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**The influence of large classes in the English language teaching-learning
process in Ecuadorian high schools**

TRABAJO DE TITULACIÓN

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to my father, mother, and brothers for all their support and unconditional love that they give me every day.

In addition, I would like to dedicate this research to my grandmother, and to my closest relatives and friends.

Patricio

Acknowledgement

I especially thank to my research advisor, Alba Vargas, for all her recommendations and help; additionally, I appreciate the collaboration of the teachers and authorities of the high school where I collected the research data.

Patricio

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Abstract

This study aims to determine instructional, social, and psychological implications of large classes in the English teaching-learning process. The research sample consisted of five classes of English as foreign language (EFL), which belonged to a private high school located in Quito and had 35 students or more. The selected classrooms were from 8th basic year to 3rd of bachillerato.

The research data was collected through a questionnaire. Participants were asked to decide their agreement or disagreement about 21 statements according to a Likert scale.

The information was described by using relative frequencies; then, the results were contrasted with the literature and previous researches.

The findings evidenced that large classes influenced the occurrence of an irregular feedback toward the learners, a less tense atmosphere in class, more chances to meet classmates, the fact of not remembering the pupils' names by teachers, and a general relaxation of students during lessons.

KEYWORDS: large classes, teaching English as foreign language (TEFL), implications, high schools.

Resumen

Este estudio busca determinar las implicaciones instruccionales, sociales y psicológicas de las clases numerosas en el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje del inglés. La muestra de la investigación estuvo conformada por 5 clases de inglés como lengua extranjera, las mismas que pertenecían a un colegio privado ubicado en la ciudad de Quito y que tenían 35 estudiantes o más. Las clases seleccionadas estaban entre 8^{avo} año de educación básica y 3^{er} año de bachillerato.

La información de la investigación fue recogida mediante un cuestionario. Se requirió a los participantes del estudio que decidieran si están de acuerdo o no con las 21 afirmaciones del cuestionario, según una escala Likert.

Dicha información fue analizada usando frecuencias relativas, los resultados fueron confrontados con la literatura y los estudios previos.

Los resultados evidenciaron que las clases numerosas influenciaron la ocurrencia de una irregular retroalimentación para los alumnos, una atmósfera menos tensa en clase, más oportunidades para conocer compañeros, el hecho de que los profesores no recordaban los nombres de sus estudiantes y una relajación general de los estudiantes durante las lecciones.

PALABRAS CLAVE: clases numerosas, enseñanza del inglés como idioma extranjero, implicaciones, colegios.

Introduction

Teaching English in Ecuadorian public and private high schools has been ineffective because at the end of EFL instruction most of students are not able to write, read, listen or speak the foreign language even at a basic level. A demonstration of this problematic scenario is that the mean score of a diagnostic English test administered to students in the last year of general basic education and the last year of high school was 13.13 over 20 points; this assessment was part of an investigation carried out in 2011 by the Ministry of Education (National Secretariat of Higher Education, Science, and Technology, 2012).

In spite of the efforts of the Ministry of Education and other governmental institutions to tackle the preceding context, class size is an important issue that influences the teaching of English and has not received much attention by policy makers. In fact, large classes are common in private and public high schools but this feature of Ecuadorian education has been overlooked by educational authorities.

The lack of attention to overcrowded classrooms occurs since it is convenient administratively to have an excessive number of pupils per class; this situation is identified by Watson Todd (2006) as a positive characteristic of large classes. However, the excessive number of students is a matter that have caused preoccupation between experienced and novice EFL teachers because large classes entails an intimidating quantity of possible problems (Watson Todd, 2006). Some of the most common obstacles of overcrowded classrooms are related to difficulties in providing feedback, chances to interact, and individual attention to all learners. Additional implications have to do with implementation of pair and group work, and challenging activities; discipline

problems, and affective issues that complicate the teacher-students rapport (Harmer, 2007; Locastro, 2001; Woodward, 2001).

The previous description about the problems of large classes reveals the relevance of the researching this topic; other fact that is important to consider is that the effects of large classes have not been researched at EFL classrooms in Ecuadorian high schools.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of large classes in the English language teaching-learning process by answering the following questions: What instructional implications do large classes have on the teaching-learning process? What social implications do large classes have on the teaching-learning process? and What psychological implications do large classes have on the teaching-learning process?

Worldwide overcrowded classrooms have been researched in TEFL contexts by taking into account different methods and contexts since the mid-1980's. Researchers on the field have addressed similar topics; the investigations conducted by Khazaei, Zadeh, and Ketabi (2012), Ijaiya (1999), and Kumar (1992) illustrated what has been explored about this theme.

Khazaei et al. (2012) aimed to ascertain the implications that class size causes on the willingness to talk of EFL students throughout lessons. The most relevant conclusion drawn in this inquiry was that the learners of a large class demonstrated the lowest level of predisposition to communicate in relation to a medium class and a classroom with a few students.

The main purpose of Ijaiya's study was to determine the influence of large classes on interactions between educator and students and the relevant coping strategies to tackle negative effects of overcrowded classrooms. Ijaiya (1993) asserted, as a broad

conclusion, that the views of learners and teachers about effects of large classes were incompatible.

The research of Kumar (1992) was carried out in order to discover the impacts of class size on language learning interactions at classrooms where English was taught as the target language. A general finding of the preceding research is that the number of students is not the only factor that explains the communicative opportunities given to the learners.

On the benefits of the current study, the authorities of the participant high school could adopt measures to correct the detected problems related to overcrowded classrooms and future studies about large classes could bear in mind the contributions and limitations of this investigation in order to improve their own methods to investigate other aspects of large classes.

