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Teachers and students' perceptions of teaching English in Small Classes in Ecuador

TRABAJO DE FIN DE TITULACIÓN

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Loja, Mayo del 2015

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DEDICATION

I thank God for giving me the necessary strength and patience to finish this research work.

I dedicate this work to my parents who have taught me values and provided me support and love every day.

Finally, I would like to thank my sister Rosario and my daughter Alison for all their patience and infinite love; I would not be able to accomplish this hard job without their valuable help and comprehension.

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ABSTRACT

The title of this research is “Teachers and students’ perceptions of teaching English in small classes in Ecuador” and the primary purpose of this study is to explore the teachers and students’ perceptions of teaching English in small classes. The data was obtained from two high schools and one institute in Cariamanga in the province of Loja.

The sample of the study consisted of students aged between 12 and 17 and in addition, 5 teachers participated in this study. All the participants were selected from 5 small classes with 20 students or less. This study was done using a qualitative and quantitative approach for exploring, explaining, describing, and analyzing the collected data.

Main findings for this study reveal that teaching in small classes certainly gives more benefits than teaching in large classes. In fact, students have more opportunities to acquire the language and teachers can have more access to each student, also to applied strategies and techniques that allow students to practice the target language.

Key words: small classes, perceptions, benefits, strategies, techniques, high schools.

RESUMEN EJECUTIVO

El título del siguiente estudio es “percepciones de los profesores y estudiantes de la enseñanza de inglés en clases pequeñas en las aulas del Ecuador. El principal propósito de este estudio, es explorar las percepciones de los profesores y estudiantes sobre la enseñanza y aprendizaje del idioma Inglés en aulas pequeñas.

Para la realización de este estudio se escogió la muestra entre estudiantes cuyas edades fluctúan entre los 12 y 17 años de edad, quienes pertenecen a clases de 20 alumnos o menos alumnos. Además, la muestra conto con la participación de cinco profesores que dictaban clases al grupo de estudiantes seleccionados.

Este estudio se diseñó utilizando un enfoque cuantitativo y cualitativo para la exploración, explicación, descripción, y análisis de los datos. La información fue recogida mediante el uso de técnicas tales como entrevistas, toma de notas, y observación. Los instrumentos asociados a dichas técnicas que se utilizaron en esta investigación fueron cuestionario y hoja de observación.

Entre los hallazgos más importantes de este estudio, se encontró que enseñar inglés en aulas pequeñas tiene más ventajas que desventajas, porque los estudiantes tienen mayor oportunidad de adquirir el lenguaje y usarlo. Además, enseñar Inglés en clases pequeñas, permite a los profesores tener acceso a los estudiantes y aplicar técnicas y estrategias que ayudan a desarrollar el lenguaje en los estudiantes.

Palabras clave: Clases pequeñas, percepciones, beneficios, estrategias, técnicas y colegios.

INTRODUCTION

Class size has been studied by many researchers around the world who argue in favor of its positive or negative effects on students' learning process. About the topic Galton (1994, p. 95-95) says that "There is a positive correlation between increasing class size and pupil progress, and there is also a negative correlation between these two concepts". In the same vein, Harmer (2001) mentions that small classes offer teachers some benefits that large classes do not.

In Ecuador, large classes have been a common characteristic of high schools and also the same condition is perceived in other countries of Latin America. According to an article published on Guatemala by Prensa libre (2010) where it is stated that overcrowded classrooms hinder the teaching-learning process since teachers and their pupils have to face difficulties such as reduced physical space. It is common to observe, especially in public high schools, 40 or more students working in classrooms built for 25 students.

Therefore, the challenges that large classes present for Ecuadorian teachers and students have risen the interest in searching their perceptions of teaching and learning English in small classes. With that purpose, the following questions have been proposed:

What are the benefits of teaching and learning English in small classes? What teaching strategies and resources benefit the teaching of English in small classes? How do students feel about learning English in small classes? Are there any limitations when teaching English in small classes?

Through responding the research questions it will be possible to know if small classes benefit or not the students' English teaching-learning process. Additionally, the findings may constitute an important contribution to the field of education since authorities would be able of taking important decisions on class size in order to improve the quality of English in Ecuador.

A considerable amount of research has been done on class size. Thus, three studies were selected to present significant evidence regarding the topic.

The first study presented here was carried out by Yi (2008) who conducted a research to study about the effects of class size reduction in adult foreign language classroom. The author from the study done concluded that students of Class Size reduction (CSR) had good opportunities to produce and use the language learned because the number of students in class facilitated the practice of the language. Also, the author suggested that teacher had better management of the class by giving substantial support to those students who needed more academic support. Nevertheless, the limitation of this study relies on the ability that teachers have to manage learning in small classes.

The second study was conducted by Hoxby (2000), to prove the effects of class size on students' achievement. The author at the end of the study concludes that the change on number of students can be used to measure the effect of class size on students' achievement; thus class size did have an effect on students' achievement. But, a limitation for this study was the systematic links between school inputs and other determinants of student outcomes that may be obscure without the variation in inputs being exogenous.

The third and last study was carried out by Harfitt (2012), to examine how class size reduction might help to alleviate language learning anxiety which has long been seen as an obstacle to second language acquisition. From the interviews students show confidence and positive attitude about their experience of studying in large and small classes. Though to this study were focused only four cases and the results cannot be extrapolated.

Regarding the benefits of this study, it will help teachers and authorities to raise awareness of the importance of providing students an appropriate learning environment. Also, this research will be a valuable source of information for future investigation on class size.

However, the current study has only examined teachers' and students' perception which is sometimes affected by the personal judgments of the respondents. Further research might compare students' achievement in large and small classes in order to prove the correlation between class size and students' learning progress.

METHOD

Setting

The setting of this research is two high schools in the city of Cariamanga, Ecuador. The sample was selected among students aged between 12 and 17 years old who attend classes on the mornings and in the evenings.

In addition, five teachers were asked to collaborate in this study. All of them are experienced professionals with an English bachelor's Degree; many of the teachers have been working in the field of language teaching for an average of 10 years.

Procedure

This study began with a careful revision of literature found in books, magazines, online newspapers, and journals; here, the Internet was the main resource used due to the vast information it provides.

After explaining how the theoretical information was gathered, it is important to mention the design applied in this study. The approaches selected for this research are qualitative and quantitative. It is qualitative because teachers and students were observed during the classes. And this study is quantitative since data gathered from questionnaires was calculated to obtain frequencies and percentages of responses.

Once the methods, techniques, and instruments were designed the next stage was the field research. It was necessary to request for permission in the educational institutions in order to apply interviews and carry out class observation. After the institute and high school authorities confirmed their collaboration, five classes with 20 or less students were selected. Questionnaires were answered by students and teachers in order to gather information of their perceptions towards the English teaching-learning process in small classes. In order to confirm the participants' responses, classes were observed and the information was recorded in observation sheets.

The observation sheets are part of the instruments used in this study. The other instruments consisted of questionnaires for students and teachers. The teachers' questionnaire contains 21 Liker scale questions grouped into strategies and resources that benefit the teaching of English in small classes; teachers' perception about how students feel about learning English in small classes; and, limitations to teach in small classes.

The students' questionnaire consisted of 22 Liker scale questions grouped into similar issues as in the teachers' questionnaire but focused on the learning rather than on the teaching process.

After the teachers and students' responses were gathered, it was necessary to tabulate the results. This process was done by counting the number of answers regarding each question and calculating the percentages in each of the following criteria: totally agree, agree, partially agree, and disagree. Microsoft Excel was used to calculate the data in order to reduce time and effort.

Once the tabulation of data was finished, next stage consisted on explaining the results through the interpretation of the frequencies and percentages. Then, the information of the literature review was used to support the analysis as well the data gathered in the observation sheets.

DISCUSSION

Literature Review

This section contains the literature review that will support the analysis of results. The topics considered for this literature review are related to managing learning, interaction in the classroom, class size and the impact it could have on the English teaching-learning process. In addition, it was necessary to review five studies from different researchers about the influence of small classes on the teaching-learning process.

In the following section, some of the most significant approaches and methods will be taken into consideration, as well as, previous studies about teaching English in small classes that give information regarding the advantages of using small numbers of students in the classroom in order to achieve a better learning.

