree. Teachers' English proficiency level ranges from A1 to C2, CEF descriptors. Classes are small and most of the classrooms are well furnished. Only some schools use technology on a daily basis.

KEY WORDS: private high schools, students, factors, influence, English teaching-learning process

RESUMEN

El propósito de este estudio es identificar y analizar los factores que afectan el proceso de enseñanza aprendizaje del inglés en colegios secundarios privados en Ecuador. Se llevó a cabo en Quito en cinco instituciones privadas localizadas en el norte de la ciudad y que atienden a estudiantes de clase media.

Para la recolección de información se utilizaron cuestionarios para estudiantes y para profesores y hojas de observación. La observación de las clases permitió obtener información de primera mano del proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje. Las entrevistas después de clase que se mantuvieron con los profesores proporcionaron información adicional para apoyar la discusión y hacer las conclusiones.

De acuerdo con los resultados, noventa y tres por ciento de los profesores tienen un título de tercer nivel. El nivel de inglés de los maestros oscila entre A1 y C1 del CEF. Los grupos de alumnos son pequeños y la mayoría de las clases están bien implementadas. La tecnología se usa diariamente solo en algunas instituciones.

PALABRAS CLAVES: colegios secundarios privados, estudiantes, factores, influencian, proceso enseñanza

INTRODUCTION

English has become the leading language of international discourse. Though it is not the mostly spoken native language, native and second language English users altogether make it the most widely used language in the world. It is the official language in 88 sovereign and non-sovereign states. Although not spoken natively, it has official status in four of the world's most populous countries: India, Nigeria, Pakistan and the Philippines. It is mostly used in international organizations like the European Union and the United Nations.

English is the language of technology, especially high technology like computer science, genetics, and medicine. It takes an average of four years for science books written in English to be translated to other languages. Many universities and colleges around the world require English knowledge for registration.

No wonder why English teaching and learning has become part of the core of the secondary curriculum in Ecuador. Mandatorily, public schools have to teach it for one hour every day. Private schools introduce it not only as a subject of study but as the means of instruction. Some of these institutions dedicate, in some cases, more than half of the schedule to teach it and to use it to for the introduction of other subjects like, for example, history, science, literature.

The English teaching and learning process requires the interaction of various components. Teachers, students, and institutions, as protagonists, have the power to grip and control the other elements in the cycle. Bearing this in mind, the purpose of this research is to identify and analyze those factors that influence this process. Due to the differences established between private and public high schools in the Ecuadorian educational system, it is difficult to carry out a study that will cover both sectors;

therefore, this research will focus only on private schools. Five private high schools will be used as the sample.

The specific objectives of this work are to identify students' English level and their needs in the classroom, to determine the classroom conditions in which English lessons take place, to identify the characteristic of in-service English teachers, and to determine institutional facilities and norms regarding quality education. The variables considered are classified into four categories: i) factors concerning students, which include students' needs in the classroom and their English level; ii) factors concerning teachers, which include their level of education and language proficiency, the methods and techniques used, the percentage of English used in class, lesson design and managing learning; iii) factors concerning classrooms, which include class size, classroom space, seating arrangements, classroom and teaching resources; and iv) factors concerning educational institutions, which include class observation and lesson design monitoring.

Regarding the method used, the general approach of this study is quantitative. The data collection techniques include surveys and note-taking. Instruments such as observation forms and questionnaires were filled in during the process. Furthermore, some other resources such as books, the Internet, and the didactic guide also helped out. The collected data was explained, described, and analyzed.

The beneficiaries of the study are English teachers, trainee teachers, headmasters of English departments, authorities of secondary schools, authorities of the institutions in the sample. All of them can favor with the first-hand information and real life situations presented, discussed and analyzed in this paper regarding students' English level and needs in the classroom, conditions in which English lessons take place,

characteristic of in-service English teachers, institutional facilities and norms regarding quality education. Hopefully, the data presented and the conclusions stated will help them make decisions on their everyday experiences.

One of the limitations of this study is that, since there was an only opportunity to see teachers at work, sometimes, it was difficult to establish proper relationships between variables after just a single visit. It was also complex in some cases to interpret what was seen and to relate it with the themes discussed in this work. Another limitation could be that five schools make up a rather small sample; yet, the results could be used to make inferences about other institutions with similar characteristics to those included in this study.

Previous studies on this topic might give some light on the characteristics of the process, on how elements relate one another, and on how to conduct this investigation. In 2008, for example, Anna Sáfár & Judit Kormos investigated three issues in connection with the traditional concept of foreign language aptitude. These issues are, in first place, the relationship between foreign language aptitude and working memory and phonological short-term memory capacity; in second place, the role of foreign language aptitude in predicting success in the framework of focus-on-form foreign language instruction; finally, the stability of language aptitude and phonological short-term memory in the course of language learning. The authors could evidence that communicative methods enhanced competence in the four skills. The results support the existence of an effect of language learning experience on language aptitude. They also concluded that foreign language aptitude does not play a highly important role in communicative language teaching combined with focus-on-form instruction.

In 2010, Nataša Bakić-Mirić carried out a study in the English classrooms at the

University of Niš Medical School. The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding about how the theory of multiple intelligences applies to lecture hall teaching. Results proved that, though three classes were not enough, a drastic improvement in final grades and increased levels of interest and participation were attained. In the same year, Muhammad Naseer Ud Din, Ph.D. studied the academic and professional qualification of English teachers and evaluated the problems related to the teaching of English, as compulsory subject in primary schools in a district in Pakistan. The results indicate that the majority of teachers were under qualified for teaching at the primary level. In relation to resources and pedagogy, audiovisual aids were not available and the syllabus did not match the mental/cognitive level of students.

In spite of the relevance of the findings of the above-mentioned studies and in spite of the view they offer on the English teaching-learning process, the specific features of the Ecuadorian educational system require a much more focused treatment. As the didactic guide states, “minimal research attention has been directed toward the factors that affect the English language teaching-learning process in our country.” No investigations on the topic have been carried out previously; or, if they actually have, there is no available data on their results. Therefore, this study becomes a suitable instrument to approach the topic on a local basis. It gives first-hand information on the Ecuadorian situation and opens the door for other research projects.

METHOD

Setting and Participants

The study was carried out in Quito in five private schools located in the northern area of the city. Though all of them are private institutions, they differ in various ways. Two of them have over 900 students each. The other two have around 400 students each, and the last one is a small institution with less than 150 students. Three of the schools not only teach English, but they use it as a means of instruction for other subjects like History, Biology, Economics, Sociology, Science, and Literature. Four schools work with middle and upper middle class kids. The other one works with low middle class students.

Schools facilities also vary. The institutions with the most number of students have big buildings which include soccer fields, swimming pool, coliseum, big playgrounds, cafeterias, spacious and well furnished classrooms and libraries. The two 400 student schools' facilities are much smaller. No pool or coliseum was seen. However, the areas were comfortable. Classrooms were nice though rather small. The last institution functions in a small building which has been adapted for this purpose. Classrooms are very small; therefore, the number of students that can fit in them is also small. The only outdoor area available is a nicely decorated patio that is shared by students of all ages. All the schools in the sample charge for the educational service they offer. The amounts differ in relation to the population stratum they attend.

The participants of the research were English teachers and students of English from these places; three teachers per school, which makes a total of fifteen teachers, and one student per each class observed, which makes a total of fifteen students. They provided with the information required for the analysis through questionnaires,

interviews and class demonstrations. Headmasters of the English departments, when available, or the Principals of the schools allocated the participants.

Procedures

The first step in the process was to work on the Literature Review. Great importance was given to up-to-date information. Authors were contrasted and compared in terms of their theories, opinions, and experiences. When conflicting points of view were detected, a much deeper review was done to assess facts and possibilities. In addition, the information of related studies provided with a good background. Previous experiences help new researchers avoid unnecessary mistakes.

For the field research, data was collected through class observations and questionnaires. An *observation sheet* was filled out while observing teachers at work. It helped to focus attention on aspects that were relevant for the analysis: methodologies, resources, classroom conditions and management. Afterwards, teachers were interviewed individually. Interviews supplied information on variables like, for example, teachers' proficiency level and on institutional management. Finally, teachers had to fill out the most important instruments in the research—the *teacher's questionnaires*.

Students were also active participants. They provided a lot of information about the process during class observations; in addition, one student per group filled out the student's questionnaire.

The results of the teacher's questionnaires were tabulated and presented in graphs. The analysis was done based on these results. The answers to the student's questionnaires and the information of the observation sheets were used to corroborate and argument the analysis.

DISCUSSION

Literature Review

The Literature Review establishes a theoretical framework for the topic. It helps to define key terms and concepts. It justifies the proposed methodology and demonstrates the preparedness of the researcher to complete the task. In addition, it describes how the research is related to prior studies.

According to King & Habound (2007), the language profile of Ecuador shows that Spanish is the facto official language of the country and that other thirteen different indigenous languages are spoken as well, as means of intra-communal communication. Within such linguistic variety, the teaching of English—a foreign language—in the classroom responded to other different types of considerations.

As the Ministry of Education has recognized in its 2011 publication called National English Curriculum Guidelines, “English is unquestionably the world’s ‘lingua franca’ at present”—essential to interact and communicate in the globalized world. It also considers the English language “as a working tool for the future professionals who are now preparing themselves in the classrooms as students and, therefore, as one of the important elements in their integral education” (Dirección Nacional de Currículo, 2008).

The community has recognized the importance of teaching English as a foreign language. *Explored*, in its editorial “English and the Scientific Community” (1996), identifies English as being indispensable in the scientific and commercial contexts. In fact, the article states that:

English has become the official language in the international scientific community. Every book, journal, scientific magazine, or any other

publication which circulates internationally is edited in English.

(...) International congresses and lectures anywhere are held in English. Every university student has to know the language in order to be updated during their study years.

In the scope of these considerations, English has become a regular part of the curriculum in private and public schools. In many institutions, English is not only introduced as a subject of study but also as the means of instruction. Authorities and teachers have put a lot of effort into shaping the curriculum to reach the objectives. However, the teaching and learning processes in the English language classroom are determined by various factors that have to be nailed together, in a puzzle-like form, to allow the final educational outcome--the students' learning of English.

Teaching approaches and methods

A very subtle and thin line separates the terms approach and method; they sometimes overlap. Approaches deal with the beliefs and principles that determine the philosophies in teaching, while methods deal with the practical aspects of the teaching process (Richards, 2011). A method is an overall plan for the orderly presentation of language material that is based upon a selected approach. Within one approach, there can be many methods.

Various approaches and methods characterize language teaching. The most outstanding ones (mostly used and updated) will be discussed in the following paragraphs. in terms of their features and usage. Some are more popular than others are in everyday practice.

The Grammar Translation Method was developed when the study of Latin was

an essential part of the curriculum; later, it was also used to teach other modern languages. Though around the 40s its popularity decreased as other approaches' principles became known, it continues to be widely used. Its goal is "to learn a language in order to read its literature or in order to benefit from the mental discipline and intellectual development that result from foreign language study" (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 5). Reading and writing are the major focus. No attention is paid to listening and speaking. Moreover, vocabulary selection is based only on the reading text used. Consequently, guaranteeing the accuracy of the sentences mainly depends on the learner's mastery of grammar; and, as Penny (2000) mentions, "grammar is a set of rules that define how words (or parts of words) are combined or changed to form acceptable units of meaning within a language" (p. 13). In contrast, the supporters of the Lexical Approach believe that "the building blocks of language learning and communication are not grammar, functions, notions, or some other unit of planning and teaching but lexis, that is, words and word combinations" (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 132). Chunks of language, vocabulary, collocations of lexical items become the basic language input, especially introduced through reading. However, as Michael Lewis (1997) states "lexical items are dependent on agreement within a particular social group; what is a lexical item in American English may not be so in British English" (p. 257). Therefore, since lexical items usually convey pragmatic meaning within a community, misinterpreting the chunks can lead to many communication problems.