Finally, a limitation of this research is that it does not allow generalizing the research results to the population because a convenience sampling procedure was employed; thus, it is not feasible to say that the results are representative of the participant high school.

Method

Setting and Participants

The field research was developed in a private high school, which is located in Quito, Ecuador.

The sample consisted of five classrooms. Three classes were included in the investigation and all of them had 35 students or more. Then, two more classrooms of the second section, with a number of pupils greater than or equal to 35, were also part of the research sample.

The sample was selected through the convenience sampling procedure; therefore, the results of this research are not able to be generalized to the target population.

Additionally, it is relevant to indicate that the research sample consisted of 181 students and their ages were between 15 and 18 years old, who belonged to the last three years of high school.

Procedure

The review of the literature was the first step in the research process and this involved the analysis and revision of different books, journals articles, indexed publications, and online sources in order to summarize some issues, such as, managing large classes, class size, activities to work with large classes, different levels of proficiency, among others, and to describe the most crucial details of five previous studies concerning the research theme.

The method of the present investigation was quantitative because the researcher employed questionnaires to collect the information from participants and such data was expressed in absolute and relative terms.

The questionnaire contained 21 sentences in which the participants had to express their agreement or disagreement according to a scale of four options, three of them referred to agreement responses. Nine statements had to do with instructional implications of large classes, five sentences with social effects and the rest of the statements with psychological implications.

The researcher described the data by using the relative frequencies because general findings were not considered; the most relevant results were emphasized if their corresponding relative frequencies exceed the percentages of the other alternatives. An additional detail to point out is that the gathered information was analyzed in line with the literature review.

Based on the findings, conclusions were drawn according to the research questions.

Discussion

Literature Review

Many scholars around the world have been interested in the influence of large classes on TEFL. However, Watson Todd (2006) asserts that the literature has not been consistent with the relevance of large classes. A reason to support the last opinion seems to be a relative recent appearance of the first effort to research the effects of overcrowded classrooms. That effort was the ‘Lancaster-Leeds language learning in large classes research project’, which began in 1986. Then, several studies related to large classes have been carried out in different countries but only five researches will be considered in this section. Though the previous researches were mentioned in first place, an overview of seven topics with reference to the research theme is going to be developed in the following paragraphs.

Teaching Methods and Teaching Approaches

Throughout history, English language teaching has been characterized by a wide range of teaching methods and approaches among them are Grammar-Translation, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Total Physical Response, Task-Based Learning (TBL), and Content-Based Language Instruction (CBLI) which are explained below.

Grammar-Translation is essentially based on presenting grammar rules and translating texts (Harmer, 2007). The main negative aspect of this method is that it does not teach to communicate ideas in the target language (Harmer, 2007). According to Richards and Rogers (2001), the Grammar-Translation method has other features. For

instance; it focuses on writing and reading, vocabulary is assimilated through memorization, sentence is emphasized as the basic object of study, and accuracy is focused as a goal of language learning.

Other approach considered in TEFL is CLT and it has two versions. The weak version concentrates on the relevance of giving students chances to practice the target language for communicative purposes. Nevertheless, the strong version of the communicative approach stresses that foreign language is principally acquired through the use of such language (Howat, 1984).

Harmer (2007) asserted that there are two main common characteristics of CLT. The teaching of language functions (for example, inviting, agreeing and disagreeing, suggesting) is considered as a guiding principle and the language learning is likely to occur when there is enough exposure to the foreign language.

Total Physical Response is another method for teaching English, developed by James Asher, which essentially employs instructions that implies learners' movements as the way of teaching a second language (Richards and Rogers, 2001; Searon, 2002; Harmer, 2007). Furthermore, this method encourages a positive learning environment without stress since the students are not required to speak or write constantly (Richards et al., 2001; Searon, 2002).

The next approach that will be analyzed is TBL. TBL provides the task a central role in language teaching-learning. The tasks are more important than the foreign language study; the tasks and activities taken into account are communicative (Harmer, 2007). Additionally; TBL implies tasks and activities based on real life situations or on a

pedagogical objective, tasks set up with a specific purpose, and activities and tasks provided according to their difficulty (Feez, 1998).

CBLI is the last approach regarded before dealing with other topic. It focuses on providing content information through the target language and using academic subjects to acquire the foreign language (Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary, and Robbins, 1999; Richards et al., 2001). CBLI has many advantages in a foreign language class but two are especially relevant. The students are able to improve their language competence into specific areas of their interest and the four language skills (speaking, writing, reading, and listening) are naturally joined (Brinton, 1989; Chamot et al., 1999).

Class size

English language classes have different sizes, which are defined in many ways according to the teachers' perceptions and imply many benefits and constraints. In order to specify certain number of advantages and disadvantages, only one-to-one classes and overcrowded classrooms will be taken into account.

Harmer (2007) maintains that one-to-one classes include three essential advantages in comparison with other lessons that consider two or more learners. In one-to-one lessons the student receives all the attention of the teacher. Moreover, the teacher is able to develop a course that takes into account interests, necessities, learning style, and type of stimulus of which the student might learn efficiently. Finally, feedback is improved in on-to-one classes. Other benefits are that teachers can adjust to student learning rhythm and that the pupil has real conversations (Woodward, 2001). However, Harmer (2007) identifies the intensity of the teacher-student relationship as a major

factor in one-to-one classes. Thus, the learning is not successful if the student and the teacher do not like each other.