Managing learning

Some important approaches for managing learning are provided by Harmer (1998), who states, “The most important to engage students in a task is giving them plenty of information about the task that they are going to perform”. Also, the author mentions the importance of getting clear directions and instructions about what students will do first and what they should do next, taking into account the level of the language of the students. Moreover, demonstrations and modeling from the teacher help students get more ideas of what they need to do in order to perform well.

Also, Harmer (1998) mentions that the importance of feedback is a relevant point because learners need to know whether they did right or wrong, to learn and correct what those mistakes were. In addition, teachers must be sensitive when correcting students. Teachers should try not to interrupt in the middle of oral, grammatical or lexical errors. Good feedback enables students to gain confidence in the process of language acquisition, so teachers have to be wise and careful when giving feedback to their students.

Furthermore, Wajnryb (1992), who provides information about managing learning, considers feedback as an important motivational value. Also, he suggests that there is a linguistic and cognitive purpose that teachers have to take into consideration to determine how students will respond and how the effect of feedback on students learning will be. Likewise, Brown (1988) specifies that feedback has to be genuinely responsive. He expresses, “it means allowing learners to experience the effect of what they produce as a guide on their future efforts”. Therefore, authentic and explicit instructions from the teacher provide to the students a guide about how well they are doing during the language acquisition.

Harmer, (1998) states a good point about managing learning to be taken into account is giving instructions. The way teachers give instructions indicates the steps teachers should follow to control the attitudes of the learners. A set of well explained instructions is important because the way how instructions are given promotes success for students when solving a task. Even more, Gower & Walters (2005) explain that it is imperative to give clear instructions at the beginning of a lesson because learners need to be guided about how to develop an activity or organize a project they are doing in class.

Teaching management does not involve only feedback and giving direction, but the use of the correct timing for each activity to be taught in class. The lessons are fitted in a period of time which varies depending on the length of the lesson, student’s background, age and level of proficiency; as a result, teachers have to use the time carefully in order to keep the control of the class. Wajnryb (1992) claims that combining lesson timing with decision making during a lesson can calm anxiety, help students keep attentive, motivated, spontaneous and interested in the course.

Teacher-student-and –student -student interaction

Wright (2010) states that most of the talking is done by the teacher , he proposes that , the intervention of the teachers in speaking practices to be reduced in order to give students more opportunities to interact with other learners.

In addition, Wright (2010) expresses that teachers need to modify the way they talk to students so that they understand and assimilate the speech better and clearer. Modification of teacher's talk help learners to get comprehensible input and enables teachers to correct students in a good way, so that, students do not feel they are being punished for the errors or mistakes they could make during the learning process.

Moreover, Lightbown & Spada (2011) in their theory punctuate the importance to access comprehensible input and controversial interaction between students and teachers. The authors argue that when learners give the opportunity to interact, they are forced to negotiate for meaning by expressing and clarifying their objectives and ideas. Students and teachers can succeed in a mutual understanding; as result, students work together to complete the task and achieve their goal.

According to the interaction hypothesis, this is a theory that suggests that one of the most effective methods of learning a new language is through personal and direct interaction; it also emphasizes negotiation that leads learners to acquire the language forms, the words and the language structures that help them to acquire the target language.

Panitiz (1999), states that one important point to highlight is the Collaborative Learning approach where people work together in groups and members have different abilities and contributions, but they work collaboratively to build up a language skill. Additionally, Panitiz (1999) also claims that the face to face interaction increases promoting each other learning by helping, discussing, sharing ideas, opinions and encouraging each other to learn; moreover, the learning atmosphere frees students, reduces anxiety, which allow students interact without feeling the pressure of the whole class.

On the other hand, Panitz (1999) claims that collaborative learning cannot function effectively if students do not have social skills; this means if there are discrepancies between the members of the groups it is probably that the groups do not perform well; therefore, teachers have to deal with the situation by teaching how to manage conflicts purposefully and effectively as part of the teaching work. Collaborative skills apart of teaching negotiation of meaning, trust building, communication, it is good students learn how to manage conflicts as a skill too.

In contrast, de la Herran &, Paredes (2008) mention that in traditional classes, most of the time of the class period is taken by the teacher to talk and teach the lessons and normally students are asked to work individually. In other words there is not much use of group work techniques or other kind of interaction between students, which causes loss of positive interactions between classmates; as a consequence, this can influence students' motivation, therefore, it also influences students' learning.

The authors also point out the importance of determining the interaction styles used in class such as cooperative, individual and competitive so that the teacher can work basing on these styles to become aware of the consequences the type of interaction can have in the class and in the students' learning improvement. If teacher does not know how to identify which interaction is being used in class, it is probable that the outlook of achieving a good interaction and a significant learning will not be the expected one; this may cause students become bored and unmotivated.

Class size

Many theories have been presented by some authors who consider class size as an important factor in the teaching-learning process. Teaching to small classes can have great advantages, and it can also give teachers the opportunity to introduce new techniques to improve the performance on students. On the other hand, Harmer (2003) claims that large

classes can be challenging, for example, in big classes teachers hardly reach students sitting the back, which makes it fairly difficult for students to be paid attention or to be helped from the teacher resulting in negative effects on the learning process.

Many activities such as role play, group work, or face to face interactions cannot be used in large classes because of the number of the students and lack of time. But, Harmer (2010) explains that large classes, though intimidating, can be warmer and more developing because there are variety of abilities, backgrounds, humor and good class feeling. However, language acquisition in large and small groups will vary in each group and the variety allows students to have more fun when they construct learning.

Blatchford (2003) suggests that small classes direct to a better teaching and consequently to useful learning. Nevertheless, the author also mentions that some skeptics argue about the size reduction of the number of students in class because this will lead to have a high cost to improve educational standards. But small classes achieve a better quality of teaching, teachers can have access to all students and they can give personal attention to those students who need more attention and help; even more, in small classes students can interact between themselves; teacher can talk to students to observe and manage each detail about the lesson being imparted, and the most importantly, students keep interested in the task. On the contrary, in large classes, interaction with learners is more difficult as well as discipline; in fact, teachers have to deal all the time with discipline issues and in trying that students keep interested on the tasks.

In addition, Bateman (2002) points that in small classes allow teacher to know individually each student and give the opportunity for teachers to offer personal support and help to those who have less skills in the language. On the other hand, Ingersoll (2009) explains that in large classes a lesson will take more time to finish, but not all students will

learn the lesson at the same pace than the others, so many of the students will need extra time to construct their knowledge, which, to some extent, means extra work for teachers.

Teaching techniques: strategies and activities for teaching English in small class

A good development of a lesson is achieved by using well formulated techniques, strategies and activities to help students to acquire knowledge and gain autonomy; for this reason, it is important that teachers choose the most convenient technique and task for the students to do. For example, Krashen (as cited in Herrell & Jordán, 2004) state that predictable routines and signals are techniques that lower anxiety in language learners and distract students from worrying about understanding every single word that the teacher says. Sequences are done on daily activities about the subject to be taught, places inside the room, instructions about the homework and things that are familiar to learners, so this technique can be used in small and large classes in beginning level.

Herrell & Jordán (2004) explain that visual scaffolding is a technique used in small classes which its main goal is the use of pictures, so that the language can be more understandable. This technique also helps students relate words with pictures and sounds; it is a good resource used in a class where student learn things by looking. Generally, pictures attract students' interest to learn vocabulary because colors and forms of the pictures give a clue of what it is being taught. Even though, students do not understand every word they have been given, they can obtain the meaning in context. Visual scaffolding is also an excellent way to provide students a comprehensible input, it is a good tool to teach children and students in beginning level of language acquisition.

In small classes the use of cooperative learning is more frequent because the number of students allows structuring small groups that work together to gain success of each member and the whole group. Mukalel (2005) asserts that group work gives students the opportunity to communicate, plan, research and interact; however, it is necessary that each member gets

involved in the tasks they have to do in order to perform well and succeed. Furthermore, in group work activities, the role of the teacher also changes because he becomes a facilitator of the learning rather than supplier of information so that the students have responsibilities inside the group.

Herrel, (as cited in Herrell & Jordán, 2004), suggest that another technique to use in small groups is role play; using this strategy in the classroom allows students the “opportunity to discuss and use the vocabulary in context through role-playing.” This strategy is used mainly to teach vocabulary and students can experience vocabulary in different contexts.