Grammar translation dominated foreign language teaching for over a century and continues to be used in some parts today. Vocabulary and lexical units have been viewed by several approaches as central in learning and teaching as well. However, when linguists and language teachers attempted to build methodologies around other

different types of observations new approaches and methodologies appeared. The Direct Method, also known as the Natural Method, for example, is based on the notion that a foreign language can be taught without translation or the use of the learner's native language and meaning can be shown directly through demonstration and action (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). The Natural Approach, sometimes confused with the Natural Method, rests on the theory that language acquisition occurs only when students receive comprehensible input. The naturalistic principles constitute the foundation of this approach. As Richards & Rodgers (2001) mention, "There is an emphasis on exposure, or input, rather than practice; optimizing emotional preparedness for learning; a prolonged period of attention to what the language learners hear before they try to produce language" (p. 179). Neither grammar knowledge nor the usage of correct lexical units are as important as reading and listening comprehension for beginning students in this approach (Krashen & Terrel, 1983).

Over time, the core of methods and approaches has changed based on other various aspects. The Notional-Functional Approach, for example, had its roots in a non-school context. "It was created by the Council of Europe in the 1970s to serve as a paradigm to language teaching in Europe" (Norland & Pruett-Said, 2006, p. 27). It was meant for adults who learned a second language—those who moved from one place to another looking for better job opportunities. The syllabus is arranged in terms of functions and notions (ideas) and the language items needed for them. The syllabus is based on meaning rather than on grammar or structure (Nagaraj, 1996).

Besides, there are approaches and methods that focus on the outcomes or outputs of learning. Competency Based Language Teaching, for example, deals with what the learners are expected to do with the language. It seeks to teach language in relation to

the social context in which it is used. It defines educational goals in terms of precise measurable descriptions of the knowledge and behaviors students should have at the end of the course. “The ultimate aim of the competency-based model is to form flexible and adaptable professionals who can apply competencies to the varied, unforeseeable, and complex situations they will encounter throughout their personal, social, and professional lives” (Perez, 2013, p. 3). As Richards & Rodgers (2001) mention, though it has a lot of advocates, its critics mention practical and philosophical issues like the fact that dividing the activities up into sets of competencies is a reductionist approach.

On the other hand, other approaches and methods focus specifically on the way language is taught in the classroom. Cooperative Language Learning is an approach to teaching English that makes maximum use of cooperative activities involving pairs and small groups of learners. Advocates have proposed certain interactive structures that are considered optimal for learning the appropriate rules and practices in conversing in a new language. It also seeks to develop learner’s critical thinking skills, which are seen as central to learning of any sort (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

Similarly, in Task-Based Language Learning, tasks in the classroom provide both the input and the output processing, necessary for language acquisition. Tasks are the core unit of planning and instruction. Engaging learners in task work provides a better context for the activation of learning processes than form focused activities. But, what is a task? How does it work? As indicated by Nunan (2004):

a pedagogical task is a piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their (the students’) attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning, and in which the intention is to convey

meaning rather than to manipulate form. (p.4)

Comprehensible input is the necessary (and sufficient) criterion for successful language acquisition. Others have argued, however, that productive output and not merely input is also critical for adequate second language development (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

The last approach to be discussed, in fact probably the most significant one, is the Communicative Approach. It is a natural extension of the Notional-Functional Approach. It is rather more broad-based for its goal is not only communication but communicative competence which is the ability, not only to apply the grammatical rules of a language in order to form grammatically correct sentences, but also, to know when and where to use these sentences (Nagaraj, 1996). Its importance in our English teaching environment relays on the fact that the Communicative Approach is one of the key issues mentioned by the Ministry of Education in the National English Curriculum Guidelines. It states:

That the Communicative Approach is currently the most recognized, accepted norm in the field of language teaching and learning worldwide because it comprises a theoretically well-informed set of principles about the nature of language and of language learning and teaching. (p. 3)

Managing Learning

It is a complex process. It deals with a number of variables working together. Samana (1998) says that a well managed class creates an atmosphere conducive to exchange and interaction, serious participation, and involvement in activities. Managing learning is much more than keeping discipline in the class. Functional classrooms combine correct timing with assertive planning; assessment with feedback; clear instructions with well selected activities.

When discussing “feedback”—one of the variables that helps to achieve a functional classroom, Askew (2000) states that, “there is strong evidence to show that formative assessment that includes effective and timely feedback enhances learning.” Feedback in its many versions —corrective, evaluative, descriptive, cognitive, affective, peer—gives the learner information about his/her learning. When used correctly, it opens opportunities for discussion, clarification and even negotiation with the student. “The student and teacher discuss what has, or has not, been achieved and why, and together construct the way forward” (Askew, 2000). The conscious process of constructing feedback together enables students to play an active role in their learning process, encourages self-assessment, and provides strategies for improvement.

Feedback is among the most powerful influences on achievement. Susan Brookhart (2008) describes its scope and value in the following terms:

Feedback is a formal component of the formal assessment process. Formative assessment gives information to teachers and students about how students are doing relative to classroom learning goals. (...) Giving good feedback is one of the skills teachers need to master as part of good formative assessment.

Feedback can be very powerful if done well. The power of formative feedback lies in its double-barreled approach, addressing both cognitive and motivational factors at the same time. (...) Good feedback gives students information they need so that they can understand where they are in their learning and what to do next—the cognitive factor. (p. 1, 2)

Furthermore, strictly speaking feedback should not include advice, praise or a value judgment. Advice is usually unhelpful and annoying and by using it teachers end up unwittingly affecting students’ confidence. When advised students turn increasingly

insecure in their own judgment and become dependent on someone else's opinion. Also, it is very important that formative feedback should precede summative assessment. In addition, many years of education research sustain the idea that by teaching less and providing more feedback, greater learning can be produced (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2004; Hattie, 2008; Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001).

In relation to managing time, Shalaway (1998) notes that "time management is the thread running through almost all aspects of teaching" (p.42). It is determined by planning and organization. Efficient and optimal use of the time in the classroom will result in increased teaching time. Efficiency has to do with assigning time periods to even the essentials of classroom life like organizational routines as collecting homework or giving out notebooks or paper. By doing so, the teacher will be capable of planning the lessons appropriately. All activities do not necessarily have to last the same amount of time. It all depends on the type of activity and its purpose. Students have to learn to value teaching time and to avoid wasting it.

Regarding instructions, these have to be clear enough to soften the teaching path. As Case, (2010, para. 1) mentions "students not understanding instructions can waste classroom time. It can also have a major impact on confidence—the teachers' confidence in their teaching, and the students' confidence in English as something that they can understand." According to the above-mentioned author, instructions in the ESL classroom (their meaning, vocabulary and usage) can be introduced, explained and practiced as any other aspect of the language.

Lesson Design

The effectiveness of a teacher depends on a good lesson; in other words,

designing a lesson carefully is essential to successful teaching. Farrell (2002) states that “lesson plans are systematic records of a teacher’s thoughts about what will be covered during a lesson” (p. 31). On the other hand, Richards (1998) suggests that lesson plans help the teacher think about the lesson in advance to “resolve problems and difficulties, to provide a structure for the lesson, to provide a ‘map’ for the teacher to follow, and to provide a record of what has been taught” (p. 103). Besides, Farrell (2002) also indicates:

Teachers plan for internal reasons in order to feel more confident, to learn the subject matter better, to enable lessons to run more smoothly, and to anticipate problems before they happen. Teachers plan for external reasons in order to satisfy the expectations of the principal or supervisor and to guide a substitute teacher in case the class needs one. (p. 30)

Different models can be used when making a lesson plan. The traditional dominant model of lesson planning is Tyler’s rational-linear framework (Farrell, 2002) which is still widely used. Tyler’s 1949-model has four steps that run sequentially: (1) specify objectives; (2) select learning activities; (3) organize learning activities; and (4) specify methods of evaluation. Therefore, plans include mainly objectives, activities, and assessment methods. Allen & Valette (1987) also noted that the teacher must determine the educational aims of the lesson in the first place; and only then, he should select the activities that will help to reach them. Before determining the lesson objectives, the teacher must clearly establish what the goals of the course are. Lesson objectives should be stated in terms of what the student will be able to do as a result of instruction—competencies. Besides, the objectives will determine the appropriateness of the activities to attain the aims. Furthermore, Richards & Renandya (2002) indicate

that lesson objectives also help to state precisely what we want the students to learn. Both Allen & Valette (1987) and Richards & Renandya (2002) think that objectives also help provide overall lesson focus and direction.

Class Size

“Class size has concerned English teachers for more than 50 years. Certainly, if teachers are to read the children’s writing regularly and hold conferences with individual children, the number of pupils must be manageable” (Flood, Lapp, Squire, & Jensen, 2003, p. 12). However, what does “manageable” mean?—manageable related to English teaching environment. Definitely, there is no magic number assigned to this word. There are advocates for large groups as well as for small groups.

Some teachers consider that overcrowded classrooms give them problems related to discomfort, control, individual attention, evaluation, learning effectiveness. Discomfort causes the impossibility of students to join easily the activities due to the lack of room. It is much harder for teachers to control classes when there are too many students or too much noise. In addition, uninterested students tend to disturb the others. Time is very limited and it takes long to check students’ work. Therefore, they prefer small groups.

The New Zealand Post Primary Teachers' Association (2011) considers that small group instruction allows students to engage better in the learning process, to be better monitored, to have better opportunities to cater diversity. For language teaching, this type of instruction seems suitable. Furthermore, Strauss (2014, para. 2, 3) indicates that:

A new review of the major research, that has been conducted on class size by Northwestern University Associate Professor Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach

and published by the National Education Policy Center at the University of Colorado Boulder, makes clear that class size matters, and it matters a lot.

Schanzenbach, who is also chair of the Institute for Policy Research Program on Child, Adolescent, and Family Studies, writes in the review:

[...]‘The mechanisms at work linking small classes to higher achievement include a mixture of higher levels of student engagement, increased time on task, and the opportunity small classes provide for high-quality teachers to better tailor their instruction to the students in the class.’

Contrasting with what was stated before, Benwell (2008) says that, unfortunately, ESL schools mostly offer large classes and teachers have to come up with engaging activities that keep all of students interested and participating. The author mentions various advantages of large groups. Classes with many students may be noisy, but they are also fun and exciting. Classes go by quickly in large groups and there is always someone willing to answer questions. Teachers have less need for fillers since core activities and lessons take longer to complete.

Classroom space and seating arrangements

According to O'Donnell, Reeve, & Smith (2007), classrooms do not have to be sterile environments where students feel little or no connection. Classrooms should reflect the kind of work and interaction that occurs there. They should be arranged to help the teacher meet pedagogical goals (Casson, n.d.). An uncomfortable “ambience”, as the author calls it, can jeopardize the climate that should be created.

As Daniels (1998) indicates, desirable behavior or students’ misbehavior can be encouraged by the physical arrangement of the classroom. Additionally, unlike other factors that also influence behavior—individual student characteristics, social dynamics,

etc.—seating arrangement is one factor that is typically under teacher control.

Therefore, teachers have to carefully design and intelligently plan how space will be used in their classrooms; moreover if there is evidence to suggest that arrangement impacts on achievement, as stated by Pace and Price (2005).

In the ESL classroom, seating arrangement and space acquire a double dimension—physical and cultural. Placing desks here or there or sitting students close or far depend on various considerations. Differently from others, the ESL class has its own mechanics. The type of interactions required to attain the aims of the class will determine how students and the teacher are placed in the working area. For example, oral activities will require students to work in groups; therefore, seats placed in clusters, circular, or semicircular patterns will be preferred over rows. Individual activities might require a formal seating arrangement, rows for example. In such cases, and depending on the purpose of the activity, students need to focus and need not to be disturbed. On the other hand, cultural aspects have also to be kept in mind—concepts of personal space vary from culture to culture (Gower, Phillips, & Walters, 2005). In many cases, the ESL classroom is a multicultural classroom.

Students sitting habits speak for themselves. They can tell the teacher the students' attitude to each other and to him or her. They can reveal the teacher's attitude towards the pupils as well. They show easily how students interact, and the types of activity they do (Gower, Phillips & Walters, 2005). In addition, sitting and space decisions will vary depending on whether the group is monolingual or multilingual, the personalities of the students, their age and level, their strengths and weaknesses, etc.

Classroom and/or teaching resources

“It has become a maxim of education to acknowledge that the greatest resource

the teacher has is the learners themselves. This is especially important in the field of language teaching where the danger is that because one learns to use a language by using it, learner passivity and non-involvement will in fact sabotage outcomes. If the processes actively engage the learners, then a more positive outcome is assured.” (Wajnryb, 1992, pág. 124)

As mentioned previously, Wajnryb considers the student an invaluable resource within the classroom. As he explains, learners could be effective “tools” in many ESL classroom situations. They can demonstrate meaning of new words and phrases to other students when required. They can paraphrase teachers’ explanations and summarize topics for their classmates. They can create new activities and games from their own point of view. They can be partners in dialogues and conversations. Definitely, they can be number one aids for an effective teaching. In the long run, this positive participation will help achieve individual and group learning.