On the topic of large classes, Harmer (2007) noticed that constant possibilities of interaction and plenty variety of students' knowledge are the advantages this kind of classes. Further positive features of large lessons are that students may have more friends, that learners could have a less possibility of exposing their ignorance (Coleman, 1989), and that the English teaching benefits more pupils than small and medium classes (Watson Todd, 2006).

In contrast, several disadvantages of overcrowded classrooms include the difficulties of providing personal attention to all learners and interacting with each student, insufficient chances of providing individual feedback, and great obstacles that complicate the development of interactive activities (Harmer, 2007).

Moreover; the problems of large classes are categorized as pedagogical, management-related, and affective (Locastro, 2001). High complexity in the execution of communicative speaking, reading, and writing activities; avoidance of challenging tasks; impediments to provide individual work; and troubles to provide feedback and monitoring are the main pedagogical problems. Management-related obstacles have to do with high noise, severe discipline problems, difficulty to perform pair and group work, and impossibility of correcting essays of all learners. In the final category, Locastro (2001) identifies five problems but three of them are highlighted below: difficulties to learn names of the students, unfeasibility of creating adequate teacher-students affinity, and troubles to value interests and moods of learners.

Managing Learning

Managing learning implies creating a conducive environment to optimum learning, which requires careful and detailed lesson planning particularly in large classes. Such planning needs to consider that overcrowded classrooms are not only numerous but they are inevitably diverse in terms of students' proficiency level, needs, learning styles, and expectations. Additionally; feedback, the way instructions are given, discipline, and time management are other key aspects to take into account for achieving English learning in large classes, for this reason, the importance of the last four factors will be described in brief.

Gower, Phillips, and Walters (2005) assert that feedback is one of the most essential functions of a teacher, that current feedback enhances the students' own assessment of how well they are learning the target language and that feedback might adopt specific forms, for instance, congratulating, evaluating regularly through tests, discussing about repeated errors of the class, and giving correction at individual level. Another reason that explains the relevance of feedback is that possibly it affects the learners' achievement more than other variable (Harmer, 2007).

The relevance of giving clear instructions, on the other hand, affects other aspects of the teaching-learning process. Maxom (2009) suggests that the success of learning activities depends highly on the way the instructions are set up. Also, providing understandable directions improves students' concentration and contributes to develop more easily the learner's classroom activities, keeps students' motivation in the activity, helps to avoid additional explanations, and makes possible that planned activities may occur in the predetermined minutes (Faleiros, 2007).

The significance of maintaining discipline in the classroom has to do with a necessity of generating a favorable environment to students' learning because the misconduct of pupils disturbs the teaching-learning process and affects the effectivity of lesson planning negatively (Barton, Coley, and Wenglinsky, 1998).

In relation to timing, managing and using time during lessons is highly important since it promotes the accomplishment of learning aims and a comfortable environment at classroom (McLeod, Fisher, and Hoover, 2011).

Managing large classes

Despite all the challenges or obstacles that stuffed classes entail, there are some recommendations that different scholars have formulated to deal with this demanding situation.

Harmer (2007) identifies some principles to manage large classes. EFL teachers, in such context, should plan their activities, set up standard procedures, organize pair work and group work, use whole class utterances, apply peer monitoring, and give the opportunity to more proficient students to teach their classmates.

Woodward (2001) coincides with the preceding author in recommending group work and routines for large classes; however, she specifies some tips in order to carry out group activities, for example, ensuring that tasks' instructions are well understood, checking activities are appealing, explicating the tasks' utility, making sure that learners need their peers to perform the group activities, establishing functions for all pupils, planning the way of controlling the tasks, and organizing the group work evaluation.

In addition to group work, Woodward (2001) mentions three suggestions to work with stuffed classrooms. The educators should catch the pupils' attention though an

interesting procedure, achieve a working environment by involving the students from the lesson establishment, and employ the board and stages with the participation of all the class in order to unify the contents learned in the group work.

Activities for working with large classes

An excellent manner to manage a large class is to break the class down into small teams or groups by using groupings like whole class, pair work and group work. This situation creates a fun atmosphere within the class where learners are motivated, build better friendship and they can help each other since stronger students and weaker students can work together.

There are many activities to be implemented in stuffed classes, among them are, debates, group storytelling, picture description, team spelling contest, writing the question game, and categories are going to be described because these are excellent instances of appropriate tasks for working with large classes.

According to Krieger (2005), the debates are activities in which two teams give their arguments in favor or against a topic; the group that agree with the proposed theme is called affirmative team and the other that disagree with the topic is denominated negative team. Also, this game requires the presence of judges who decide which team is the winner.

The group storytelling activity has several variations; one of them begins when the teacher distributes an incomplete story to each group, then the teams have to finish the tale in twenty minutes. At the end of the task, the students present the story to all their classmates (Jianing, 2007).

A version of the picture description requires that the teacher shows a picture to all the learners. Next, the educator asks some yes/no and Wh-questions in order to get answer of the pupils; several responses might focus evident facts of the picture while others might be based on fictional situations. This procedure may be implemented in pairs, a student makes questions about the image and his or her peer answers such questions (Miller, 2007).