Gibbons, (as cited in Herrell & Jordán, 2004) expresses that communication games are activities used in classroom to promote communication and interaction between language learners. Another excellent tool to teach a new language is communicative games. Many games are structured to help students to use the language and to look closely at its functions so that the students can work either individually or together to communicate and solve a task. Additionally, the same author considers that this activity gives students the opportunity to use language in a non-stressful way; they can relax without feeling the pressure of using the correct language in public and feel the fear of being judged negatively because this is the main cause of restraining students to use the language in class. Also, this technique can be used in any level, giving learners an authentic reason for communicating; games can be very motivating if there is a competition in language activities, but teacher needs to plan the lesson beforehand, and of course, students need to know vocabulary to be successful in the activity.

Similarly, Herrell & Jordán (2004) state that communicative games have some benefits, for example, classes become student-centered, communication is based on student's interactions which increase learning motivation and overall and lowers anxiety and fear of failure when communicating.

Mukalel (2005) offers a big variety of techniques that can be used in class for example debates and discussions. These techniques are focused on communication skill. Learners use communication in real situation, one example of real communication is renting a house, in a restaurant, making reservations, so debates and discussions give students opportunity to use the language in real life situations where communication is necessary. Also, it is highly motivating because students will have to communicate to get their needs met and satisfied. An important point in these kinds of activities is that teachers talk less and students get more opportunities of practicing the language in class and gaining confidence of the target language in general.

Mukalel (2005) explains that another technique to work with small classes is working on models; this activity uses models such as, pictures or people. Models can be used especially to teach pronunciation; for example, a native speaker can be a good model for teaching phonology because the stress, accent and pronunciation is accurate so that students can pick up the correct intonation, stress and sounds of the words. Using models in teaching have some benefits, for example, students will learn more rapidly, they will be aware of phonetic sounds and they will be engaged to use the target language.

Additionally, Mukalel (2005) asseverates that making guesses is another technique used to teach English. This technique allows students to do a creative and imaginative use of the language; students will be asked to use language in context to guess what will happen next in a given situation. It is very useful to teach reading and listening involving students in an active way in order to make students ask themselves questions while they are reading; also, this technique provides students the opportunity to analyze themselves, their understanding and progress of the language as well. Mukalel (2005) explains that one of the activities that can be included as guess is the “Talking about John”. The advantage of this technique is that students interact with each other to get information; it can be used as an icebreaker.

Mukalel (2005) presents group organizing as a strategy that helps students to gather and organize ideas, plan and select information before doing a task, cooperate in the activities, which is really relevant since learners will share ideas between members to find the correct answers to accomplish the task. The same author proposes the so called thinking maps, which are strategies that generally demand a higher thinking skill from the students, but the learners are free to express their ideas on a map rather than using organized and complete sentences. These activities maintain students away from grammar checking; generally the use of the chunks can be beneficial to create map thinking. Some of the subjects that are very good tools to teach language communication are, reporting T.V, video scenes, shows, among others

Learning environment

The positive effect of a small learning environment is supported by different authors. One of them is Berns (2010, p. 224) who states, “Students in small classes also hold more leadership positions than those in large schools”. He remarks that class size influences the social bonds that students create among them and it has a positive effect in their learning process. Since more learning activities take place in the small class, the author explains that interaction among students is increased and it creates a cooperative environment in which learners are able of understanding and supporting each other.

In the same way, Bidle & Berliner (2013) point out that the magic of a small class environment relies on the interaction that develops during class activities; not only between students, but also with the teacher. The authors highlight that the less competitive is the context, the more encouraging and supportive are relationships among students. Similarly, Finn & Wang (2002) explain that individual or group activities motivate students to work together towards the achievement of common goals and to contribute with each other knowledge. Those students who share information are seen by their peers as valuable members in the class.

It is important to review some studies that had been conducted in relation to the teaching English in small classes. These studies will give relevant information about teaching English in small classes.

The first study presented by Yi (2008), who conducted a research to study the effects of class size reduction in adult foreign language classroom. To evaluate students the author used a speaking test to explore the effectiveness of class size reduction at the middle of the program of school year. The level of proficiency was considered in this stage of the course and a simple speaking test was used as measurement method. A select group was evaluated; the questions from the test were translated into students' first language. The test was designed with items that require short answers and elicitation, but the author in this study, punctuated some limitations on evaluating communicative competence owing to the structure of the test and because at this stage of the course students did not acquire the speaking competence of the target language. The speaking competence on this point of the course was evaluated according with the following aspects: fluency, pronunciation, form accuracy and information accuracy. And most of the items were designed to elicit certain information.

Otherwise, to evaluate students from the end of a course, the author used two exams to measure listening and reading skills of the language; he used two standardized tests, the DLPT and OPI both tests are used to test language proficiency, the scores of these tests were used to determine if class size reduction is effective.

The research states that students in Class Size Reduction (CSR) program had more opportunities to use the language taught, teacher had better control of the class and they could spend more time helping shy students to use the target language.

The result at the end of a program indicated an improvement in three features of the language and Class Size reduction (CSR) had an advantage above the middle point students, whenever in listening test there was a high performance compared with level 2 + (45%) and

whit non-clustery CSR students at level 2 (48%) the students at this level, who achieved 45% are students who are nearly at proficiency level “3”. The author considers that reading skill involve explicit instruction, the difference in the performance of the two groups on this skill suggests that the impact of CSR might not be limited to learning areas or communicative environment, as appeared to be a possibility with the mid-point measure .

From his study the author concludes that students of CSR had good opportunities to produce and use the language learned because the number of students in class facilitated the practice of the language. Also the author suggests that teachers had better management of the class and gave substantial support to those students who need more academic support.

The hypothesis is supported by the difference in how learners take turns in small classes than normal and big classes CSR students outperform regular students in all three skills of listening, reading, and speaking. The results in regard to the acquisition of reading skills in particular argue that the effect of CSR is not limited to areas of implicit learning.

Alternatively, another research about class size reduction was conducted by Graue, *et al* (2007). The purpose of this study is to know the reaction of the teacher working in reduced classes, and how Class Size Reduction (CSR) facilitates or reduces the physical layout of the school, and as well as how the implementation is shaped by educator beliefs about team teaching and working with colleagues.

The instruments applied for this research were observations and Standardized assessment of environments through the use of the Assessment of Practices in Early Elementary Classrooms (APEEC; Hemmeter, Maxwell, Jones Ault, & Schuster, 2001) and Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation Toolkit (ELLCO; M. W. Smith & Dickinson (203) and Collection of artifacts (e.g., lesson plans, curriculum, examples of home–school communication, report cards, assessment instruments, photographs) also, interviews with classroom teachers (two), principals (three), and a sample of students (one).

The observation plan was organized in levels without taking into account whether the school was urban, semi-urban or rural. And these characteristics did not have any relationship between the SAGE program and other innovative strategies.

The analysis revealed that schools with rapid growth and improvement, there was more suggestion of innovative strategies to meet the space challenge introduced by SAGE program, nevertheless in school with low improvement and growth, still were depended on traditional ways to use the physical space.

The research states that the two instruments applied, 15.1 classrooms present a high rate about proposing innovative strategies and introduce space challenges and compared with the researcher observations it is argued that small classes provide an excellent student-teacher interaction.

The authors conclude that reducing the number of students in class, increase students' achievement and student- teacher interaction, because CSR is introduced in the multifaceted system of classroom practice. Also, the authors conclude that in adequate space teachers have more opportunities to prepare many lessons with different kinds of strategies, such as small-group pull-out sessions, and individual activities that were either teacher or student directed.

The next study was done by Finn, *et al* (2005). The purpose of the study was to achieve the following objectives: to know whether having instruction in small classes from early grades (k-3) has relation with students' graduation from high schools. If the academic achievement from early grades is related to high school graduation and to know if receiving instruction in small classes from early grades is attributed to the effect on small classes on students' achievement and subsequent effect in achievement graduation.