However, what are other teaching resources and why are they so important? Baker & Westrup (2003) say that “resources are books, any person, animal, plant or any object that makes teaching and learning easier, clearer and more interesting” (p. 141). The authors also mention that using resources improves motivation and participation and makes the teaching learning process much more interesting.

The whiteboard is the most successful teaching/learning aid. It is sometimes overused and some other moments, misused. In many cases, it is the only resource available. However, along with this so-called “teachers’ great ally”, we can find many other very useful, interesting and motivating resources. In the EFL classroom, visuals are mandatory. As Gower, Phillips & Walters state in relation to visuals:

“They illustrate meaning more directly and quickly than through verbal explanation. They attract students’ attention and aid concentration. They add variety and interest to a lesson. They help make the associated language memorable. On permanent display (posters, charts) they can help make a classroom a stimulating and attractive place in which to work.”
(2005, p. 70)

Visuals can take numerous forms: flashcards, charts, posters, realia, pictures, photographs.

Other very common resources in the ESL classroom are CDs and CD players. They are one of the language teacher’s most useful tools and probably most popularly used. Nearly all course books and many other published EFL materials are accompanied by CDs. Luckily, most teachers have access to CD players to use in the classroom.

Currently, videos are also very popular as a dynamic resource for supporting curricula. They have several advantages over audio tapes. They engage the students easily, increase students’ retention of the subject. Facial expressions and gestures provide additional information to enhance students’ understanding. In combination with the Internet, they can be excellent companions for the teaching-learning process.

In the information society, as stated by Tomaszewski (2011, para. 5), “Technology is bigger than ever in schools.” Teachers and administrators are facing a new challenge—how to safely incorporate it in the classroom. Many considerations have to be borne in mind. Cellphones, iPads, social networks, online educational platforms can be widely used in the EFL environment. However, this usage faces one big problem: “the level of ignorance on the part of the teacher” (Tomaszewski, 2011, para. 10).

Classroom Observation (Institution Monitoring)

In many educational institutions, monitoring teachers' performance includes various steps, variables, and procedures, as well as different levels of involvement.

Classroom management is one of the variables considered, and it is mostly assessed through classroom observation. Depending on the institution's policy, criteria and viewpoint on the topic, the observation can be used as a means of evaluating teachers or as a vehicle for informal assessment aimed for development and professional and institutional growth (Zepeda, 2007). In any of the cases, as Wragg (2012) mentions, the advantages are many. First, feedback provided could help a teacher become more aware of his/her strengths and weaknesses. Second, classroom observation can provide administrators the opportunity to evaluate actual needs and inequities in the classroom. In addition, classroom observation can examine how technology is incorporated into a classroom, whether it's used well or ineffectively. Finally, some observational studies could be implemented to evaluate a specific program and help to measure whether it is meeting its goals.

Additionally, depending on their purpose, classroom observations can vary in type and style.

There are many reasons (purposes) to observe classroom practice. [...] Having a clear purpose, intended outcome, and a well-developed theory of action about how classroom observation will result in the improvement of teaching practice allows leaders to reflect on just how closely their own intentions and practices align. (Fink & Markholt, 2011, p. 89)

Fink and Markholt (2011) consider three main types of observations: learning, goal setting and implementation, and supervisory. Through learning observations,

administrators, principals, and teachers focus on one or more dimensions of instruction, for example, student engagement, curriculum, or pedagogy connected to an identified problem. Goal setting and implementation observations determine the level of implementation of curriculum materials and guidelines. Finally, supervisory observations allow supervisors and principals to examine the teaching and learning process as it relates to the school's instructional goals, to examine relevant student performance data, and to monitor student progress.

The monitoring process also deals with other types of practices. There are follow-ups for paper work completion, lesson planning, grading, and other administrative requirements.

Learning styles

Reid (1995, as cited in Woolfolk 1980) states, "the terms 'Learning style' have been used to describe an individual's natural, habitual and preferred way of absorbing, processing and retaining new information and skills." Woolfolk (1980) lists auditory, visual and kinesthetic learners. Visual learners learn mainly through seeing. Auditory learn mainly through hearing and kinesthetic mainly through doing. According to Duckett, & Tatarkowski (n.d), some students could have a combination of two or sometimes the three learning styles. The authors also say that studies show that matching teaching styles to learning styles can significantly enhance academic achievement. Under such perspective, it seems a wise idea to customize EFL classes in relation to students learning styles. Therefore, in order to facilitate academic success, it is important to provide learning experiences that are accessible to all students with all learning preferences. Resources, furniture arrangement, activities, space, seating arrangement, aids should work on their side.

There are other learning styles theories, which in the bottom relay on the same principles and deal with the same phenomena but have come out with other categorization of learning (Hainer et al, 1990). These approaches are not mutually exclusive; they represent different ways of viewing learning: global/analytical, impulsive/reflective, field dependence/field independence, and simultaneous/sequential processing.

Nevertheless, according to Woolfolk's more recent publication (2007), nowadays most educational psychologists are skeptical about the value of learning preferences. Tests and instruments dealing with the topic lack evidence and reliability. Some of the teaching ideas handled by these approaches may be useful and could be helpful in the classroom. However, students are poor judges of how they learn; and it is the teacher's responsibility to help them benefit from developing new and perhaps more effective ways to learn.

Language Aptitude

John Carroll (1991, as cited in Lightbown & Spada, 2006) characterizes aptitude in terms of ability to learn quickly—the rate of learning. In the second language acquisition field, differences in aptitude are remarkably noticeable. However, as Lightbown & Spada (2006) say, lacking aptitude for EFL or ESL learning is not the end of the story. Each learner has a unique and unrepeatable profile of personality traits, learning preferences, attitudes and aptitudes, which will ultimately enable to attain success in the endeavor. Thus, differences in aptitude are important only as leads to follow when sketching the path to learn the language.

Good language aptitude is a wonderful gift, but it is not everything. In order to make the most of the aptitude we do have, we need to learn to

identify our strengths and weaknesses and develop the strengths while compensating for the weaknesses. (Lightbown & Spada, 2006)

Language aptitude or language potential can be evaluated using formal tests, which predict the degree of success a candidate will have with the new language (British Council, n.d.). Aptitude tests usually include evaluation of the ability to manage sounds and grammatical structures, infer rules, and memory.

Though language aptitude may be fixed, there are many things teachers can do in the area of learner training to improve the learner's ability (British Council, n.d.). They could help students identify their strengths and work in their weaknesses. They could help learner determine their preferences for learning and then help them to look at how they can develop them.

After having defined terms and discussed concepts and authors' theories related to the English teaching-learning process, their relevance has become evident. They come into life, interact and influence one another, and connect as domino pieces during class time. In order to complete the scenario, five research studies on the topic are included and analyzed in the following paragraphs, in terms of their objectives, methodology, conclusions, and limitation.

Basic-Miric (2010) carried out a study in which the theory of multiple intelligences was implemented in the English language course syllabus at the University of Niš Medical School. The primary objective was to monitor students' performance in English, as well as their overall grade on the final exam. In order to gain a better understanding about how MI theory applies to lecture hall teaching, a lecture plan for the first year students of pharmacy at the University of Niš Medical School is sketched out on the topic Intercultural communication and a part dealing with intercultural core

competencies. For three consecutive classes, the teacher used MI (multiple intelligence) activities to introduce and rehearse the topic. Results proved a drastic improvement in final grades and increased levels of interest and participation. As a limitation of the study, the author considers that three class periods were not enough and that the experience should be repeated.

Nasser (2010) studied the academic and professional qualification of English teachers and evaluated the problems related to teaching of English as compulsory subject in primary schools through a research implemented in eight schools in District Kohat, Pakistan. Two questionnaires were developed, one for the head teachers of the schools and the other for the English teachers. Data collected through the questionnaires was tabulated, analyzed and interpreted by using percentage and chi square formula. The results indicate that the majority of teachers were under qualified for teaching at the primary level. They have not done any English language course; therefore, their spoken language was not good. In addition, the schools were not an English-speaking environment. In relation to resources and pedagogy, audiovisual aids were not available and the syllabus did not match the mental/cognitive level of students.

Sáfár & Kormos (2008) carried out an investigation in which seventy-two students from an English bilingual secondary school in Budapest participated. The aim of the research was to test some of the problematic aspects of the traditional concepts of language aptitude and some of the new proposals concerning the definition of language aptitude. They concentrated on three issues: the effect of language learning experience on language aptitude test performance; the predictive power of language aptitude in a one-year long intensive language training program which primarily uses a communicative approach with focus-on-form instruction; and the relationship of

working memory capacity and language aptitude. The methodology used included the application of various tests. Students in the bilingual school completed a language proficiency test, a backward digit span task, the non-word test and the language aptitude test in September and June. The control group took the aptitude test and the non-word test on two occasions. The results support the existence of an effect of language learning experience on language aptitude. They also concluded that foreign language aptitude does not play a highly important role in communicative language teaching combined with focus-on-form instruction.

Another study held by J. Monks and R. Schmidt, in 2010 at the School of Business at the University of Richmond, examined the impact of class size on student outcomes in higher education—university business courses. Additionally, this paper investigated the importance of student load (total number of students taught across all courses) in educational outcomes. The sample includes 48 individual faculty members, 88 separate courses, and 1,928 course sections. In total, 8 faculty, 14 courses, and 84 sections were super-sized over this period. Data was collected through the observation method. The results indicate that both class size and student load negatively impact student assessments of courses and instructors. Large classes and heavy student loads appear to prompt faculty to alter their courses in ways deleterious to students.

According to the authors:

The evidence found in this analysis unequivocally leads to the conclusion that both class size and the total number of students that a faculty member is responsible for teaching have a negative impact on the self-reported outcomes of amount learned, instructor rating, course rating, and expected course grade. These negative relationships between class size

and student load with student outcomes are found conditional on faculty and course fixed effects, and thus represent changes in student outcomes within instructors and courses, and are not attributable to endogenous variation in class size across instructors. (p. 15)

Description, Analysis, and Interpretation of Results

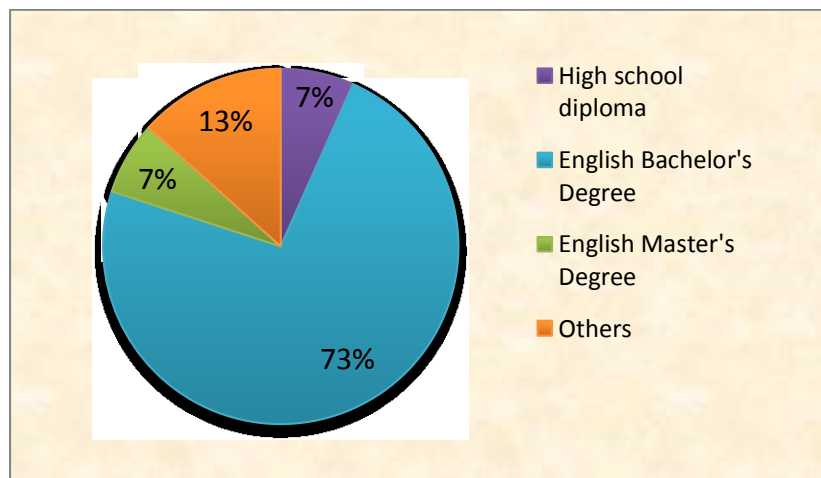
The analysis is divided into four sections. Each one discusses a different group of factors involved in the English language teaching-learning process. Those concerning teachers are analyzed first. Then, aspects dealing with students and classrooms are described in terms of how they influence teachers' decisions, planning and practice, and in terms of how students interact with these other features. Finally, institutions' role in the process is also included in the analysis.

Teachers' questionnaires served as the basis for the analysis. Students' questionnaires and the data collected while observing the classes and while interviewing teachers are also used to back up opinions and facts. Pie charts are used to illustrate the percentages of the results for each question. Colors and labels help clarify the quantity each sector represents.

Quantitative Analysis

Factors Concerning Teachers

What level of education do teachers have?