The last three adequate activities for overcrowded classrooms are described by Benwell (2008). The team spelling contest refers to a competition in which the student who gives the correct spelling wins a point for his or her team. At writing the question game, the teacher forms several teams and mentions an answer, the student who writes the corresponding question receives a point. Finally, the categories activity begins when the teacher names a category, then each student is required to call out an example of the category. If the learner does not give an instance for more than five seconds, he or she has to select other new category and gets out the game. The last student remaining in the contest is the winner

Classroom Space and seating Arrangement

The existing physical space does not affect directly the students' achievements but it is important that the teacher organizes different large, small and individual activities in specific sites of the classroom (Sabornie, 2011). Nevertheless, Brown (2007) considers the classroom space as a factor that complicates the execution of learning activities especially when the pupils need space to do various assignments.

In relation to seating arrangement, Sariçoban and Sakizili (2006) assert that the preceding issue is a feature that influences the interaction between teacher and students

and vice versa. Thus, the organization of the seating helps to promote an interactive environment.

Furthermore; changing seating organization leads to a focus on the teacher when it is necessary, to meet other classmates, and to add some variation to the custom of sitting in the same place every day (Scrivener, 1998).

Other aspects of seating arrangement are pointed out by Gower and Walters (2005). The physical arrangement of the seats might affect student-student and teacher-students attitudes and the kind of tasks which the learners are involved.

Different levels of proficiency

The different levels of proficiency of students have positive and negative effects on the foreign language teaching; some of them are described below.

The most important benefit of having students with various levels of proficiency is that higher-level students might teach less proficient pupils when the teacher considers the last possibility as a useful practice (Harmer, 2007).

On the other hand, Harmer (2007) reports that mixed-ability students imply a high complexity at the moment of planning lessons and, thus, at carrying out such plans. Moreover, the teacher needs to keep the higher level students motivated, engage learners with middle level in order to achieve their learning objectives, and allow the less proficient pupils to acquire the target language according with their degree of proficiency (Brown, 2007).

After reviewing the seven issues with respect to large classes; research purposes, methods, and conclusions of five previous studies will be described in order to justify the appropriateness of the current research.

The first inquiry regarded sought to ascertain the effect of class size on willingness to communicate of Iranian students (Khazaei et al., 2012). The study was developed in the city of Kermanshah and considered 30 female and male adult intermediate EFL students who belonged to a language institute. The participants were chosen from three classes: five pupils came from the class A, ten learners from class B, and the last fifteen learners from class C. The preceding classrooms were classified as small, medium and large respectively (Khazaei et al., 2012).

In order to collect information about the turns of talking and each student's conversation time, Khazaei et al. (2012) employed observations and audio recordings.

The data was analyzed through one way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) with the purpose of inquiring the class size impact on learners' willingness to communicate. Additionally, the researchers used the mean and the standard deviation in relation to pupils' turns of talk and to time of conversation (Khazaei et al., 2012).

Khazaei et al. (2012) concluded that students in small class had more opportunities and time to have meaningful conversations than the other participants. In addition, the pupils belonging to the medium class were less disposed to communicate than the preceding students due to fewer chances to participate in communicative activities. Moreover, the situation of the big class verified an expected feature of large classes, that is, the learners who came from the overcrowded classroom obtained the minimum level of willingness to participate in conversations.

The second study considered was developed by Thaher (2005) with the general aim of finding out the consequences of overcrowded classrooms on English foreign

learners at a Palestinian university by investigating the students' attitudes to large classes.

The researcher selected 230 male and female pupils randomly from the first, second, third, and fourth years of An-Najah National University as the sample research (Thaher, 2005).

Thaher (2005) designed a questionnaire to obtain information, the conformation of the instrument, its content validity and reliability, variables taken into account, and other relevant details will be explained below.

Forty six questions were included in the questionnaire; those had relation with instructional, psychological, and social effects of overcrowded classrooms on EFL students (Thaher, 2005).

Thaher (2005) ensured the content validity with a discussion about the research problem with experienced colleagues, and some suggestions about the questionnaire's items from four educators who worked for the Department of English and for the College of Education at An-Najah University.

With respect to reliability, the questionnaire was consistent because the researcher calculated the Cronbach Alpha formula and obtained a coefficient of 0.81 (Thaher, 2005).

The independent variables were mainly gender, study level, and grades of Placement English Exam obtained before studying the foreign language as college requisite. In contrast, the dependent variables consisted of the participants' answers on the research instrument (Thaher, 2005).

The questionnaire also included a version in English and another one in Arabic, the subjects were asked to respond the items in Arabic in line with a scale of five options. Another important detail about the research instrument is that the researcher employed five ranks in order to analyze statistically the data: very high, high, moderate, low, and very low degree (Thaher, 2005).

Thaher (2005) summarized three principal results in the latter part of the inquiry. The instructional, social, and psychological consequences on large classes were moderate because the three factors showed means of 3.42, 3.38, and 3.28 respectively. As the second general finding, the researcher exposed that there was not significant differences in pupils' gender, level of study, and placement test scores towards their responses on the questionnaire. The final conclusion was that the inquiry revealed a negative association between class size and classrooms interactions in large classes.

Another previous research related to the present study was implemented by Ijaiya (1999). The last inquiry was carried out in order to determine the implications of large classes on teacher-student interactions and the most used coping strategies that the instructors implement in order to overcome such effects (Ijaiya, 1999).

The sample research took into account teachers and students. A simple random sampling technique was employed to choose 206 learners and 141 instructors, from eight schools located in Ilorin, Nigeria (Ijaiya, 1999).

Ijaiya (1999) used a questionnaire as research instrument. The questionnaire had two parts. The first one was included in order to seek the most relevant implications of large classes in the teacher-student communication; the students had to decide the importance of each statement in relation to the rest of the proposed sentences. With

regard to the final part of the research instrument, the participants were required to mention which copying strategies were the most employed by teachers.