The authors used samples of two subsets of students who participated in Tennessee's Project STAR., project that ended in Grade 4. Researcher followed students' academic development through years of high school. In addition, researchers for this study collected

high schools transcripts for 5,335 STAR students in 165 schools, 4,948 of whom could be classified clearly as graduating or dropping out and who had achievement data from K–3.6 and the information also was confirmed through Tennessee State Education Department records , in addition, students` achievement from other subjects such as math and reading were computed and each of those components were obtained from norm reference and criterion -referenced achievement administered in K-3. Furthermore, a set of curriculum-referenced tests developed by the Tennessee State Education Department was also administered to each student to check the Basic Skills First, which had a very specific objective in reading and mathematics at each grade level.

To do the analysis the researcher had used a basic logistic regression multilevel data, and a statistical program called HLM5 program (Raudenbush, Bryk, Cheong, & Congdon, 2000).

The results showed that the percentage of students who graduated from high school was 77.5% and the high percentage was for female students, whose rate was of 81.8%, and for male students it was 73.1%. Graduation rates (and academic achievement) increased monotonically with additional years in a small class. Furthermore, the benefit of 3 or 4 years in a small class was greater. The results also determined that the graduation rates of students in full-size classes were higher than those of students who spent 1 year in a small class. This may be due to the fact that students who attended small classes for 1 year were more transient than others; their families most likely moved into or out of the school's catchment area during the STAR years.

The results also indicated that background demographic characteristics of schools and students (sex, race/ethnicity, free lunch) were consistent across the three sets of analysis and according to school characteristics graduate rates were higher in suburban and rural schools than they were in inner-city schools and were positively related to school size. Regarding to

student characteristics, female students had a significantly higher graduation rate than male students. The researcher concluded that students who received academic instruction in small groups from early grades had high rates to graduate above and beyond the effect on early academic performance.

The following study was conducted by Hoxby (2000), to prove the effects of class size on students' achievement. The investigation was conducted in two campuses. On the first situation class size showed a normal variation according with the number of students attended in the school; in the second situation some changes were found when there was reduction on increment of students in the classrooms. Also, the researcher used the result of standards tests to establish a relationship between scores and class size. In addition, a survey was delivered to each school to collect information about their class size policies, teaching aids, and mixed-grade classes.

The results of this study indicated that in classes considered big classes with 25 students and small with 15 students, teaching aids were used for pedagogical purposes, but they were not used to manage large classes. Furthermore, from the observations made in classrooms the author found that teacher did not change the strategies when the number of students in class changed and teachers used the same methods for both class sizes.

The author concludes that the variation in number of students in a class can be used to consistently estimate the effect of class size on student achievement and those teachers who did not receive training to take advantage to work with small classes in systematic way they did not vary their techniques when working with small classes. Considering this interpretation, the author suggested that reduction in class size should be combined with instruction for teachers that helps them modify their teaching techniques depending on the number of students in class.

The following investigation carried by Harfitt, (2012) is to examine how class size reduction might help to alleviate language learning anxiety which has long been seen as an obstacle to second language acquisition.

The author used case studies and data delivered from multiple student interviews and classroom observations to help to determine if the same results can be found across more than one case. Also multiple interviews were applied to teachers and students. The students' interview questions focused on their point of view and experiences of studying in large and reduced- size classes.

From the interviews, many students punctuated to feel good about their experience on studying in large and small classes, giving to small classes better support. According with the students' interview many of them pointed that in small classes they get more support from their classmates, and this helped them to have more opportunities to interact with other students and gain confidence when speaking and participate in class. Also, the results showed that the same students did not look anxious when receiving negative feedback from their classmates; instead they are less embarrassed when speaking compared with large classes.

The results from the observations indicated that students were not shy when giving answers or expressing opinions and telling things out when receiving evaluations from their peers. Students also, admitted to have better opportunities to use the language; they gained confidence and in small classes they have more opportunities to interact with the teacher when they make open questions which permit students to produce more complex answers and make mistakes but at the same time they take the teacher feedback as part of their learning. Teacher also gives students more time one to one instruction in small classes.

In this study, researcher concluded that reducing class size influences in language learning and that is the reason that Asian classrooms were reduced. Strength about this approach is how students fell about receiving instruction in small classes. The author suggests

making deep examination of students and teachers working in large and small classes through more studies to define the details of the classroom contexts.

Description, Analysis and Interpretation of Results

This section contains the description, analysis and interpretation of results obtained in relation to teachers and students' perceptions about teaching and learning English in small classes. The results show the benefits, strategies and resources, students' feelings and limitations of teaching and learning English in small classes.

Qualitative and quantitative analysis

What are the benefits of teaching and learning English in small classes?

Table 1

Teachers' perceptions

No	In small classes	Totally agree		Agree		Partially agree		Disagree		Total	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	It is easy to design activities that allow students to practice what they have learned	2	40%	3	60%	0	0%	0	0%	5	100%
2	The students are attentive and participate in class	2	40%	3	60%	0	0%	0	0%	5	100%
3	The space of the classroom permits to develop the activities designed by the teacher	2	40%	3	60%	0	0%	0	0%	5	100%
4	It is possible to give suitable feedback	2	40%	3	60%	0	0%	0	0%	5	100%
5	The activities designed permit a high grade of interaction between students	2	40%	3	60%	0	0%	0	0%	5	100%
6	Exist major interaction between teacher and students	1	20%	4	80%	0	0%	0	0%	5	100%
7	It easy for you teacher to remember the name of the students	2	40%	3	60%	0	0%	0	0%	5	100%

Author: María Olmedo

Sources: Teachers' interviews

Table 2

Students' perceptions

No	In small classes	Totally agree		Agree		Partially agree		Disagree		Total	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	The activities done help to apply what students learned	45	56.25%	32	40%	2	2.5%	1	1.25%	80	100%
2	The students are attentive and participate in class activities	30	37.5%	43	53.75%	7	8.75%	0	0%	80	100%
3	The students concentrated better because there less noise in class.	48	60%	25	31.25%	7	8.75%	0	0%	80	100%
4	The classroom space allows to carry out effectively the activities assigned by the teacher	36	45%	40	50%	4	5%	0	0%	80	100%
5	Students receive proper feedback from the teacher	38	47.5%	34	42.5%	7	8.75%	1	1.25%	80	100%
6	There is interaction between students	29	36.25%	42	52.5%	8	10%	1	1.25%	80	100%
7	There is interaction between teacher and students	34	42.5%	38	47.5%	6	7.5%	2	2.5%	80	100%
8	The teacher call students for their names	42	52.5%	30	37.5%	8	10%	0	0%	80	100%

Author: Maria Olmedo

Sources: Students' interviews

The results in tables 1 and 2 show teachers and students' perceptions about the benefits of teaching and learning English in small classes. In statement one, teachers were asked whether it was easy for them to design activities that allow students to practice what they have learned. For this item 40% of the teachers totally agree, and the other 60% agree.

The results indicate that it is easy for them to design and use activities that permit students to put into practice what they have learned.

In relation to students' perceptions, 56, 25% of the students totally agree, and 40% of them think that the activities planned by the teacher allow them to practice what they have learned. However, two students which correspond to 2.5% partially agree and one which corresponds to 1.5% totally disagree, which means that the activities designed do not help them to apply what they have learned in class.

In the observations done during the English classes, it was noticed that teachers asked students to remember the content of the last class through brainstorming. Students were also asked to explain and to apply what they know about the topic, giving concepts, writing grammatical sentences correctly, and giving examples in an oral way. So teachers allow that the students connect all the previous knowledge and put it into practice in different tasks that they needed to perform.

In statement 2, teachers were asked if the students were more attentive and participative in class activities, 40% of teachers totally agree, and 60 % of them agree that in small classes the students are more attentive and participative in the activities developed in class. According with the students' perceptions, 37.5% of them totally agree, and 53.75% agree that working with small classes helped them to be more attentive and collaborative in class and 8.75% partially agree to be more attentive and collaborative in class.

In addition to the results presented above, during the observations done in classes most of the students looked attentive in class and therefore, more collaborative and participative in the activities provided by the teacher. Although, in some grades the teacher needed to call students attention, they were attentive to what teacher said in order to understand the instructions and tasks to be performed in class.

Concerning this aspect, Harmer (1998) gives important clues about managing learning in the classrooms, Harmer states “the most important to engage students in a task is giving them plenty of information about the task that they are going to perform”. Also, Harmer considers that an important issue to take into account is the level of the students’ language and adapting the task according to the students’ knowledge and in this way to avoid distractions and to avoid that the students misbehave.