Author: María Fernanda González
Source: Teacher's questionnaire

According to the results obtained in the teachers' questionnaires, seventy-three percent of the teachers in the sample have a Bachelor's Degree in English; seven percent have a Master's Degree in English; seven percent have a high school diploma. The remaining thirteen percent have other types of degrees.

In order to have a clearer view of teachers' educational background, when interviewed, they were asked about their majors; their educational plans, if any; and the institutions where they got their degrees. Thus, eighty percent of the teachers, (twelve out of the fifteen) have a degree in English, either in Applied Linguistics or in the teaching of English as a second language. One of these twelve teachers also has a Master's Degree in English. In addition, as mentioned during the conversations, two out of these twelve teachers are already attending a master's degree program. Two more teachers are already registered. They will start theirs soon. The teacher who only has a high school diploma is almost finishing her Bachelor's Degree in English at a local university. The two remaining teachers from the sample do have a degree but not in teaching or in English (science and management). In the end, that makes 87% (thirteen out of fifteen) of the teachers who are trained to deal with the teaching of English and a 100% of teachers with university level studies. This is very good news.

The teacher with a Bachelor of Science Degree said that he has taken the TKT, Teaching Knowledge Test, offered by Cambridge University, which, in his opinion, gives him the necessary training to face the challenge of this job. The TKT tests the knowledge about the teaching of English. As Spratt, Pulverness and Williams (2008) note, it gives teachers a strong foundation in the core areas of teaching knowledge required in the classroom. It comprises methodologies for teaching, the "language of teaching", the ways in which resources can be used, the key aspects of lesson planning,

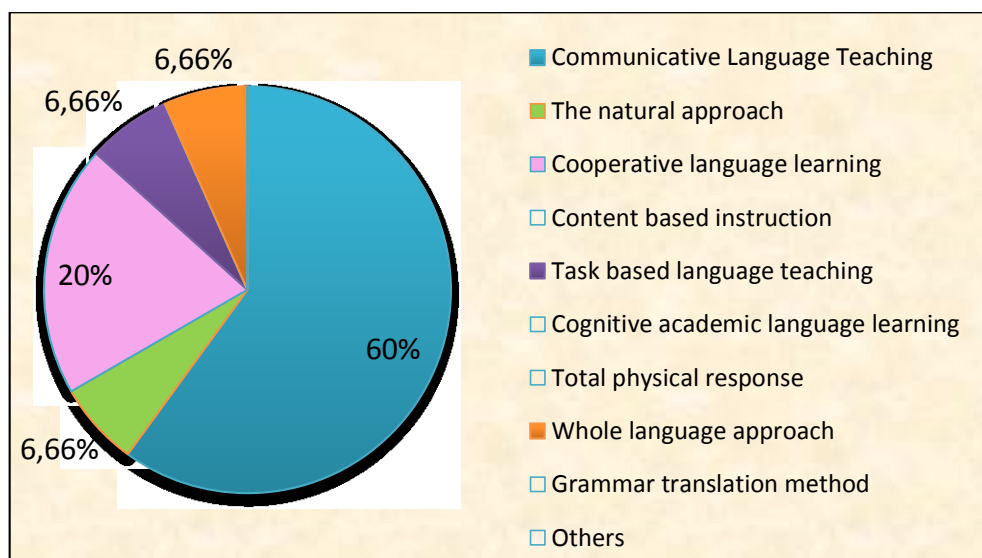
and classroom management methods for different needs.

According to coordinators, authorities and teachers of the institutions visited, schools have had to pay more attention to teachers' level of education and are hiring only candidates with a third level degree minimum or asking their teachers to get their degrees mandatorily for two main reasons. First, schools that have been certified by the International Baccalaureate Program are required to have high-quality educators who can successfully deliver IB programs reflecting IB standards and practices. Second, private schools have been required by the Ministry of Education to go through an assessment process in which various indicators will be examined. One of these indicators has to do with teachers' educational level.

During observations, no clear relationship between teachers' level of education or type of degree and their actual performances could be established. It would be incorrect, for example, to say that teachers with a degree in English did a better job in their classes. In fact, the teacher who has a Bachelor of Science Degree gave the best class. Nevertheless, either through training or through experience gained on a daily practice, they have acquired the "know how" required to teach English.

On the other hand, no direct correspondence between teachers' level of education with their English proficiency level can be established either. The woman who has the master's degree does not have the highest level of proficiency according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. In fact, the teacher with the lowest degree (the high school diploma) is C1. Furthermore, those teachers with degrees in other fields and not in English had a better score in their proficiency levels than some teachers who had earned a BA in English.

Which of the following methods were used in the class?



Author: María Fernanda González
Source: Teacher's questionnaire

According to the questionnaires and as shown in the chart, the Communicative Language Teaching Approach was mostly used, (60% of the times), followed by the Cooperative Language Learning Approach (20% of the times). In the teachers' opinion, the Natural Approach, the Whole Language Approach and the Task Based Language Teaching Approach were also used in one class each (6.66% of the times each).

It has been difficult to analyze this question. I agree with the opinion of 53% of the teachers in the method they used in their classes. Their practice was consistent with the method they acknowledged they use. On the other hand, I disagree with the other 47%, that is, seven out of the fifteen teachers. My appraisal could be mistaken since it is not easy to define a method in a forty-five minute class. Narrowing up, in four out of the seven cases, some activities used could fit the procedures employed when applying approaches that have the same background as, for example, Communicative Language Teaching, Task Based Learning, or Cooperative Language Learning. However, most discrepancies were subtle. The methods observed and the ones recognized by teachers

were somehow closely related.

Nonetheless, three out of the seven teachers were definitely mistaken when they defined their teaching method. The first one chose Cooperative Language Learning as her method. However, as Richards & Rodgers (2001, p. 192) indicate Cooperative Language Learning “makes maximum use of cooperative activities involving pairs and small groups of learners in the classroom.” Therefore, a class with only individual activities is not a cooperative language learning class type. It seemed to be a Content-Based Instruction class instead, since the students were dealing with vocabulary and expression required to talk about a specific content—environmental issues.

The second teacher said that she applied the Whole Language Approach in her class. However, this approach does not integrate reading, writing, speaking, and listening the way the teacher suggested. As stated by Richards & Rodgers (2001, p. 108), it “emphasizes learning to read and write naturally with a focus on real communication and reading and writing for pleasure.” The listening drills, choral repetitions and the reading assignment the teacher used were not focused on real communication.

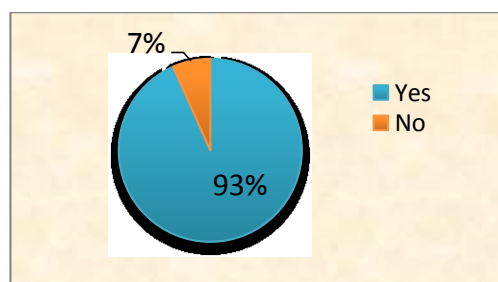
Finally, in the Natural Approach the emphasis is made on exposure or input rather than on practice. The third teacher, who allegedly was using this approach, was paying a lot of attention to accurate production and was using direct repetition and formal questions.

In addition, it seems that the principles that support and framework teaching ideologies and trends and that ultimately make up a method are either not known or are confused by many of the teachers in the sample. In a first attempt, teachers did not read the instructions carefully and did not tick an only option for this question but marked as

many as they thought described their practice. Surprisingly, they ticked choices which could be considered opposite or at least very different and which, in the end, did not describe their classes at all. Though in their performance, teachers tend to use an eclectic and very personal approach, it is inconsistent to mix such a variety of opposed options.

Finally, 26% of the teachers (four) from two different institutions did mention a school policy regarding the method or approach they should use in class. They were instructed to apply the communicative language teaching approach. Moreover, they were trained on how to use it, on the advantages it has for the school's specific needs, on the principles and background that sustain it, on the major differences between the communicative approach and earlier or other language teaching options, and on the types of activities that will boost it. As they said, they have been trained to become good practitioners. In the school's opinion, this method is the best media to fulfill the requirements that the IB program demands and is the most suitable way to achieve the required outcomes. In most of these classes, guided or individual practice, the activities themselves, the type of interaction, the way feedback was given (when given) made it clear that the teacher's final goal was to help students enhance communicative tools and competences either for written or spoken English.

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



Author: María Fernanda González
Source: Teacher's questionnaire

According to the information in the questionnaires, ninety-three percent of the teachers use whole-group activities to teach their lessons while a seven percent don't.

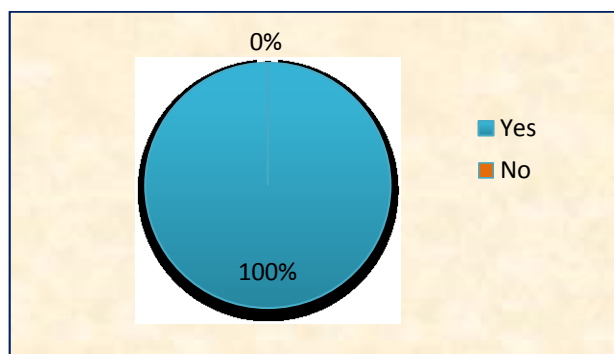
Most of the observed classes included, at least for some minutes, some kind of whole- group activity. In some classes, either the warm-up or the objectives' explanation was done with the group all together. In others, the feedback at the end or the summit time was conducted as a whole-group activity. In some other cases, the introduction of the topic was performed through this type of activity as well. Therefore, the results of this question do picture the real events observed in the classes visited.

Some whole-group activities were perfectly managed. Students paid attention while the teacher or other students were talking. As mentioned by Andrewes (2006), whole-class discussion, instruction or activities "is the welding together of the whole group and the camaraderie that comes about when a whole group works together towards a common goal" (p. 24). This is exactly what happened in some of the observed classes. Furthermore, when necessary, teachers involved students who seemed distracted, uninterested, or less confident by addressing them directly and motivating them to participate. This type of interaction encourages fluency and involvement. As Andrewes (2006, p. 24) indicates, "The larger the group, the more variety there is in the ideas, opinions and experiences which can contribute to the learning process." Some groups had difficulty staying quiet and paying attention during this type of interaction. Yet, most teachers did a good job controlling and mainstreaming discipline. Students did enjoyed whole-group activities and participated eagerly when required.

The only teacher who said that he does not use whole-group activities in his classes with this particular group mentioned discipline as the main reason for not doing so. From the very beginning, he divided the class into three groups, four or five students

each, and explained what they were going to work on separately. He moved back and forth from one group to another, helping students while they were working giving them feedback or further explanations of the task. The class went on fairly well with this technique.

Do teachers use individual activities to teach their lessons?



Author: María Fernanda González
Source: Teacher's questionnaire

One hundred percent of the teachers say that they use individual activities to teach their lessons. However, some of the observed classes did not use individual activities at all. They moved from whole-group instruction to group work right away or started at group work at once. Anyway, the question addressed teachers' daily practice in general not in the observed class in particular; therefore, all responded positively.

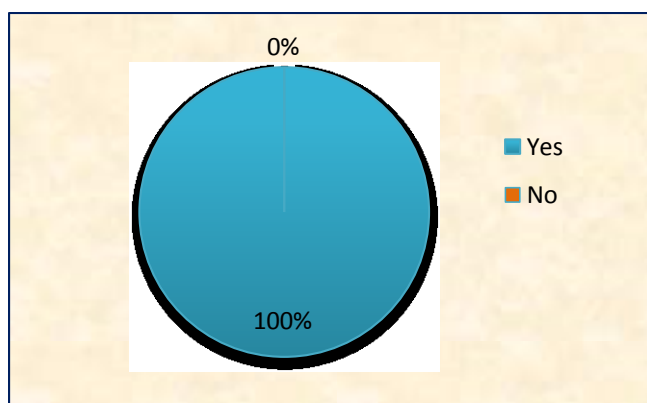
In those classes where individual activities were included, students worked either on language written assignments or on some kind of reading material. After giving out instructions, most teachers appointed time for the task's completion and periodically reminded the students the minutes they had left. Some of the teachers, not all of them, walked around the class to monitor students work. When questions arose, they helped them with individual problems by explaining new vocabulary words, paraphrasing reading sections, clarifying instructions when required, or giving out the answers to the exercises.