The researcher analyzed the gathered information with the Spearman's rho correlation coefficient (Ijaiya, 1999).

The researcher identified two broad findings. The first overall result is that the ranking established by teachers and students in the first part of the questionnaire had a weak positive correlation. The preceding situation implies that the opinions of learners differed greatly in comparison with teachers' beliefs about the effects of large classes. The other finding involved the fact that teachers as much as learners shared, in general terms, their opinions relating to the most common coping strategies used to overcome the effects of overcrowded classrooms (Ijaiya, 1999).

It is relevant to indicate that excessive noise was identified as the most relevant difficulty in overcrowded classrooms by both educators and pupils. Additional problems of large classes were complexity of catching pupils' attention, insufficient participation in class activities of students who sit at the back, limitation for teachers to move to the front of the classroom due to numerous students' lockers, and scarce question dispersion towards the learner because of time limit (Ijaiya, 1999).

The fourth inquiry in the same way as the first previous study deals with class size. Kumar (1992) sought to reveal the implications of class size on language learning interactions in EFL classes.

In order to fulfill the previous general aim, the researcher observed eight classes; four classes in the first research phase and four ones in the second stage. All considered classrooms were located in India and belonged to high schools (Kumar, 1992).

The initial research phase was carried out to get a first impression of the differences of how many times teacher and students participated in communicative activities and how long such interventions were. The inquirer employed an audio-recorder and annotations to complete the observation. Moreover, students' talk and teacher talk were measured through their respective turns of speaking without considering if students talked individually or collectively (Kumar, 1992).

Kumar (1992) examined a large class and a small class initially. Due to unexpected results found at both classes, another couple of classrooms were included at this research phase.

The researcher selected two traditional classes and two classes where communicative activities were emphasized at the second stage. The traditional classrooms' main activities included vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation drills tasks and the lesson content relied on the textbook. Although, the non-traditional classes employed mainly role-play activities. These two kinds of courses included a small class and the other was large (Kumar, 1992).

The employed instruments to obtain the research data were mainly transcripts about interaction of teacher and students during the second phase. Instead of determining turns in terms of occasions, turns were calculated by using the average of words employed by the students (Kumar, 1992).

In relation to the data analysis, Kumar (1992) explored the transcripts in order to get the similarities and differences between the two types of classes. Furthermore, descriptive profiles about each class meant an additional manner of understanding similar and opposite features between them.

A broad conclusion asserted by the researcher is that the communicative opportunities available to students are not determined simply by the class size (Kumar, 1992).

There are also other relevant findings that were found in the two research phases. The first observations carried out in four classes at the initial stage revealed that the amount of communicative chances might be influenced by the kind of activity which the teachers implemented in their lessons and not by the amount of pupils (Kumar, 1992). In the second phase, the teaching-learning activities benefit students' interaction in non-traditional classes possibly by providing more time to communicate; in contrast, the traditional activities seemed to have the opposite effect (Kumar, 1992).

The final inquiry regarding overcrowded classrooms was developed by Shamin (1993). The preceding study was qualitative and for this reason the three original objectives were expanded in five research questions. The research questions referred to what teacher and students' definitions of large classes were, what educators and learners believed about large and small classes, what teacher-student behavior and classroom procedures were taking place in large classes, how pupils' classroom location influenced their perceptions about teaching and learning opportunities in large classes, and what type and scope of innovations were in overcrowded classrooms in Pakistani high schools (Shamin, 1993).

The research sample consisted of 232 classes who belonged to 6 high schools in the city of Karachi. Moreover, 20 teachers and 21 groups of pupils were interviewed (Shamin, 1993).

The data gathering consisted in observing three categories of high schools. The types of educational institutional were as follows: government, government-nationalized, and private high schools (Shamin, 1992).

The researcher implemented three stages to obtain the data. The first phase was a kind of preliminary observation since it was carried out to get a first idea about the situations to investigate. The second phase was a more structured observation and it aimed to concentrate on emerging themes. Finally, the last phase was field research and it had the purposes of interviewing teachers and students, and working with them. These interviews were included because the inquirer wanted to obtain complementary information about classroom procedures and events and to verify the data collected through observation (Shamin, 1993).

Shamin (1993) completed the observation process with the help of an audio-visual recorder, field notes, and documents not prepared for research purposes. The audio-visual recorder enabled the inquirer to review the facts found in observations. The documents referred to examination papers, schools news, and newspaper articles that were useful to make clear some aspects of teaching-learning process.

Shamin (1993) finished her inquiry with five principal findings.

The first conclusion is that the amount of students was not the unique basis to define class size; other factors that affect the participants' perceptions about large classes were prior experience of teachers and pupils, average class size of the nearest educational setting, classroom dimension, and levels of ease or complexity to carry out teaching-learning activities (Shamin, 1993).

Next, Shamin (1993) concluded that teachers and students considered their teaching-learning problems in overcrowded classrooms in comparison to the easiness to develop similar activities in smaller classes.

Third, Pakistani teachers employed a group of core activities in teaching and learning processes but, among them, enhancing activities were regarded as more difficult to implement in large classes by the teachers (Shamin, 1993).

After that, teachers did not change their teaching procedures apparently if they identified two or more classes as the same class size category (Shamin, 1993).

Finally, Shamin (1993) states that the students' location in front or back of the classroom might impact the teaching-learning interaction and the degree of participation of learners throughout lessons.

Description, Analysis, and Interpretation of Results

This section will deal with the presentation and analysis of the information collected through the questionnaires, which were structured to answer the three research questions.