In statement three, from the students’ questionnaires, they were asked if they could concentrate better because there is not too much noise in the class, the results show that 60% of students totally agree and 31.25% agree that they are able to concentrate better because there is not too much noise in class. On the contrary, 8.75% feel that they cannot concentrate in class because of the noise.

Additionally, it was observed that in classes with a small number of students, it is easier to hear any instruction directed by the teacher. The small number of students in classes allow to hear what teachers and students says , also teachers do not need to speak too aloud in order that students at the back listen to them.

Another aspect that was considered in this research is classroom space. Teachers and students were asked if the physical space of the classroom allows performing and developing the activities designed for the lesson.

In relation to this statement, 40% of the teachers totally agree and 60% of them believe that the space is appropriate to develop all the activities designed by the teachers.

Students were also asked for their perceptions in relation to classrooms space; the results show that 45% of them totally agree and 50% agree that the space available to teach English is enough and they can develop effectively the activities provided by the teacher, but 5% of students partially agree with the idea that the space available is adequate to develop the activities in class.

From the observations done, the physical space is big enough and it is possible to move and organize tables in order to accomplish any activity; the tables can be arranged in rows, circles, U form, so the way the tables are arranged depends on the task to be performed, also, the space allows students and teachers to move freely around the classroom without being interrupted by overcrowded tables and big number of students. Most students in the classroom felt comfortable, which was a positive aspect to be taken into consideration since students can practice the target language. Teachers also felt free to work at their own pace without the interruption by the noise coming from the classroom or outside it.

The results in item four show the perceptions about the feedback that students receive in class and the results show that 40% of the teachers totally agree and 60% agree that working with small classes makes it possible to give effective feedback; in the same way, it can be seen that the majority of the students, 38 (47.5%) absolutely agree that teachers' feedback is effective, while thirty-four (42.5%) of the learners agree that the feedback they receive is adequate and efficient; but 8.75% of them partially agree that feedback is good for them and only 1.25% disagree that the feedback they receive is effective.

Teachers in the observed classes were really attentive to answer any arising question when needed. Teachers gave feedback when necessary to everyone and students felt that the feedback they were given was really useful and clear enough for them to improve their knowledge.

Wajnryb (1992), who gives information about managing learning, considers feedback an important motivational value. He suggests that there is a linguistic and cognitive purpose that teachers have to take into account to determine how students respond to the feedback and the effects on students learning. In the same way, Harmer (1998) mentions that the importance of feedback is a relevant point because learners need to know whether they did

right or wrong, to learn and correct what those mistakes were. This aspect is without a doubt a very positive side on teachers to be highlighted and remarked.

Statement five is aimed at knowing if teachers and students believe that the activities done in class permit the interaction between students. The results show that 40% of the teachers totally agree that the interaction between students is high, 60% agree that the interaction is good. In relation to students' perceptions, 36.25% totally agree that in small classes there is real interaction between students. Additionally, 52.5% of the students agree that there is a good interaction between students. In contrast, 10% of students disagree with it, and 1.25% considers that there is not interaction at all between them.

Panitiz (1999) claims that the face to face interaction increases promoting each other learning by helping, discussing, sharing ideas, opinions and encouraging each other to learn; moreover, the learning atmosphere frees students, and reduces anxiety.

Taking into consideration what has been observed in every class, it can be said that students felt free to participate and interact between themselves throughout the whole class hour, which is absolutely an affirmative aspect to mention. The way teachers make students approach the activities help a lot to the development of the class; for instance, there was a large variety of pair work activities.

In addition, from the observations done, it can be said that every student seemed to be interested in the lesson as well as all the learners have the chance to communicate and to share information in order to accomplish the tasks, most of the time there was collaborative learning and this was done through group work activities. However, it could be observed that even when most students were working on the given tasks, more attention should be paid to discipline, since some of the students tended to talk about different topics or they simply did not use the target language as it is expected.

The results in statement 6 from tables 1 and 2 are about the interaction between students and teachers and the results show that 20% of teachers totally agree and, 80% of them agree that there is good interaction between students and teachers. In relation to the students' answers, 42.5% of them totally agree that the interaction with the teacher is great and 47.5% agree that small classes led to a better interaction between students and teacher. However, 7.5% partially agree that in small classes the interaction between teachers and students is the best, and 2.25% of the students completely disagree that they can have a real interaction with their teachers.

According to Bidle & Berliner (2013), who point out that the magic of a small class environment relies on the interaction that develops during class activities; not only between students, but also with the teacher. Also, Wright (2010) states that most of the talking is done by the teacher, he proposes that, the intervention of the teachers in speaking practices to be reduced in order to give students more opportunities to interact with other learners.

Also, Lightbown & Spada (2011) in their theory claim the importance to access comprehensible input and controversial interaction between students and teachers. The authors argue that when learners are given the opportunity to interact, they are forced to negotiate for meaning by expressing and clarifying their objectives and ideas. Students and teachers can conclude in a mutual understanding; as result, students work together to complete the task and achieve their goal.

The observations show that teachers give instructions and interact with students all the time, but teachers tend to speak more than the students which limits the opportunity for students to use more frequently the language.

Item 7 is aimed at knowing if teachers call all their students by their names, the results show that 40% totally agree and 60% of them agree that they call their students by their names all the time. In relation to students' perceptions, 52.5% of them totally agree that in

small classes it is easy to remember names and in fact they mention that they are called by their names all the time. Thirty seven per cent of the students agree that they are called by their names, but 8% of them partially agree that teachers remember their names.

Bateman, (2002), said that small classes allow teachers to know individually each student. In small classes, teachers can give personal support and help to those students who lack strong language skills.

Since there were few students in most of the observed classroom, teachers could easily remember their pupils' names, which was very important for the students since some of them mentioned that they feel that teachers give more attention to each student. Also, from the observation done, it is important to indicate that the students are called by their names all the time, however, in some grades teachers did not remember the names of their students because some of them were new at school.

After analyzing the two tables about the benefits of teaching and learning English in small classes, the results show that there is strong evidence that teaching English in small classes has more benefits than drawbacks. The results show that in small classes there is better management of the teaching and learning of English. First and the most important, is that teachers can use different activities, methods and teaching approaches in small classes that motivate student to learn the language.

On the other hand, students feel that they have plenty of opportunities to apply and use the target language. Teachers in small classes are able to provide effective feedback and monitor the learning process of their students, at the same time; teachers motivate students to carry on practicing the language. Secondly, the space available in small classes allow to arrange tables in order to perform the activities provided by the teacher, and these arrangements allow students to have better interaction between teachers and students all the

time. Third, students are more active and tend to have a rich appreciation and interest on the language they are learning.

What are the strategies and resources that benefit the English teaching in small classes?

Table 3

Teachers' Perceptions

No	In small classes	Totally agree		Agree		Partially agree		Disagree		Total	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
8	Design and apply activities that allow students to practice listening skills	2	40%	3	60%	0	0%	0	0%	5	100%
9	Designing and apply activities allow students to practice the speaking skills	2	40%	3	60%	0	0%	0	0%	5	100%
10	Designing and apply activities allow students to practice the reading skills	2	40%	3	60%	0	0%	0	0%	5	100%
11	Designing and apply activities allow students to practice the writing skills.	2	40%	3	60%	0	0%	0	0%	5	100%
12	Design and apply group activities	2	40%	2	40%	1	20%	0	0%	5	100%
13	Design and apply individual activities	2	40%	3	60%	0	0%	0	0%	5	100%
14	Use of technological resources	1	20%	2	40%	2	40%	0	0%	5	100%
15	Use of didactic materials	2	40%	3	60%	0	0%	0	0%	5	100%

Author: Maria Olmedo

Sources: teachers' interviews

Table 4
Students' perceptions

No	In small classes	Totally agree		Agree		Partially agree		Disagree		Total	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
9	The activities allow to practice the listening skills	41	51.25%	36	45%	3	3.75%	0	0%	80	100%
10	The activities allow to practice the speaking skills	41	51.25%	33	41.25%	6	7.5%	0	0%	80	100%
11	The activities allow to practice the reading skills	36	45%	28	35%	15	18.75%	1	1.25%	80	100%
12	The activities allow to practice the writing skills	38	47.5%	40	50%	2	2.5%	0	0%	80	100%
13	Group activities are practice in class	52	65%	21	26.25%	5	6.25%	2	2.5%	80	100%
14	Individual activities are practice in class	43	53.75%	28	35%	8	10%	1	1.25%	80	100%
15	There are use of technological recourses	9	11.25%	28	35%	36	45%	7	8.75%	80	100%
16	There are use of didactic materials in class	22	27.5%	33	41.25%	18	22.5%	7	8.75%	80	100%

Author: Maria Olmedo

Resource: students' interviews

Tables 3 and 4 show what are teachers and students' perceptions in relation to the strategies and resources that benefit the English language teaching and learning process in small classes.