It was very interesting to witness how, in one of the observed classes, during the individual activity, the teacher used different approaches to explain the same question to different students. She was very resourceful and creative when handling the situation and showed her teaching skills. She drew a chart for one student, translated for another, and gave further explanation of the matter to the last one. This proves that individual needs can be better met on a one to one basis when teachers are sensitive and trained.

Most of the classes where students were involved in individual activities ended up either in-group work or in a whole-group discussion. Only one class did not follow this pattern. The task involved self-access material; so, after finishing the individual assignment, students had to check their own work and correct their mistakes, if any, independently, using the answer key available at the end of the book. Therefore, they kept engaged in the activity till the class period was over.

Managing time was a bit difficult from time to time because some pupils worked faster than others did. However, most teachers were able to control this aspect in a proper way. Class sizes in the sample were manageable. An average of around thirteen students makes things very convenient for this type of interaction.

Do teachers use group work to teach their lessons?



Author: María Fernanda González
Source: Teacher's questionnaire

One hundred percent of the teachers in the sample say they use group activities to carry out the teaching-learning process. Many of the observed classes included group work.

At a first glance, a relationship could be made between communicative language teaching classes and group work. Those teachers who acknowledged the use of this approach grouped students much of the lesson time. This is definitely consistent with the focus on communicative competency that this method advocates. Group work enhances students' oral production and allows less confident students to get a chance to practice the language they are learning in a less threatening environment and far from the eye and ear of the teacher. Peers in the class help and learn from each other. Meanwhile, the teacher can freely intervene and monitor progress, give help, advice and encourage when needed. However, group activities in some of the communicative language teaching classes observed were not designed to gain communicative competence but rather encouraged somehow cooperative or collaborative learning. In other classes, group activities were merely individual tasks done in a group seating arrangement. No communication was promoted or collaboration was required.

Regarding management of group activities, generally speaking, students were committed with achieving the objective of the tasks assigned. Therefore, discipline was not a big problem. Few students took their time to get started; but after the teachers called their attention, they got involved easily. Again, class sizes helped a lot.

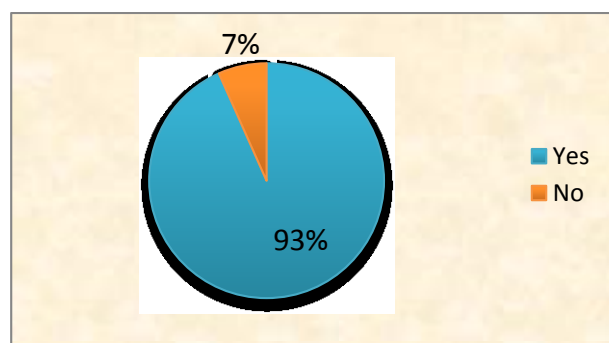
In the cases of schools in the sample with a bigger number of students per room (twenty average), discipline was managed in a very effective way during group activities. Since these students are intermediate or high intermediate English level, teachers gave them challenging activities that needed their full attention and

concentration while working on them, applying, as one of the teachers stated, Vygotsky's zone of proximal development. In addition, teachers also explained the assessment criteria that were going to be used for evaluation. Consequently, no time could be lost or wasted in disruptions or indiscipline. Getting started right away was the attitude. Though one student named these activities as "difficult" in the student's questionnaire, they could handle them with ease, finish them on time, and required almost no assistance from the teacher. Therefore, they were manageable. They did require work, of course. This was probably what was difficult for this student.

Group activities turned into language games in two classes. Students enjoyed playing and participated eagerly. Noise and movement did not reflex misbehavior but rather enthusiasm and interest. Spacing was a problem during group work. Since classes are small, the allocated space is also small. In fact, the smaller the class was, the lesser the space.

Information provided in the second questions from the student's questionnaire indicates that students enjoy group activities. They consider this type of interaction a valuable mechanism to help them practice the language.

Do teachers use English in the class most of the time?



Author: María Fernanda González
Source: Teacher's questionnaire

According to the results, ninety-three percent of the teachers in the sample say they use English most of the time. The one teacher who corresponds to the other seven percent considers she does not use English most of the time; in fact, she used more Spanish in the observed class than any other. This was a beginner's class and, after explaining what the kids were supposed to do in English, she answered students' questions and re-explained things in Spanish. She also used Spanish when helping kids individually. It seems both, teacher and pupils, were used to this synergy. Nevertheless and probably because she was observed, she made a conscious effort now and then to go back to English, especially when she was addressing the whole class. In the end, though the kids did not have a full exposure to the language during class time, they did have a good deal of English input.

Through the questionnaires, students corroborated teachers who said they use English "most of the time". However, an English usage percentage that is less than ninety percent cannot be considered "most of the time." There were certainly a few classes where English was used with ease by teachers; however, this was not true for all. Teachers used Spanish for definitions, to translate words, for individual explanations, to ask for help, to threaten misbehavior, to explain objectives, to answer questions, or to clarify tasks.

Regarding this sample, a connection can be established between student's English level and teacher's English usage within the class. Teachers in higher-level classes used more English than teachers in lower level classes. This is possible since intermediate and high intermediate students' range of language and competences allows them to perform better in only English environments. Contrarily, students with a basic level can have understanding difficulties when addressed only in English, therefore

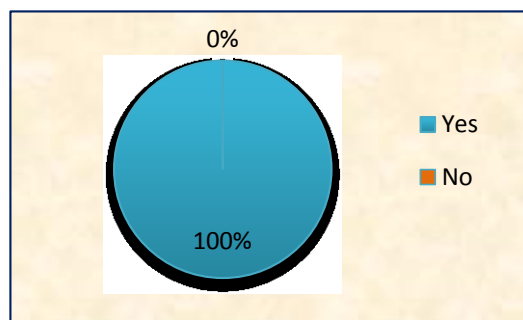
teachers probably relied on Spanish to ensure comprehension.

Walking a fine line, there is another relationship that can be established regarding teachers' English usage in this sample. Teacher's English proficiency is directly related to English usage in the observed classes. Those teachers whose proficiency level was higher used less Spanish while teaching. Five out of the fifteen teachers were C1s or C2s (native or native-like levels). Teachers with a good management of the language did not need to go back to Spanish to explain themselves. They could easily paraphrase, rearrange structures, and use a wide range of vocabulary in their oral production. They could say the same thing in different ways, which, of course, helped students' understanding.

In one of the observed classes, there was clearly an incoordination between the teacher questionnaire's answer and what was actually observed in the class. The teacher did use English 100% of the time. Yet, students' faces and reactions showed that they were not used to hearing as much English from her as she was producing that day. Moreover, they complained when she asked them to address her only in English and were reluctant to do so. Undoubtedly, this was not the usual practice. In addition, the student in this class who answered the student's questionnaire did mention that the teacher did not use English most of the time.

Finally, teachers with native or almost native-like proficiency levels were teaching intermediate and high intermediate classes. On the other hand, teachers with less proficiency were teaching students with less English level. This correlation worked well in the practice. Native and almost native-like speakers of a language have a feel for its nuances, are comfortable using its idiomatic expressions, speak it fluently, and, of course, have no accent. They can be good models for intermediate or advanced students.

Do teachers plan their lessons?



Author: María Fernanda González
Source: Teacher's questionnaire

According to the data in the questionnaires, one hundred percent of the teachers said they do plan their lessons and emphasized its relevance during the conversations held after the observations. There was a lot of evidence during this period that proved that planning is part of their praxis.

In the first place, the day the classes were visited, all the teachers had a written plan as framework for the lesson. The formality of these written instruments showed that they habitually use them. The head of the pedagogical department or of the English department has checked and signed them. They were done in formal forms or were bound together in booklets in some cases. Only in one institution supervisor did not review the lesson plans for the observed classes.

Planning could also be perceived in other various details throughout the class sessions. Teachers were ready with the equipment and material required. The CD player was there and set in the right track in one class. Copies of worksheets were available for a collocations fill-in the gap exercise in another. Game cards and dice were handed-out for the group activity. Previously graded essays were given out for the students to review and correct. Smartboards were set on the links the class topic and procedures demanded. Things were ready before teachers started teaching.

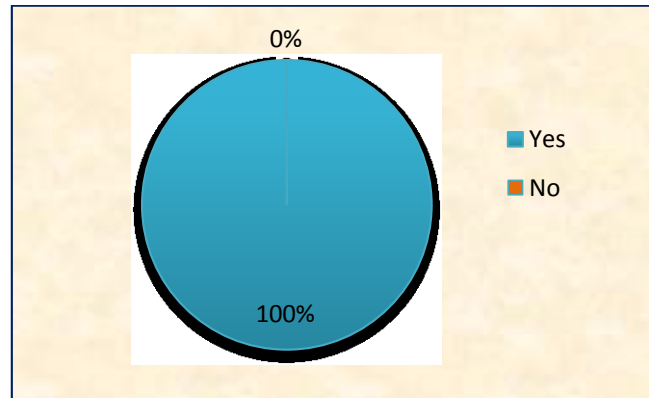
Other aspects in the observed classes showed preparedness and also good, conscious, skillful planning. First, timing was well managed in most of the cases. Teachers knew what they were going to do, so the allocation of time for the various activities was properly done. Second, in at least 70 percent of the cases, the objectives were displayed at the very beginning of the sessions proving that teachers knew beforehand what they wanted to achieve with the teaching-learning process and how they wanted to reach the goals. Third, the choices made by teachers concerning activities, book exercises, types of interaction, ways to handle feedback were suitable for the situations. Obviously, teachers have given a thought to the lessons.

Planning does not always mean success and plans are just routes or maps to follow and not straightjackets to fit in. Though there is strong evidence that observed teachers did plan the classes and habitually plan on a weekly basis, some classes did not end up as the teachers pictured them. Things had to change on the move. The phrasal verb game in the high intermediate class took longer than expected. Students had difficulty remembering the various definitions and usages of the verb “look” in combination with different prepositions. So, the practice worksheet was not completed. Tenth graders had to fill in a cause-effect chart, with information from a reading selection from the course book. They took longer on the pre-reading activity; therefore, there was no time to complete the chart. Eight graders were so enthusiastic about the spelling bee that, on their eager request, the teacher had to think of ten more words to dictate.

Planning can also be influenced and even changed by circumstances that are out of the teacher’s reach. In three occasions, classes were interrupted partially or totally. Students were asked to join a rehearsal for the Pledge of Allegiance ceremony. In

addition, the High School coordinator lectured a class during observation time.

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



Author: María Fernanda González
Source: Teacher's questionnaire

All the respondents acknowledge that they consider discipline, timing, feedback, and instruction to teach their lessons. Attention was given to these aspects during the observed classes in different ranges of levels.

Discipline was well managed. Students coincide with this opinion through their answers to the questionnaires. Teachers used various techniques and mechanisms to control and enhance it. Most students were committed to show how well they do in English and how much they know, so they had a positive attitude and behaved well. In addition, classes were well planned and group interaction was well picked. Teachers knew what they wanted from the kids and smoothly guided them. The flow of activities was well-structured in most of the cases and students followed it easily and enthusiastically. In addition and as mentioned before, class sizes in the sample are an asset. There is a thirteen student average in the eighth, ninth, and tenth groups. A bit higher is the average number in the older classes. These are small groups. Consequently, it was easy for the teachers to set rules and successfully control them. They showed experience and skills in this labor. Though movement and noise could be

felt and heard in some moments, especially during group work, it was due to enthusiasm and not indiscipline. Even the teacher who complained about disciplinary issues in the group did a good job during the observed class.

Providing feedback throughout lessons is very important. Students need a clear view of their performance in relation to the goals. However, not all the teachers used it in the observed classes or at least they did not do it overtly. Some teachers, especially those working with students with basic level, randomly made comments, which included advice, praise and evaluation on students' work—not feedback in strict terms as defined by some academics. They used expression such as “very good”, “you need to practice”, “do not stop”, etc. They also made subtle corrections on pronunciation or language structure. One teacher even graded students' reading performance. Gestures and smiles prompted students to continue or reconsider their answers and self-correct. Nonetheless, such behavior seemed the result of the second nature response teachers develop to manage class interaction, rather than the result of a conscious effort to give students information about how they are doing in their efforts to reach a goal.