It is relevant to mention that, due to the current research's scope, absolute and relative frequencies are going to be considered in order to present the results.

Another important detail to indicate is that there are three options concerning agreement, the most crucial findings will be taken into account in line with their greater relative frequency.

What instructional implications do large classes have on the teaching-learning process?

Table 1

N°	In classes with a large number of students:	Totally agree		Agree		Partially agree		Disagree		Total	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1.	The activities done in class help to apply what students learn in class.	53	29.3%	93	51.4%	28	15.5%	6	3.3%	180	99.4%
2.	The activities done allow to practice listening, speaking, reading and writing skills.	50	27.6%	91	50.3%	32	17.7%	8	4.4%	181	100%
3.	The students are attentive and participate in class activities, including those sitting at the back of the classroom.	27	14.9%	69	38.1%	71	39.2%	14	7.7%	181	100%

4.	Varied class activities are used, such as group, individual, pair-work activities, etc.	65	35.9%	73	40.3%	31	17.1%	12	6.6%	181	100%
5.	Activities such as role-plays, competitions, debates, games, etc. are used in class.	29	16.0%	54	29.8%	67	37.0%	31	17.1%	181	100%
6.	Students can cheat during tests.	11	6.1%	18	9.9%	38	21.0%	114	63.0%	181	100%
7.	Students get distracted by doing assignments from other subjects.	6	3.3%	22	12.2%	55	30.4%	97	53.6%	180	99.4%
8.	The physical space of classroom facilitates the tasks that are carried out in class.	55	30.4%	84	46.4%	34	18.8%	8	4.4%	181	100%
9.	Students cannot receive regular feedback from the teacher due to the large number of students.	15	8.3%	62	34.3%	60	33.1%	44	24.3%	181	100%

Elaboration: author
Source: questionnaires.

Table 1 shows the results of the students' opinions about the instructional implications of large classes on the English teaching-learning process.

The results of the first statement show that most of the students (51.4%) agreed with the fact that the teachers implemented activities that enabled the pupils apply their knowledge. On the other hand, the disagreement alternative was common for 6 participants (3.3%). The total and partial agreement options represented 29.3% and 15.5% of the opinions about this statement respectively.

The preceding information confirms that the students were able to practice what they learned in class and suggests that the excessive number of learners did not affect such practice.

The second statement about the implementation of listening, speaking, reading, and writing tasks reveals that the agreement option was common for more than the half of the participants (50.3%); the rest of alternatives concentrated the views of the students in the following way: totally agree 27.6%, partially agree 17.7%, and disagree 4.4%.

After describing the last information, it might be stated that the four main skills of language teaching-learning were integrated in the lessons of the investigated classrooms and that class size was not an impediment to carry out the four main skills activities; thus, large classes did not have an effect on the application of reading, writing, speaking, and listening activities.

In relation to the opinions of the pupils about the third sentence, the majority of participants (39.2%) partially agreed with the situation that refers to the attention and participation in class activities of all learners. Furthermore, 14.9% of the students totally agreed, 38.1% of participants agreed, and 7.7% of the learners disagreed with the proposed statement.

The preceding data is partially explained by considering the results of the fourth and fifth statements, which show that the educators are used to implement appealing learning activities; specifically, the teachers employ pair and group tasks, games, debates, competitions, and role-plays during lessons. Additionally, the attention and involvement of the pupils might not have been influenced by large classes.

Most of students who collaborated in this research believed that the educators applied varied class activities, such as, individual, pair, and group work (forth statement); the last majority represents to 73 pupils (40.3% of the total). Also, 65, 31, and 12 learners chose the total agreement, the partial agreement, and the disagreement alternatives respectively.

The findings of the statement number 4 are consistent with the recommendations of Hammer (2007) and Woodward (2001) about using group activities in overcrowded classrooms. Furthermore, the educators must have followed some of the tips specified by Woodward (2001) in order to implement tasks that require more than one pupil, for example, the teachers might have carried out interesting tasks, gave clear instructions to the students, indicated the usefulness of the activities, among others. Consequently, the class size did not influence on the situation investigated through the fourth question.

The results of the proposed statement number 5 are the subsequent: 16% of the students totally agreed, 29.8% agreed, 37% partially agreed, and 17.1% of the participants disagreed with the use of games, competitions, debates, and role-plays in the participant classrooms.

These opinions confirm the findings in relation to the fourth sentence because the previous activities are considered appealing and motivating generally and this situation is a suggestion of Woodward (2001) to develop group tasks in large classes; in other words, the preceding percentages are consequences of the evidenced facts with the data about pair and group work.

An extra situation that might be stated about the previous information is that the number of students may not have had an impact on the execution of competitions, debates, games, and role-plays.

The majority of pupils (63%) disagreed with the proposed sentence about cheating during tests (sixth statement). In contrast, the total agreement, the agreement, and the partial agreement options were shared for 6.1%, 9.9%, and 21% of the students respectively. It is vital to bear in mind that the first percentage regarding the sixth statement signifies the highest relative value in the table 1.

The research information about not cheating throughout tests may have happened at some degree since the teachers established an inclusive code of conduct, otherwise stated, the learners knew what behavior were considered good or bad. This practice is a suggestion of Harmer (2007).

Regarding the statement about getting distracted by doing tasks from other subjects during English classes, the reason to explicate the results of the sentence number six is valid to understand that the majority of participants (53.6%) disagreed with the preceding asked fact. Another feasible explanation is an appropriate fulfillment of the controlling role by the educators throughout the lessons.