The results in statement 8 show that 40% of the teachers totally agree that the activities designed allow students to practice listening skills, and 60% of the teachers agree that they use activities to help their students to practice listening skills. According to the students' perceptions 51.25% of them totally agree that the activities allow them to practice listening skills. Besides, 45% of the students agree that teachers use activities to practice

listening skills, 3.75% of them partially agree that the activities used in class had helped them to practice listening skills.

Yi (2008) claims that in Class Size Reduction program (CSR) the students have more opportunities of interacting and receiving input, also, students are more able to listen and to be perceptive; this combination helps to improve pronunciation.

During the observations done in classes, it can be said that teachers use English to teach their classes, to give instructions to their students. The activities used by the teachers to teach listening, are dictations, information transfer, as well as tape and CDs with plenty of practices and other resources to boost listening skills in students.

Statement 9 is aimed at knowing if teachers use activities in class that allow students to practice speaking skills, and the results show that 40% of the teachers totally agree that the activities designed by them help students to practice speaking skills in class and 60% of the them agree that the activities provided allow students to practice the target language. In relation to the students' perceptions, the results show that 51.25% of them totally agree that the activities used in class helped them to practice their speaking; and 41.25% of the students agree that they practice speaking skills in class while 7.5% of the students disagree that the techniques used by the teacher helped them to improve their oral skills.

To practice speaking skills and to lower students' anxiety, Mukalel (2005) explains that one technique is to work on models, for this activity teachers use models such as pictures or people. He claimed that using models in teaching have some benefits, for example, students will learn more rapidly, reduce levels of anxiety, students will be aware of phonetic sounds and they will be engaged to use the target language.

From the observations done in class, it can be said that the teaching strategies implemented by the teacher gave to the students the opportunity to use the language in dialogues, greetings, and small discussions. The teacher used simple questions to the students

and they gave short and limited responses. Although, some of the students' responses were short, they had the opportunity to practice the language, but some pupils felt a bit nervous when expressing ideas in front of the class, even though, they tried to communicate in English. However, one negative aspect concerning to students talking time was the fact that teachers tend to speak more than students and this situation limits in some way students' opportunities to speak and to use the language.

Statement 10 is aimed to find if the activities used in class allow students to practice reading skills and the results show that 40% of the teachers totally agree and 60% of them agree that the activities certainly help to practice reading skills. In relation with students' perceptions, 45% of them totally agree and 35% of the students agree that the activities developed in class help them to improve and to practice reading skills, while 18.75% partially agree that the activities were enough to practice reading skills and one student 1.25% disagrees with this idea.

Concerning the practice of reading skills, Cockrum (2013) explains that there are different activities to be done out of a piece of reading, for instance, a role-play about what has been read or a summary of it. He also claims that reading activities can enhance students' vocabulary.

During the observations in different classrooms, teachers at the beginning of the lesson asked students to read the title of the lesson, objectives and some instructions from the book. Although these small activities are not properly reading activities, these are a way to introduce students to reading. Also, during the lesson, the teacher asked students to develop some reading activities presented in the students' books which were short stories, among other little pieces of reading provided in the students' books. But many activities were limited only to the ones presented on the book.

In some classes, reading activities were concerned with subject related to real world, sports, and daily activities between others that allowed students to practice more reading. In spite of these activities were fine, they were not enough to practice reading skills. There are many activities to be done when talking about reading. For example, there is pre-reading, while reading and post-reading activities which would help students not only read but understand what they are reading, so that they later can infer, answer questions, order events chronologically and to practice other activities related to reading skills.

Item 11 is aimed at knowing if teachers and students think if the activities designed help to practice writing skills. The results show that 40% of the teachers totally agree and 60% of them agree that the activities used in class allow them to develop and practice writing skills. According to students' perceptions, 47.5% of them totally agree and 50% agree that the activities certainly used in class helped them to develop writing skills while 2.5% of the students disagree that the activities helped them to practice writing skills.

Doff (1988) states that there is a huge variety of writing activities that can be used in English teaching. He states that the activities can vary depending on the level or age and some of the activities he mentions are note taking, dictation, parallel writing, and writing based on a text, among others.

The observations reveal that during the lessons teachers use basic writing activities, such as completing sentences, gap filling, and completing tasks on their books; also, students wrote sentences and exercises on the board. These activities are very basic and students use them frequently, but it is necessary that teachers use a variety of techniques to teach writing in a deep way. Most of the teachers believe that practicing writing skills were having students sitting on their desks just to complete the workbook, but not, writing is more than just filling or completing information after a grammar lesson. Teachers should research in books or on

the internet about writing techniques and implement them in their classrooms. Also, they should attend training courses which help them to improve their teaching skills.

Item 12 is to know if teachers use group work activities in the class. In relation to this statement, 40% of the teachers totally agree, 40% agree and 20% partially agree that that group work activities are used in class. Students were also asked about the use of group work activities and the results show that 65% of them totally agree and 26.25% agree that group activities are used in their classes to learn English, and 6.25% of the students partially agree while 2.5% disagree which indicate that group work activities are not often used.

Mukalel (2005) asserts that group work gives students the opportunity to communicate, to plan, to research and to interact. Additionally, he mentions that in group work activities, the role of the teacher also changes because he becomes a facilitator and the students are the centre of the class. Small groups provide opportunities to interact face to face, students are able to ask and give information, to give responses, so, students work collectively to complete a task and achieve a common academic goal.

Fortunately, teachers in the observed classes used quite well some group activities; however, it is safe to say that some teachers have the wrong impression of what a group activity is, for example, some teachers believed that group work consists on taking four or five students together so that they can write or complete the same activity they could do individually. And it is necessary to plan well designed activities to avoid students to waste time and promote indiscipline when working on groups.

Item 13 was designed to ask whether teachers use individual activities in class, according to the results 40% of the teachers totally agree and 60% of them agree that they use individual activities to teach their classes. Additionally, in relation to the students' perceptions, 53.75% of them strongly agree that there are a lot of individual activities to be practiced during a lesson, and 35% agree that there were activities that make them to produce

language individually, while, 10% of the participants disagree to practice language individually. And one student which corresponds to 1.25% absolutely disagrees that individual practices are used in class to develop language skills.

Teachers made students work on their books for about 15 minutes, and then the instructors started to copy the answers on the board so that everyone can correct what they had done wrong or simply did not do from the beginning of the activity. Teachers did not monitor that everyone was doing the assigned tasks.

Individual work activities were the most common in all the observed classes since the majority of teachers made their students work individually on their notebooks to complete some grammar and vocabulary exercises. The problem here again is that students just spent their time working mechanically rather than efficiently and correctly.

In item 14 teachers were asked if they use technological resource when teaching English. One teacher which represents 20% totally agrees that he uses technological resources when teaching English and 40% agree that technological resources are used in class, but 40% of the teachers reported that they do not use TIC's when imparting their lessons. Students believe that the technological resources teachers use in class are enough, that is why 11.25% of them totally agree and the other 35% agree that they have different learning aids in class and 45% of the students partially agree and 8.75% disagree which means that these students do not agree with the idea that technological resources are used in their classes.

Verdú, Jorda and Coyle (2002) believe that resources and materials have an important value in languages teaching. The authors mention some educational resources which they consider very common teaching material used in most classrooms; for instance, books, visual created by the teacher and/or students, technological equipment, cassettes, projectors, videos, and computers can be excellent devises in language teaching and learning.