Formative feedback was part of some of the observed classes in the baccalaureate groups. Feedback was personalized, specific, immediate, and consistent. Teachers took their time to explain students individually on how to deal with errors or problems especially during individual or group activities. It was also user-friendly. The information provided was useful and understandable and time was given to use it. Constructive criticism led to finding and using suggestions for improvement, which, in the long run, should give effective results. Written feedback was also used in a few classes. Teachers handed out work previously checked by them for the students to review. In one case, for example, the papers were not graded. A rubric was used to

explain the students' performance and to describe the characteristics of the work in terms of different components. Criterion-referenced feedback and descriptive feedback report more motivation and surely did so in this case.

Fourteen out of the fifteen students who answered the questionnaires feel that their teachers give them enough feedback. As they said, after each activity, teachers explain them the nature of their mistakes and gave them hints on how to improve them. Only one student said that the teacher does not do this because she does not have the time to do so. Though students' questionnaires require a second reading and some kind of scrutiny, it seems students feel comfortable with the amount and quality of feedback they receive from teachers.

Finally, feedback works in a two way process in the classroom setting. Students supply teachers with a lot of information on the teaching-learning process through various mechanisms. Most students showed interest and motivation. They participated with enthusiasm and worked within the time frames assigned. They were very involved in the individual or group activities. They showed a positive attitude most of the time. The reading teachers could make of all this information was certainly good for them. Students were benefitting with the process and enjoying it.

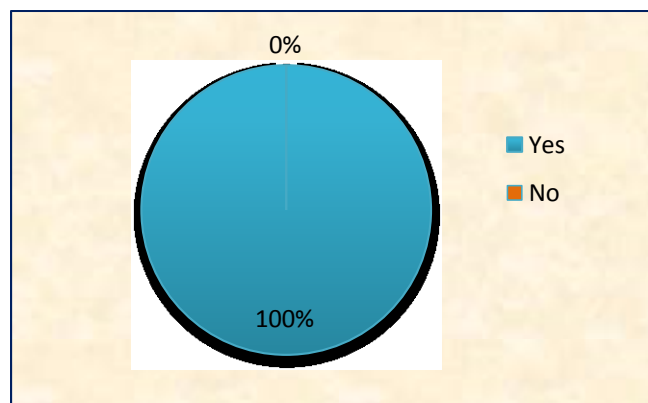
Time during the observed classes was well managed in eighty percent of the cases. The time-activity relationship and time breakdowns during the class period were well established. They allowed students to move from one activity to another with a good pace. Students could get organized for individual or group interaction and still had the chance to finish the tasks assigned. Good pacing shows beneficial for the emotional environment in any class setting which in the end turns into positive, proactive attitudes. Besides, good time management also deals with at the spot decision making moments.

In two classes, teachers changed their minds and gave students more time for a game, in one case, and a group activity, in the other. Students were truly involved and did not want to stop.

Two of the observed classes showed poor judgment regarding timing. In the first case, as the teacher mentioned at the beginning of the class, the objective of the lesson was to use certain verb phrases in a speaking exercise. However, much of the class time was spent in explaining the definitions and usage of the verbs and, in the end, students had very little time to actually do much speaking. In the second case, the teacher was so worried to complete her plan that she pushed students to rush on the activities. They followed her lead but seemed stressed out and disappointed at the end.

Factors Concerning Students

Do teachers consider students' needs to teach English successfully?



Author: María Fernanda González
Source: Teacher's questionnaire

All of the respondents feel they do consider student's needs to teach English successfully. Various categories fit in the expression "students' needs." For example, students' age, personality, aptitude, attitude, motivation, and learning styles should be kept in mind when customizing their needs. Some of these aspects were in fact taken into consideration during the observed classes; however, not all of them.

The activities were suitable for students' ages in all the cases. They were somehow more childlike for eighth graders and formal for the older groups. Some of the tasks students were involved in were options taken from course books. In such cases, teachers could rely on the author's criteria about appropriateness, which usually works well in practice. However, they did a good job when choosing what seemed personal options. Games were used with both eighth graders and second baccalaureate students, for example. Yet, they were different, each one proper for the level used. Age was considered in the type of activities used as well as in the content of the materials employed. Videos choice also showed teachers interest to fulfill students' needs. A video on racism was used with second baccalaureate students and one about comic heroes was discussed with ninth graders.

Likewise, teachers were indeed concerned in motivating students throughout the lessons. Various styles and approaches were used for this purpose. All made an effort to come up with a set of varied and attention-grabbing proposals for the classes. They did attain the objective. Students were challenged with the activities. They were interested during whole-group discussions or instruction. They were absolutely caught up during games and group work. Thus, motivation was taken care of.

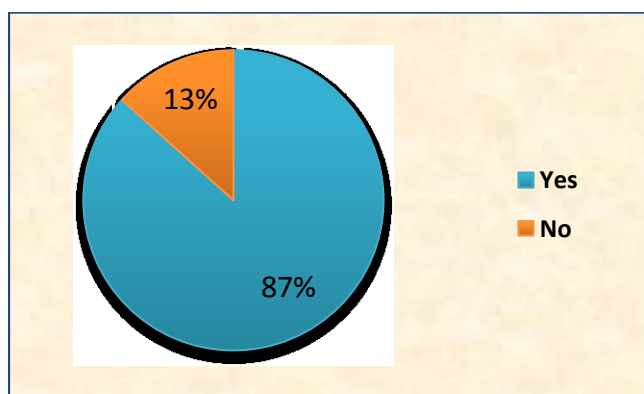
On the other hand, it was hard to see if teachers considered student's personality in only one forty-five minute class. Some did evidently. Others did not overtly, though it might be incorrect to state they did not at all. Sometimes subtle behaviors and small details play an outstanding role when dealing with these matters. Noticeably, teachers were considering students' personality and needs when they allowed them to group themselves as they wanted or, on the contrary, when they assigned group members. Teachers were considering students' personalities when they addressed one student

softly and kindly, and another respectfully but firmly. They were in view of kids' personalities when they switched from individual to group work to give them all valuable learning experiences. They were also paying attention to kids' personalities when they gave personal feedback.

Learning styles definitely come up when thinking about students' needs. According to Woolfolk (1980), teachers have to match teaching styles to learning styles to enhance significantly academic achievement. However, only in a very few of the observed classes the menu offered could partially match the wide range of learning preferences. This aspect did not seem the priority or the main intention of teachers when planning their lessons. Probably, in practice, the observed classes did indirectly meet different learners' requirement but things were not intentionally intended to do so. Variety, when introduced, responded to other issues. Nonetheless, an opinion on this subject could be faulty when based on such small evidence.

Finally, according to the students, teachers do meet their needs and fulfill their expectations. All of the questionnaires' respondents like to learn English and like the way teachers teach them. They enjoy the activities proposed; the way classes are arranged and handled.

Do teachers consider students' English level to teach their lessons?



Author: María Fernanda González
Source: Teacher's questionnaire

According to the results, ninety here percent of the teachers do consider students' English level to teach their lessons. Thirteen percent of the teachers do not consider students' English level to teach their lessons.

Thanks to schools' structure, internal organization and current state of affairs, teachers in the sample have had an easy road when having to consider students' English level in their teaching. As far as it could be perceived, pupils in most groups had a similar performance level in the language, probably as the result of the program they had undergone through. They were all in the same step of the ladder. Therefore, teachers did not have to strive to fulfill different individual needs within the same class. They could plan for the group as a whole and be successful in their teaching. The same activity, content, or language could suit all the learners. They did do a good job when deciding what resources to use, what types of interactions to allow, what assessment styles to apply. The English level of the groups matched perfectly with these decisions. For example, videos where native speakers talked were introduced to high intermediate classes. Adapted ESL videos were used with intermediate groups. Complex communicative tasks were used with high-level students while vocabulary development activities and games were given to basic and intermediate groups.

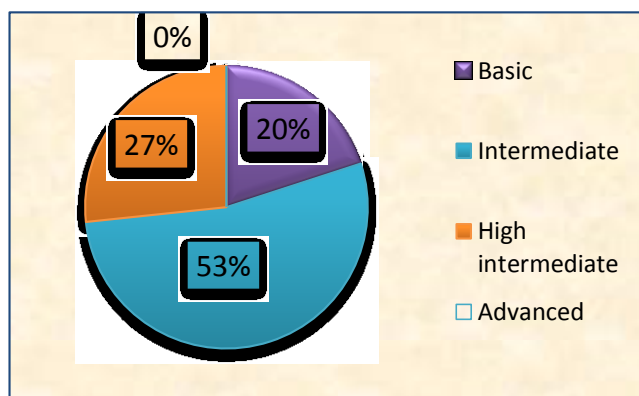
Students' English level was taken into account by teachers or by authorities in the schools in the sample because of other types of considerations as well. In one of the institutions, for example, tenth graders were separated into either intermediate or high intermediate for the English class, though the difference in students' performance was not that noticeable. However, those students considered "high intermediate" were, as mentioned by the teacher, better qualified and had a higher overall level of

accomplishment at this point. This made them eligible to complete the High Level International Baccalaureate English program, in opposition to the standard level, which will be used with the intermediate group.

Two teachers answered that they did not consider students level to teach English successfully. Yet the observed classes show that there was such consideration.

Students in both classes had a basic level of English proficiency. The objectives matched this level. The activities proposed practiced the language structure introduced, which was also coherent with the level of the students. Maybe teachers were not conscious about these facts. When asked, one of the two said that since he is teaching a beginners class and introducing the basics of the language at every level, he did not need to know what the students know beforehand.

What is the students' English level?



Author: María Fernanda González
Source: Teacher's questionnaire

According to the teachers' answers, fifty-three percent of the students have an intermediate level, twenty-seven a high level, and twenty have a basic level.

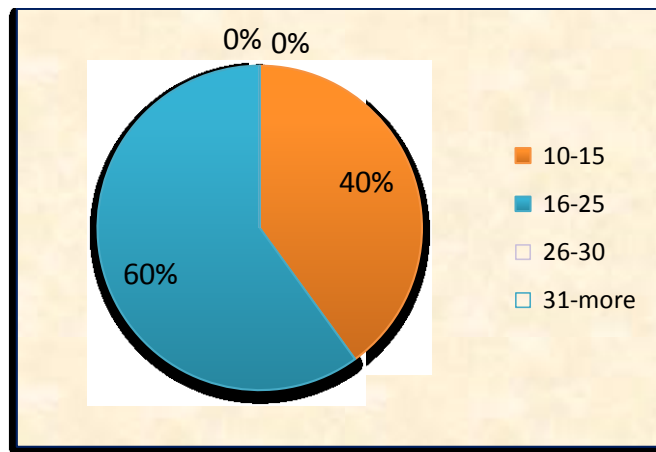
Teachers made a good portrait of their students' English level when answering this question. Their options extensively matched what could be seen in the observed classes. However, when digging a bit deeper certain things become known, which

demand a second view on the subject. Some students and even some groups walk the fine borderline between categories. They can fit either side. In one of the schools, for example, a group considered “intermediate” by the teacher could fit the high intermediate category if judged by their performance during the observed class. The same thing happened with a high intermediate class that on observation could easily fit the advanced category. On the contrary, another “intermediate” class showed nearly basic skills at moments in their oral competences but worked exceedingly well in a demanding reading activity they were assigned. So, where should they fit? Naming the groups as basic, intermediate, high intermediate, and advanced could be a mistake; moreover, if these labels are given out after a forty-five minute interaction. Therefore, teachers’ opinions should be trusted at this point.

Nonetheless, certain facts regarding this topic can be mentioned. First, in one of the schools, two students in two high intermediate/advanced classes were native speakers. This is an IB school and these classes are working on the IB English curriculum. Literature, current topics, cultural issues, etc. are discussed in the English room. Students’ proficiency level allows them to surf this content with ease and enthusiasm. Second, many of the students in another school were new to the institution. Their English level did not reflect the school’s long-term English program or policy. Third, as brought up during the conversation with either the teachers or the authorities, four out of the five schools fall into the category of “bilingual institutions.” They need to pay special attention to their English curricula. Therefore, they aim their efforts to obtain high standards of achievement and high levels of proficiency in their students.

Factors Concerning Classrooms

How many students are there in the class?



Author: María Fernanda González
Source: Teacher's questionnaire

As marked by the respondents, forty percent of the teachers have a range of 10 to 15 students per class. The other sixty percent have 16 to 25 students in each group. Roughly speaking, teachers who marked the 10-15 option had an average of 11 students, though one has only nine. Those who marked the 16-25 option worked with an average of 18 students.