The other students' responses about the previous proposed sentence are that the total agreement answer represented the 3.3% of the opinions, the agreement alternative was common for 12.2% of the learners, and the partial agreement alternative was selected by 30.4% of the pupils.

According to the information about the appropriateness of the physical space in order to develop learning activities; 55 students totally agreed with such circumstance,

84 learners agreed, 34 participants partially agreed and 8 pupils disagreed with the eighth statement.

Possibly, these results occurred because the students believed that the classrooms were large enough and, consequently, such physical feature was not an obstacle for the teaching-learning process.

The last sentence about instructional implications of large classes showed that the majority of learners (34.3%) agreed with the fact that the teachers did not provide feedback because of the excessive number of pupils. Moreover, 8.3% of the pupils totally agreed with such statement, 33.1% partially agreed, and 24.3% of the students disagreed.

These findings indicate that the pupils did not receive information about their performance in classes due to the number of learners, and this fact is a common problem of overcrowded classrooms (Hamer, 2007; Locastro, 2001). However, the most worrying situation on this matter relates to a feasible poor learning as feedback is the most relevant variable that influences learners' achievement (Harmer, 2007).

Once main instructional results were explained; it is vital to bear in mind that the overcrowded classrooms might be pointed as a reason of the provision of irregular feedback. In contrast, it is likely that the number of learners did not influence the teaching-learning circumstances that were investigated through the rest of the instructional statements.

What social implications do large classes have on the teaching-learning process?

Table 2

N°	In classes with a large number of students:	Totally agree		Agree		Partially agree		Disagree		Total	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
10.	There is interaction between the students and the teacher.	63	34.8%	74	40.9%	37	20.4%	7	3.9%	181	100%
11.	The students have the chance to know more people.	65	35.9%	89	49.2%	21	11.6%	6	3.3%	181	100%
12.	The teacher does not know the names of all the students.	27	14.9%	57	31.5%	70	38.75%	27	14.9%	181	100%
13.	The atmosphere is less tense because it is less likely that the teacher makes continuous questions to the same student.	43	23.8%	59	32.6%	64	35.4%	15	8.3%	181	100%
14.	I use my cell phone or other electronic device without being caught by the teacher.	16	8.8%	18	9.9%	32	17.7%	115	63.5%	181	100%

Elaboration: author
Source: questionnaires.

The research data concerning social implications of large classes on the teaching-learning process are presented in the table 2.

The results of the proposed sentence number ten reveals that 34.8% of the participants totally agreed, 40.9% of the students agreed, 20.4% of the learners partially agreed, and 3.9% of the pupils disagreed with the statement.

This information shows that teachers and students did interchanged messages, ideas, and feelings; however, this circumstance could not be considered as an evidence of the influence of large classes on the teacher-students interaction since this situation depends on many variables such as the type of activities, the teaching methods and approaches, the teachers capability to deal with stuffed classes, among other factors.

The majority of learners (49.2%) selected the agreement option at the sentence regarding their opportunities to know more people in large classes. The total agreement, the partial agreement, and the disagreement alternatives in relation to the sentence number 12 were chosen by 35.9%, 11.6%, and 3.3% of the pupils, respectively.

This circumstance of the researched classes is an advantage that overcrowded classrooms have in relation to other kinds of classes (Watson Todd, 2006); therefore, it is a positive aspect that was confirmed by the participants' answers because the more students there are at a class, the greater likelihood to have more friends. Also, it might be indicated that the amount of students contributed to have the results showed by table 2 in the respective row.

On the twelfth sentence; 27 learners totally agreed, 57 pupils agreed, 70 students partially agreed, and 27 participants disagreed with the proposed statement.

The previous data demonstrated that the teachers did not the names of all their pupils and it is an affective problem of stuffed classrooms (Locastro, 2001). Moreover, the preceding fact seems to indicate a lack of interest toward the students and a negative

impact of the class size on the recall of students' names; consequently, the teacher-learners rapport might have been affected negatively.

The occurrence of a less tense learning atmosphere because of a less predisposition of the educators to make continuous questions to the same student (sentence number 13) was also corroborated by 64 students, who selected the partial agreement option at this asked statement. Also, 43 pupils showed a total agreement and 59 participants agreed with such circumstance. Nevertheless, only 18 students disagreed with the mentioned sentence.

The preceding findings relate to a benefit of large classes identified by Coleman (1989) which concerns a less likelihood of exposing the learners' lack of knowledge. So, the fact verified through the sentence number 13 is another advantage of the participant classes and suggest that overcrowded classrooms influenced the preceding results.

In regard to the results about the prohibition of cell phones (fourteenth statement), 63.5% of participants did not consider that they were able to use cell phones in the classroom without the teachers' noticing. A derivative fact of the previous finding is that such percentage is the most highest in all the three tables showed in this study. Nonetheless, the three alternatives of agreement represented 36.5% of the student's views.

This research data seems to confirm the use of a code of conduct to control pupils' discipline by the teachers in the same way the statements number 6 and 7 revealed through their respective relative and absolute values. Moreover, the cell phones ban may not be considered as an effect of large classes because this decision depends on the

educator's appreciation about the helpfulness of such electronic devices at the educational context.

To summarize the social implications, the overcrowded classrooms affected the occurrence of three circumstances. The participants were able to meet more people, they corroborated a less tense atmosphere due to the excessive number of students and that educators did not know the names of the learners. In relation to the other social statements, it is possible that the large classes did not influence on these aspects.