From the observations done, some classrooms are not equipped with projectors or other technological resources, instead students worked with CD players and sometimes a TV, tape recorders to help students to boost their language learning.

Item 15 is related to the use of didactic materials. The results show that 40% of the teachers totally agree and 60% of them agree that they use didactic material to teach the language. Also, students were asked this same question; 27.5% of them totally agree and 41.25% agree that didactic materials are used in classes to help them to learn the language. Twenty two point five per cent of the students partially agree while 8.75% of them totally disagree that didactic materials are used by their teachers to teach English.

Gower, Phillips and Walters (2005) point out, that the materials more used by teachers and students are workbooks, readers, reference books, authentic materials and video were also mentioned. Ellington and Race (1993) claimed that these days duplicated materials like worksheets, hand-outs notes, overhead projectors and television sets and computers can be found in schools.

From the information gathered during the class observations, it can be said that teachers used a lot of didactic materials to teach the English language, especially with the younger students. For instance, teachers took flashcards, realia, worksheets to work with.

After analysing each item related to the strategies and resources that benefit the teaching and learning of English, the results provide affirmative answers to the questions. First, interviewed teachers perceive that in small classes the activities used in class to develop the listening, speaking reading and writing skills are good enough to help students in the process of learning English. Teachers are conscious that the used of technological resources are limited and the use of these devises can be excellent when teaching. In addition, students perceive that many activities used in class have helped them to develop the mentioned skills

and they are happy that teachers use several techniques and strategies, as well as didactic material when teaching English.

How do students feel about learning English in small classes?

Table 5

Teachers' perceptions

No	In small classes	Totally agree		Agree		Partially agree		Disagree		Total	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
16	They are relaxed when speaking in front of their classmates	1	20%	2	40%	2	40%	0	0%	5	100%
17	they are taken into account by the teacher because they have more opportunities to participate in class	1	20%	4	80%	0	0%	0	0%	5	100%
18	They are motivate to participate because of the small number of students	1	20%	2	40%	2	40%	0	0%	5	100%
19	They are at ease because they can healthy compete with their classmates.	2	40%	3	60%	0	0%	0	0%	5	10

Author: Maria Olmedo

Source: teachers' interviews

Table 6

Students' perceptions

No	In small classes	Totally agree		Agree		Partially agree		Disagree		Total	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
17	I am relaxed at when speaking in front of my classmates	32	40%	33	41.25%	14	17.5%	1	1.25%	80	100%
18	I am taken into account because I have more opportunities to participate in class	42	52.5%	33	41.25%	5	6.25%		0%	80	100%
19	I am motivate to participate because of the small number classmates	40	50%	32	40%	8	10%		0%	80	100%
20	I am at ease because I can healthy compete with my classmates	47	58.75%	26	32.5%	6	7.5%	1	1.25%	80	100%

Autor: María Olmedo

Source: Students' interviews

Tables 5 and 6 present information about teachers and students' perceptions related on how students feel about learning English in small classes. Item 16 is related to whether students feel relaxed at the moment of speaking in front of their classmates. The results show that 20% of teachers totally agree and 40% of them agree that students feel relaxed at the moment of participating in front of the class; however, 40% of the teachers partially agree that their students feel relaxed when speaking in front of their classmates.

In relation to the students' perceptions, 40% of them totally agree, and the other 41.25% agree that they feel relaxed when speaking in front of their classmates. On the other hand, 17.5% of the students partially agree and one student which corresponds to 1.25% totally disagrees to feel comfortable when speaking in front of the class.

During the class observations, not all of the students felt anxious to speak in front of their classmates, but it was perceived that some students were shy and nervous, especially the young ones.

Item 17 focuses on knowing if students are taken into account to participate in class, the results show that 20% of teachers totally agree 80% of them agree that in small classes students are taken into account to participate in class' activities. According to the students' perceptions 52.5% totally agree that they are taken into account to participate in class, and 41.25% agree that their teachers made them to participate in class. However, 6.25% partially agree that they have had the opportunity to participate in class.

Blatchford (2003) says that small classes direct to a better teaching and useful learning. In addition, teachers can have access to all students and they can give personal attention to those students who need more attention and help.

The observations done in classes reveal that most of the students sincerely felt free to participate in the activities during the imparted lessons. Teachers gave students time to give opinions and ideas; the problem was that students did that in Spanish.

Item 18 is aimed at knowing if students are motivated to participate in class. The result reveals that 20% of teachers totally agree, and 40% of them agree that students feel motivated in class because of the small number of students in class. Nevertheless 40% of the teachers partially agree they feel that students were not very motivated to participate in class. In relation to students' perceptions 50% of them totally agree and 40% agree to feel motivated to participate in class, but 10% of the students partially agree to feel motivate to participate in class.

In addition to the information presented Bateman (2002) points that small classes allow teachers to know individually each student and gives the opportunity for teachers to give personal support and help to those who have fewer skills in the language, which will motivate students to learn more.

One positive aspect to highlight about the observed students is that most of them were seriously interested in learning the language. Teachers did well motivating students to participate by asking them to go to the board, having them read some titles and topics, etc. Students did not feel pushed or obliged to do it; they did it freely. It is well known that motivation is an important issue in the learning process, so it is necessary that teachers keep motivation during the whole class.

Item 19 is aimed at knowing if students feel happy to compete without fear and teachers' perceptions show that 40% of them totally agree and the other 60% agree that their students feel happy to compete without fear in class.

Students also were asked about the same issue and their perceptions show that 58.75% of them totally agree and 32.5% agree to feel good without pressure to compete in class between their classmates. However, 7.5% partially agree and just 1.25 % totally disagrees with the idea.

According to Gibbons, (as cited in Herrell and Jordán, 2004) communication games are activities used in the classroom to promote communication. Interaction between language learners gives students the opportunity to use language in a non- stressful way; they can relax without feeling the pressure of using the correct language in public and feel the fear of being judged negatively because this is the main cause of restraining students to use the language in class.

From the observations done in classes, it can be said that students certainly feel free to participate with no fear since in small classes the friendship is evident among students and they respect each other. But, some students feel fear to speak in class, because of the pressure of the group or may be their language level is not as good as of other students in class, but, this is not a barrier for students to participate in class, since teachers always model what they expect their students to do showing and teaching them how to be confident.

Analyzing the results of the perceptions about how students feel about learning English in small classes, it was found that there are positive effects for teachers and students feel more comfortable when teaching and learning in small classes.

The students feel relaxed because they have no much pressure to use the language in class and they are motivated to learn English and even more to compete with their classmates without fear to being underestimated. Teachers also perceive to have better control of the group and have chance to monitor each student learning progress.

Are there any limitations when teaching English in small classes?

Table 7

Teachers' perceptions

No	In small classes	Totally agree		Agree		Partially agree		Disagree		Total	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
20	There is anxiety among students because there is more control from the part of the teachers	0	0%	0	0%	5	100%	0	0%	5	100%
21	Listening and speaking skills are more difficult to develop.	0	0%	2	40%	3	60%	0	0%	5	100%

Author: Maria Olmedo

Sources: teachers' Interviews

Table 8

Students' perception

No	In small classes	Totally agree		Agree		Partially agree		Disagree		Total	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
21	There is anxiety among students because there is more control the part of the teacher	16	20%	37	46.25%	17	21.25%	10	12.5%	80	100%
22	Listening and speaking skills are more difficult to develop.	8	10%	33	41.25%	28	35%	11	13.75%	80	100%

Author: Maria Olmedo.

Sources: students' interviews.

The information gathers from table 7 and 8 show the results the limitations that teaching and learning English in small classes implied.

Teachers were asked if they perceive that students feel anxiety because they are more controlled by the teacher, 100% of the teachers partially agree that their students feel controlled by them during the class development.

In relation to students' perceptions, 20% totally agree to feel anxiety because of the teachers' control, and, 46.25% of them agree. To the same question 21.25% partially agree that their teachers controlled the class too much. And 12.5% of the students completely disagree they feel stress or anxiety because teachers monitor them in class.