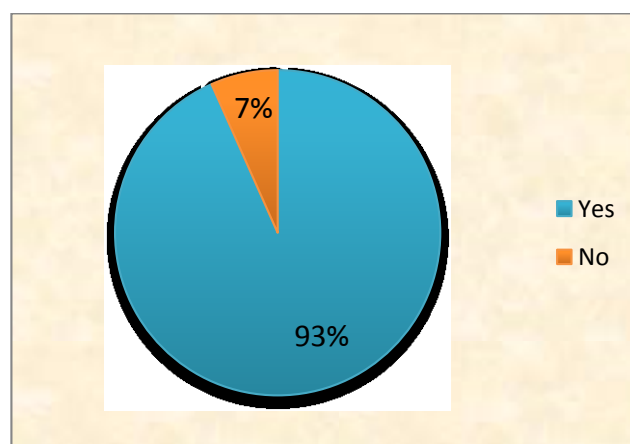
As mentioned before and based on observations, class size in the sample is a great advantage for the teachers. Small groups allow them to offer one-on-one assistance at times and to meet the individual needs of their students. Most teachers who marked the 10 to 15 category for this question work with students whose level of English is basic. Students in such classes had various chances to participate and use the language. Discipline could easily be managed and controlled. In addition, a sense of belonging could be felt in these environments. Though sometimes teachers find it quite challenging to keep their students interested and excited about learning in such groups, during the observed classes, teachers did not have this problem at all. Only in two

occasions, the small size of the group seemed a weakness. The game one of the teachers had prepared required more participants in order to be more challenging. In addition, in another class, activities finished quickly; therefore, for the spare time, the teacher had to use a filler. Luckily, she had one nearby.

Those bigger classes in the sample, still small compared to other institutions, worked fine. Teachers used numerous coping strategies to enhance engagement and ensure participation. Again, discipline was not a problem. Some groups were a bit noisier and more disorganized than others were, though nothing disturbing. In two or three of the 18 student average classes, teachers established a fun and competitive atmosphere during group work, which turned into total involvement. There was certainly more circulation and movement but still goals were attained and activities were finished.

In addition, as shown in the results, thirteen out of the fifteen students consider that the number of pupils in each class favor their learning process. The other two who do not think their class size favors learning come from the 16 to 25 option.

Do teachers feel comfortable with the number of students they are working with?



Author: María Fernanda González
Source: Teacher's questionnaire

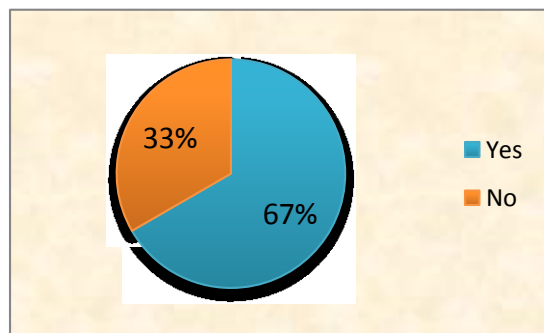
According to the results, ninety-three percent of the teachers feel comfortable with the number of students they are working with. Only a seven percent are not. Various reasons were mentioned to support such opinions during the conversations. They said, for example, “Small groups are easy to manage.” “Small groups give students opportunities to speak out and participate.” “Teachers can meet individual needs better when classes are smaller.” “Students have more space to move around in the classroom when classes are small.” “Classes with around 20 students are perfect because the rhythm of interaction is good.” “When classes are not too small, there is always someone who is willing to answer questions.” However, those teachers with the largest classes did complain that sometimes it was difficult to manage and control group activity.

One teacher mentioned that though she thinks her classes have the appropriate sizes for interaction during class time, she feels that the activities that accompany the teaching process like grading and correcting assignments and tests for such number of students can be a big burden, difficult to handle, and time consuming.

Coincidentally, the only teacher who does not feel comfortable with the number of students she is working with mentioned these same arguments for her discomfort. She is an IB teacher. She thinks that the IB programs is very demanding; therefore, the students involved in it have to have high exposure to the language. In the end, it turns into a lot of class-preparation time, a lot of marking, a lot of mock tests and exercises, a lot of formative feedback, a lot of individual tutorial time, and a lot of papers correction. Consequently, a twenty-student class, as the ones she handles, means, in her opinion, at least four out of schedule working hours a day for two to three times a week. Therefore, she would like to have half of the students.

One of the teachers looked bothered and puzzled with the students demands during the observed lesson. She was monitoring students' individual work and had to move around answering questions. After some minutes, and after having assisted a few kids, she seemed a little overwhelmed and tired. Of course, this does not mean she is not comfortable with the number of students she is working with. Maybe it only means she would be less stressed-out and anxious if the number were smaller.

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



Author: María Fernanda González
Source: Teacher's questionnaire

As the results show, sixty-seven percent of the teachers say they have enough space to work with the number of students they have been assigned. Thirty-three percent say they do not.

Definitely, spacing was one of the biggest issues in this study. The ratio between classroom area and class size can be analyzed in three groups.

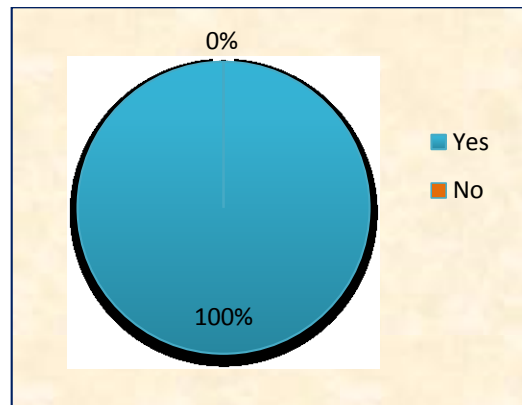
The first group includes three small classes in the sample that work in small areas, very small indeed. Students could hardly fit in such spaces and did not have easy circulation. Desks had to be set together and could hardly vary their arrangement. Teachers and students do not feel comfortable with the working space they have, as they mentioned in the questionnaires. It is obvious that if the class size was small for these groups, it was not due to pedagogical considerations, but rather because, literally, there

was no more room for more people. Probably if there was more space, there would have been more students per class.

The second group includes six classes. Their situation was not as bad, but still it was not the best possible. These groups fit in the space provided with some difficulties. Some of these classes were small, so was the space. Somehow, the teachers managed to cope with the situation and were able to work in groups, play games, and walk around during monitoring time. Most teachers and all students in this group did complain through their questionnaires. However, one teacher said that she feels comfortable with the spacing because she used to work for another institution where classes were “much smaller.” This was improvement in her opinion.

The third group also includes six classes. All of them have between 16 to 25 students. They are the biggest groups in the sample; however, the classrooms they work in are big too. Students have enough room to move around and be comfortable. They have furniture for their personal belongings and even areas to display their work. Teachers and all students but one feel comfortable with the space assigned. Only one student from one of these classes answered “No” to the question “Do you consider the classroom size allows you to work comfortably?” There was no opportunity to talk to this student and determine exactly what he/she meant. I wonder what he/she would have felt in a classroom setting from any of the other schools in the sample.

Do teachers arrange students' seats in relation to the activities planned for the classes?



Author: María Fernanda González
Source: Teacher's questionnaire

The results indicate that one hundred percent of the teachers in the sample do arrange students' seats in relation to the activities planned for the classes.

As Denton (1992) states, the physical arrangement of a classroom has significant implications for discipline and classroom management. It strongly influences learning as well. Careful use of physical space can positively affect teacher and students attitudes.

Teachers in the sample were very resourceful and did their best with the means they had available. There was an exquisite variety of seating arrangements most of which paid off in the end. Even those teachers working with small groups in small spaces managed to have kids seated in pairs or groups when required, despite the fact that kids had to step on the chairs if they wanted to come up front.

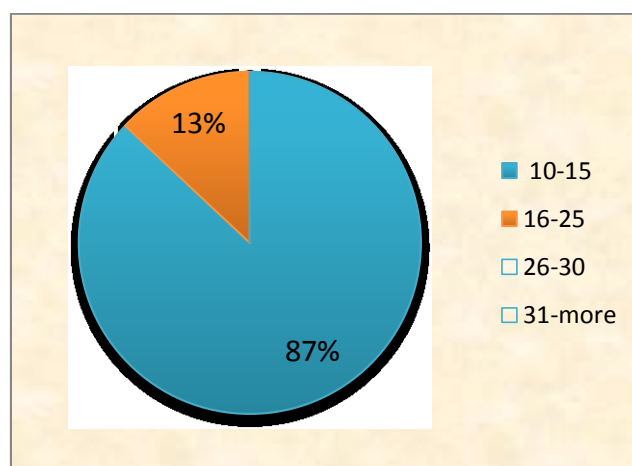
Those classes that started with desks lined up in rows for whole-group instructions grouped their tables and rearranged chairs when necessary. In one of them, when playing a game, tables were left aside and students arranged their chairs in a circle. Students could face each other, have eye contact, and play better.

One of the teachers said that sometimes she does not move students around as

much as she wishes because the homeroom teacher has asked her not to do so. In her class, students were seated in pairs and the activity she worked on had to be done individually so the desks display worked well.

In two of the institutions visited, teachers had their own classrooms. They did not have to wonder around as usually happens but waited for the students to come to their place. As mentioned, they consider themselves lucky for the advantages of such situation. These teachers had the teaching-learning scenarios ready for the students beforehand. If the lesson planned required group work, they had the tables and chairs arranged for this purpose. Less effective class time was wasted.

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



Author: María Fernanda González
Source: Teacher's questionnaire

As shown in the chart, thirteen percent of the teachers think that 16 to 25 students is the appropriate number for the English classroom; in the meantime, eighty-seven percent of the teachers think it is 10 to 15 students. According to standards, 10 to 15 students make up a small class; and, as the New Zealand Post Primary Teachers' Association states in its article (2014), small group instruction allows students to engage better in the learning process and to be better monitored. Also in such environments,

teachers can diversify methodology, resources, processes, activities to cope with individual needs. Teachers know the advantages of small groups; therefore, they want to work with such number of students.

Regarding the sample, there is good news on this topic. Forty percent of the teachers work with groups that match the number of students they consider appropriate. When the size of a class matches the teacher's expectations, things can flow easily—regardless the number of pupils it has. Teachers' positive attitude on this matter benefits the environment. Usually, teachers in this situation feel they can manage the group easily and deal with the after-class work (grading, tutoring, etc.) without hesitations. They enjoy class time and spread such feeling towards their students.

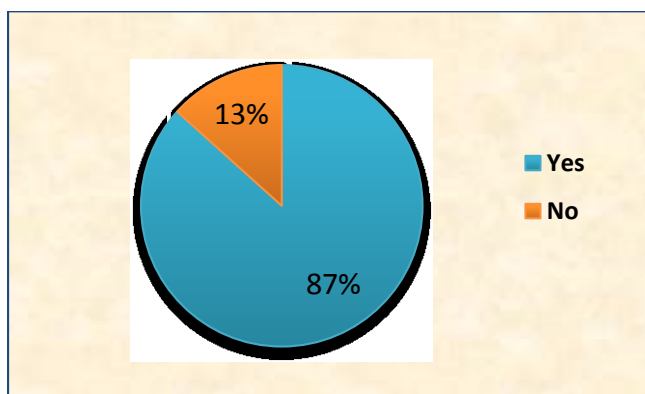
On the contrary, fifty-four percent consider that 10 to 15 students in a class are appropriate and they are working with bigger classes. Coincidentally, all of them are IB teachers. When interviewed, these teachers mentioned that planning and evaluating are a big burden for them; therefore, the more students the more work they have to deal with, and the more time they need to assign to these activities. In fact, they did not complain about class management or discipline; they only grumbled about pre and post class activities.

Only one out of the fifteen teachers—a seven percent of the sample—wants to have more students in the class. When observed, this teacher seemed to have trouble dealing with only ten students; thus, it seems odd that he would like more. However, there was not an opportunity to deepen on this matter—or any other—with this teacher because the interview was very short.

Regarding this topic, four students said that the number of pupils per class did not help them learn the language. Unfortunately, since I could not talk to the students

who filled out the questionnaires, I could not know why they said this. However, as I have mentioned before, classes in the schools visited were rather small so students cannot complain of them being overcrowded. One student did mention why he answered negatively. He complained that his class was too small, and they could not play nice games.

Do teachers use teaching resources?



Author: María Fernanda González
Source: Teacher's questionnaire

According to the results, thirteen percent of the teachers do not use resources while teaching; and eighty-seven percent say they do. However, during the class observations, all of the teachers used resources. As stated by Wajnryb (1992), in the language classroom, the greatest resource a teacher has is the learner. All of them actively involved the learners in the process. In addition, most of them used whiteboards, pens, books, notebooks, printables, worksheets, etc.

When considering technology, forty percent of the teachers in the sample work in fully furnished classrooms. Each one is provided with a smartboard and a wireless connection to the Internet. As mentioned by one of the teachers, “this equipment substituted the old-fashioned CD players for the listening activities and the televisions for videos.” When observed, they employed the smartboards as a writing board, as a

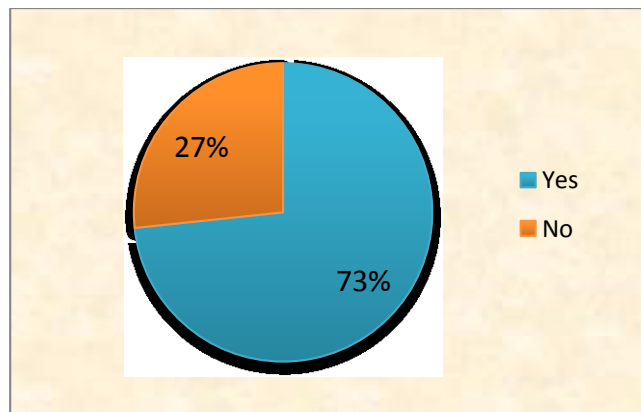
computer screen, or as a television, enabling a quality-learning environment. In one class, for example, students were reading a text in their books and when they reached a word they did not know, the teacher looked for its meaning on an online dictionary or searched for images and shared her findings with the students through the smartboard. Nice way to introduce new vocabulary! In another class, the teacher opened the page of the school's online platform called "Moodle" to explain the students the schedule of the activities they were responsible for. They have been using this technology for more than three years so both, teachers and students, were used to handling it.

The other nine teachers did not have smartboards in the classrooms; in fact, there were no computers or TV sets either. Two teachers did have laptops on their desks; but, as they said, these were personal property. When asked about technology usage, they said that, when required, they could book for the "digital class" and use it. The "digital class" included, as mentioned by the teachers, a television, a DVD player, a computer and an in focus. They also mentioned that since there is only one digital class for the high school section, sometimes it was not easy to get a chance to use it; therefore, they could only count on it when it was necessary. When asked about Internet access, teachers said that they use it only through the computer available at the library.

When considering other types of resources, CD players could be found in many of the observed classes. They were actually used in two of them to work on listening activities that the course books included. As mentioned by the students, they were also used to listen to music while working in class or for other types of activities. Flashcards were also used in one of the observed classes to introduce the meaning of a group of verbs to eighth graders. Though not too technological, this resource proved to be a very good choice for the occasion.

Finally, there were wall charts and posters with English material in all the visited classrooms. The students made some; others were part of the supplementary material that comes with textbooks.

Do teachers consider the resources they have in class appropriate?



Author: María Fernanda González
Source: Teacher's questionnaire

As marked by the respondents, seventy-three percent of the teachers consider the resources they have in class appropriate. On the other hand, twenty-seven percent think they are not.

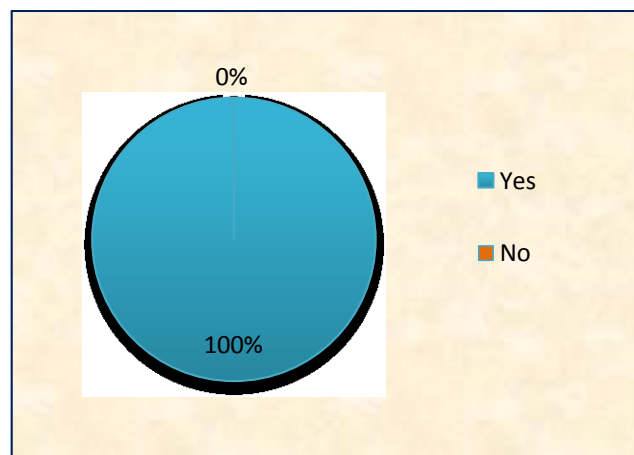
After what I observed, I agree with those teachers who consider that the resources they can count on are not appropriate. Whiteboards, books, notebooks, charts, CD players and flashcards are not enough in today's classrooms. Nowadays, there is a big supply of interesting and motivating language teaching material that can be easily used in the classrooms. The Internet, for example, offers a variety of videos, images, pictures, reading selections, academic pages, dictionaries, newspapers, books, etc. for educational usage. However, how can teachers incorporate this material to their planning if they cannot access the Internet easily?

Eleven out of the fifteen teachers consider the resources they have appropriate. As mentioned before, six observed classes did count with fully furnished classrooms

with updated technology—smartboards and wireless access to the Internet. However, the other five classes had only basic resources, so I do not understand how these teachers can consider them appropriate. It is either they have not discovered the magic of technology, or they did not want to put the schools in evidence. It is obvious for anyone who enters the classes that resources are scarce. Digging a little bit deeper, if the first option is true for the situation, teachers need to understand that resources make teaching and learning easier, clearer and more interesting. Nonetheless, though teachers might know how useful resources and technology are, if they are not available for their usage, they have to do their best and work with the tools they are given. This is exactly what the teachers at these schools are doing—coping with the situation.

Factors Concerning Educational Institutions

Do institutions review teachers' lesson plans?



Author: María Fernanda González
Source: Teacher's questionnaire

According to the results, one hundred percent of the lesson plans are reviewed. Eighty percent are reviewed once a week. The other twenty percent are reviewed once a month.

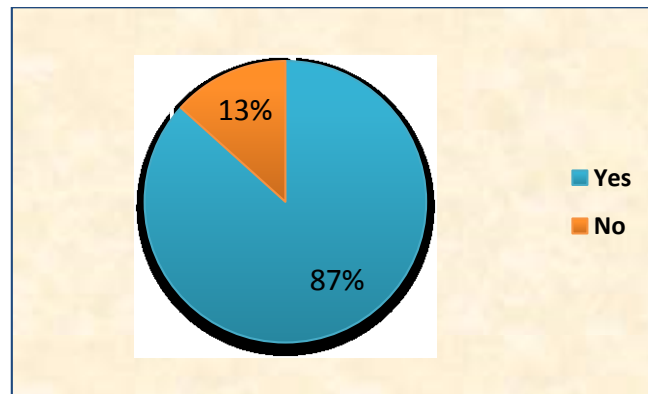
Schools' organization varies a lot. As mentioned by teachers or authorities, sixty

percent of the schools visited have a Languages/English Department, which is responsible for coordinating the policies related to English teaching. In these schools, the coordinators of the English department were the ones responsible for reviewing the lesson plans. These revisions allowed coordinators to know teachers' pace in relation to the annual plan, how far they have gone, and ultimately if they are complying with the schedule. They could check which activities are planned; when tests and exams are scheduled, and when homework is given. Coordinators can follow the track of teachers' work through the lesson plans. They can also give feedback to teachers work.

Those two schools that do not have an English department function differently. English lesson plans are reviewed by the High School Director in one case and by another English teacher in the other. The High School Director, as mentioned by the teachers, does not speak English, so his revision is merely a mechanism to confirm that teachers are complying with this requisite. No feedback is given or deeper checking is made. Peer checking in the other school works similarly; it is occasional as well.

I had a chance to see some of the lesson plans. Their design and the information they included varied from one school to the other. The simple ones mentioned briefly the activities, resources, and homework, if any, per class. The complex ones included information related to objectives, methodology, evaluation, resources for every class. It seemed to me that teachers required a lot of time to complete these last forms. I doubt if all this information actually helps teachers to teach better.

Do institutions monitor teachers' work?



Author: María Fernanda González
Source: Teacher's questionnaire

According to the results, thirteen percent of the teachers answered negatively to this question. Eighty-seven percent, on the other hand, state that institutions do monitor their work.

Those two teachers who answered negatively to this question belong to the same institution. This is a small school, rather new; but it is growing fast. There is no English Department; and as teachers said, they use an English series, chosen by the Director, as their program. There are two full-time and one part-time English teachers for the whole institution (preschool, primary and high school). They work rather independently—no monitoring is made on a regular basis. The Director visits the classes occasionally. Teachers help each other with advice, when required, and with the lesson plans revision. As mentioned during the interviews, it seems next year the number of students is going to increase; therefore, they expect that the school will start a new organizational system.

Monitoring in eleven schools is done through various mechanisms. In two of them, teachers in the English department meet on a weekly basis. Class observation is done frequently (two or three times a month), and individual sessions with the coordinator are scheduled regularly. In addition, as part of the monitoring policy,

teachers' performance is assessed through various mechanisms: class observations, parents and students' feedback, and the coordinator's evaluation, among others.

As it was mentioned during the interviews, the monitoring process used in these schools puts a lot of pressure on teachers. Many things have to be complied with and many people check teachers' work. However, they recognize that when things are done with responsibility, everything can flow with ease. As they also mentioned, teachers need commitment and professionalism to carry out their jobs in these environments. On the other hand, these schools also provide teachers with detailed guidelines and information on how to encounter the teaching process, what methodologies and approaches have to be used in order to attain the school's objectives, training on relevant educational topics, and through the monitoring process they can assure teachers are doing what the schools require from them.

In the other two schools left, monitoring is done mainly through class observations. It is not clear how often it is done because teachers in the same school have different opinions on the topic; one marked once a month, the others, once a week. At any rate, it seems it is done sporadically rather than on a regular basis. In addition, it does not seem a structured process. As mentioned by one of the teachers, no feedback is given after a class observation. Meetings with the other English teachers are scheduled occasionally when specific purposes require them. A teacher from one of these schools when interviewed mentioned that she would like to have more feedback on her work, because she does not know how well or bad she is doing it. She felt insecure due to her lack of experience.

Conclusions

- The aspects analyzed in this study that mostly affect the English teaching and learning process in the schools in the sample are: the level of education teachers have, their proficiency in English, the usage of the language in the classroom, the class size, the space available, and the teaching resources.
- The level of education of the teachers in the sample is highly favorable for the English language teaching- learning process.
- There is a well-established relation between teachers' proficiency level and students' English level.
- Teaching resources provided in the classroom enhance the process at various levels. Technological resources are not used in all settings on a daily basis.
- Most of the groups work in small areas. However, groups are rather small as well. Teachers and students deal with this situation the best way possible and manage to work in groups and to change the seating arrangements as required.
- Students enjoy their English classes: the activities, the way teachers manage classrooms, the books, the other resources, etc.

Recommendations

- Three out of the five schools in the sample should invest in technological resources to cope with millennial students who are technologically native and require highly motivating environments. Technology allows bringing the world to the class, to reach for first-hand information and to access the best educational resources.
- There should be a consensus on how to tackle English teaching in every school to optimize resources, materials, books and efforts. English departments or teams should formulate general policies, which take forward teaching and learning processes. They should contribute to and lead pedagogic and strategic discussion in order to support and sustain teachers' praxis, ensure improvements and developments, and guarantee good standards of pupil's achievement.
- Some teachers in the sample should update and clarify their knowledge regarding English teaching methods and approaches.

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Anexo N° 6



UNIVERSIDAD TÉCNICA PARTICULAR DE LOJA

La Universidad Católica de Loja

**MODALIDA ABIERTA Y A DISTANCIA
CARRERA DE INGLÉS**

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	()
----	-----	----	-----	----	-----	----	-----	----	-----	----	-----

Anexo 7



UNIVERSIDAD TÉCNICA PARTICULAR DE LOJA

La Universidad Católica de Loja

**MODALIDA ABIERTA Y A DISTANCIA
CARRERA DE INGLÉS**

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!!!!

Anexo 8



UNIVERSIDAD TÉCNICA PARTICULAR DE LOJA

La Universidad Católica de Loja

**MODALIDA ABIERTA Y A DISTANCIA
CARRERA DE INGLÉS**

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 (<i>age, personality, attitude, aptitude, motivation, and learning styles</i>)	
YES ()	NO ()

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

Students' Level (<i>Basic, Intermediate, High Intermediate, and Advanced</i>)	
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!!!!!!