Blatchford (2003) suggests that small classes direct to a better teaching and consequently to useful learning. Nevertheless, the author also mentions that some skeptics argue about the reduction of the number of students in class, because class reduction will lead to have a high cost to improve educational standards. But small classes achieve a better quality of teaching; teachers can have access to all students and they can give personal attention to those students who need more attention and help; even more, in small classes students can interact between themselves; teacher can talk to students to observe and manage each detail about the lesson being imparted, and the most importantly, students keep interested in the task. On the contrary, in large classes, interaction with learners is more difficult as well as discipline; in fact, teachers have to deal all the time with discipline issues and keep students interested in the task.

The information gathered from the observations show that in some classes students feel that teachers control them, whereas, in other classes the students do not feel to be controlled by the teacher any time and they can work without pressure. Also it was observed that teachers certainly monitored and to extent controlled students. However, discipline sometimes became a problem at the moment of teaching.

The item 21 from tables 7 and 8 is aimed at knowing if teacher and students perceive that there are difficulties when students practice listening and speaking skills.

From teacher's perceptions, 40% of them agree that in small classes there is difficulty when listening and speaking, 60% of them partially agree that there is difficulty when practicing these skills. In relation to students' perceptions, 10% of them totally agree that

there are difficulties practicing listening and speaking skills, and 41.25% agree that there are difficulties at the moment of practicing these skills.

However, not all students perceive that there are difficulties because 35% of the students partially agree and 13.75% believe that there are no difficulties at all at the moment of practicing listening and speaking.

From the observations done, there are some difficulties in some grades but in some classes there is not any difficulty when they use the listening and speaking skills. According with the students' interview most of them pointed that in small classes they get more support from their classmates, and this helped them to have more opportunities to interact with other students and gain confidence when speaking and participating in classes.

After analyzing the last two tables, the results show that certainly there are some limitations to teach and learn English in small classes. First reason is because teachers have more control of the class; therefore students feel anxiety which is more evident in beginner levels.

In addition to these results, a study carried out by Harfitt, (2012) whose purpose was to examine whether, and how, class size reduction might help to alleviate language learning anxiety show that reducing class size influences on language learning, students in small classes sense having more confidence in speaking practices and they were less anxious when received negative evaluation from their peers and students in the smaller classes openly admitted that they could "speak up" more and that it had given them a lot of confidence when compared to their previous learning experience in larger classes.

Conclusions

Teaching and learning English in small classes have more benefits than drawbacks for students. The results show that studying in small classes gives more opportunities to practice the target language.

Variety of activities can be used to develop the English skills such as listening , speaking , reading and writing , also many activities can be adapted depending on students level and knowledge background to help and to conduct the language learning.

Teachers and students feel that teaching and learning English in small classes give the opportunity to know each other, students are taken into account and teachers feel it is manageable to work with few students because it is easier to control, and monitor each student.

Small classes allow students to have better interaction and plenty of opportunities to participate in class; the use of the target language is more frequent because students have the opportunity to be participative and active in the class.

In small classes the space available allows to arrange tables in order to perform the activities provided by the teacher, and these arrangements permit students to have better interaction between teachers and students all the time.

Teaching and learning English in small classes have limitations because some students feel they are monitored and controlled by the teacher all the time and many can feel anxiety and nervousness to speak in front of the class.

Recommendations

The present research study reveals that teaching English in small classes has more advantages than drawbacks; therefore it is wise to recommend implementing class size reduction in Ecuadorian classrooms in order to have a rapid acquisition and improvement of the target language.

Teachers should take advantage of working in small classes and they should use variety of techniques and strategies, also they could attend the courses about strategies and techniques to teach English to help students to improve their language skills.

According to the results, the use of technological resource is limited in some classes, so teachers should use these teaching tools more frequently, these resources help to improve the language skills in students, specially listening and speaking. Also it would be advisable that directors of the institutions do something to supply these technological resources in their schools.

To lower down anxiety in students, teachers are advised to use games as techniques to help students to feel more relaxed in class. A variety of games not only helps students to feel more comfortable in class, but helps them to learn the language without pressure.

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ANNEXES



UNIVERSIDAD TÉCNICA PARTICULAR DE LOJA
La Universidad Católica de Loja
OPEN AND DISTANCE MODALITY

ENGLISH DEGREE

Dear student,

The aim of this brief questionnaire is to obtain information concerning *your opinion in relation to the learning of English in small classes*. The following information will only be used for academic/research purposes.

Informative data: Please fill in the information below

Name of institution :			
Type of institution:			
	Public () Private ()		
	School ()	High school ()	Language institute ()
City:			

Instructions: place an (X) in the box that best reflects your personal opinion:

Strategy: answer the following questions as honestly as possible based on the following criteria.

Totally agree
Agree
Partially agree
Disagree

A. Benefits of teaching and learning English in small classes.

	In class with a small number of students	Totally agree	Agree	Partially agree	Disagree
1.	The activities done in class help to apply what students learn.				
2.	The students are attentive and participate in class activities.				
3.	The students can better concentrate because there is less noise in the classroom				
4.	The classroom space allows students to carry out activities assigned by the teacher.				
5.	Students receive proper feedback from the teacher.				
6.	There is interaction between the students				
7.	There is interaction between the teacher and students				
8.	The teacher remembers the students' names.				

B. Strategies and resources that favor the English teaching in small classes.

	In class with a small number of students	Totally agree	Agree	Partially agree	Disagree
9	The activities done allow students to practice listening skills				
10	The activities done allow students to practice speaking skills				
11	The activities done allow students to practice reading skills				
12	The activities done allow students to practice writing skills				
13	Group work activities are used				
14	Individual activities are used				
15	Technological tools are used				
16	Didactic materials are used				

C. Students' feelings when learning English in a small class.

	in class with a small number of students	Totally agree	Agree	Partially agree	Disagree
17	I am relaxed when speaking in front of my class				
18	I am taken into account by the teacher because I have more opportunities to participate in class				
19	I am motivated to participate because of the small number of classmates.				
20	I am at ease because I can healthy compete with my classmates				

D. Limitations of learning English in small classes.

	in class with a small number of students	Totally agree	Agree	Partially agree	Disagree
20	There is anxiety among students because there is more control on the part of the teacher				
21	Listening and speaking skills are more difficult to develop				

Thank you



UNIVERSIDAD TÉCNICA PARTICULAR DE LOJA
La Universidad Católica de Loja
OPEN AND DISTANCE MODALITY

ENGLISH DEGREE

Dear teacher,

The aim of this brief questionnaire is to obtain information concerning *your opinion in relation to the learning of English in small classes*. The following information will only be used for academic/research purposes.

Informative data: Please fill in the information below

Name of institution :			
Type of institution:			
	Public () Private ()		
	School ()	High school ()	Language institute ()
City:			

Instructions: place an (X) in the box that best reflects your personal opinion:

Strategy: answer the following questions as honestly as possible based on the following criteria.

Totally agree
Agree
Partially agree
Disagree

A. Benefits of teaching and learning English in small classes.

	In class with a small number of students	Totally agree	Agree	Partially agree	Disagree
1	It is easy to design activities that allow students to practice what they have learned				
2	The students are attentive and participate in class				
3	The space of the classroom permits to develop the activities designed by the teacher				
4	It is possible to give suitable feedback				
5	The activities designed permit a high grade of interaction between students				
6	Exist major interaction between teacher and students				
7	It easy for you teacher to remember the name of the students				

B. Strategies and resources that favor the English teaching in small classes.

	in class with a small number of students	Totally agree	Agree	Partially agree	Disagree
23	Design and apply activities that allow students to practice listening skills				
24	Designing and apply activities allow students to practice the speaking skills				
25	Designing and apply activities allow students to practice the reading skills				
26	Designing and apply activities allow students to practice the writing skills				
27	Design and apply group activities				
28	Design and apply individual activities				
29	Use of technological recourses				
30	Use of didactic materials				

C. Students' feelings when learning English in a small class.

	In class with a small number of students	Totally agree	Agree	Partially agree	Disagree
31	They are relaxed when speaking in front of their classmates				
32	they are taken into account by the teacher because they have more opportunities to participate in class				
33	They are motivate to participate because of the small number of students				
34	They are at ease because they can healthy compete with their classmates.				

D. Limitations of learning English in small classes.

	In class with a small number of students	Totally agree	Agree	Partially agree	Disagree
35	There is anxiety among students because there is more control the part of the teacher				
36	Listening and speaking skills are more difficult to develop				

Thank you