What psychological implications do large classes have on the teaching-learning process?

Table 3

N°	In classes with a large number of students:	Totally agree		Agree		Partially agree		Disagree		Total	
		F	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
15.	The atmosphere is stressful.	39	21.5%	39	32.6%	52	28.7%	31	17.1%	181	100%
16.	I feel comfortable when I speak in front of all my classmates.	36	19.9%	66	36.5%	54	29.8%	25	13.8%	181	100%
17.	I have less chance to interact.	16	8.8%	73	40.3%	63	34.8%	29	16.0%	181	100%
18.	I do not like to get involved in learning activities since I feel shy.	22	12.2%	42	23.2%	56	30.9%	61	33.7%	181	100%
19.	The teacher does not pay attention to all the students equally.	30	16.6%	50	27.6%	41	22.7%	60	33.1%	181	100%
20.	I think that I can compete with my classmates in a good way.	69	38.1%	66	36.5%	35	19.3%	11	6.15%	181	100%

21.	I feel relaxed because I can be unnoticed during the lesson.	31	17.1%	49	27.1%	60	33.1%	41	22.7%	181	100%
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Author: Patricio Sánchez
Source: research questionnaires.

The results of psychological implications of large classes on teaching-learning process are illustrated by the table 3.

The first sentence concerning psychological implications of large classes reveals that 32.6% of the students agreed with the last statement, 28.7% of the participants partially agreed, 21.5% of pupils totally agreed, and the rest of the learners (17.1%) chose the disagreement option.

This information ratifies the finding of Thaher (2005) about the existence of a stressful atmosphere in stuffed classrooms and implies that the class size might have had an effect on the environment of the participant classes.

The students who agreed with the sentence number 16 represent the 36.5% of all the participants. Similarly, 29.8% and 19.9% of the learners indicated that they partially and totally agreed with the feeling of being comfortable when they spoke in front of their peers, respectively. On the other hand, 13.8% of the participants disagreed with the proposed statement.

The results of the sentence sixteenth took place probably since most of the students had proficient skills to talk in front of an audience and they were confident in their speaking English proficiency level. Hence, it is difficult to specify whether the number of learners affected the comfort at the moment to speak publicly.

In relation to the seventeenth statement, 73 pupils believed that they had fewer opportunities to interact in lessons; such number represents the majority of opinions

(40.3%) about this situation. Furthermore, 16 students totally agreed, 63 participants partially agreed, and only 29 participants disagreed with the previous sentence.

This observed circumstance is apparently normal for large classes as it was confirmed in the study of Khazaei et al. (2012). However, Kumar (1992) concluded that the chances to interact might be determined by the type of teaching-learning activity that is implemented in the classroom and not only by the number of learners. Then, the last research results do not represent an evidence of the effect of large classes on the opportunities to communicate since the data research does not allow the inquirer to specify how the two variables, class size and type of activity, affect the students' possibilities to interact during lessons.

The findings of the statement regarding to the fact of not joining to learning activities due to students' shyness are exposed in following way: the total agreement alternative was common for 12.2% of the participants; the agreement option was shared by 23.2% of the learners; the partial agreement answer was selected by 30.9% of the pupils; and the disagreement response was marked by the other students (33.1%).

The little difference between the three last percentages reveals a normal situation of any class or group of people; some students are shy and others not. In spite of the excessive number of learners were considered in the proposed statement, the shyness of pupils to participate in different tasks is only one factor that explains this behavior between many of causes that could be mentioned.

In regard to the sentence number 19; 16.6% of the participants totally agreed, 27.6% of the pupils agreed, 22.7% of the learners partially agreed, and the 33.1% of the students disagreed with the proposed circumstance.

The findings of the previous statement are contrary to the negative characteristic of overcrowded classrooms identified by Locastro (2001) as an affective difficulty. A feasible explanation for this unexpected circumstance is an excellent effort of the educators to give attention to the majority of learners; this reason is evident when the preceding disagreement percentage is highlighted. Consequently, it is likely to state that the quantity of learners did not affect the provision of the instructors' attention to the pupils.

On the twentieth statement, the majority of students (38.1%) marked the total agreement option. Likewise, 36.5% of the participants chose the agreement alternative and 19.3% of the pupils shared the partial agreement response. Nonetheless, only 6.1% of the learners disagreed with such sentence.

Once the previous research data was mentioned, it could be stated that the class size did not have an influence on the competition between students and that the opinion of the pupils about this learning condition happened since the teachers must have used competitive activities during classes and the tasks must have allowed the pupils' participation in an adequate manner.

The last statement of the questionnaire showed the subsequent results: 31 participants totally agreed, 49 students agreed, 60 learners partially agreed, and 41 pupils disagreed with the feeling of relaxation because they were able to be unnoticed.

The results of the sentence number twenty one appear to be a demonstration of the influence of large classes on the relaxation of participants due to the students' belief about not being noticed during lessons.

This circumstance could be explained in turn since it was less likely that the educators make several questions to the same pupil (thirteenth statement).

As a final point, there are two major psychological circumstances that deserve to mention due to their importance. The existence of students' relaxation in classes (the last statement of the questionnaire) was influenced by the amount of students. On the contrary, stuffed classes did not affect the attention given by the teachers to all pupils and the student-student competition.

Conclusions

The data gathered enabled the researcher to draw some conclusions about the instructional, social, and psychological implications of large classes in the teaching-learning process.

There are two main findings with respect to instructional implications that need to be emphasized. First, the class size had an influence on the lack of regular feedback as the research data confirmed this usual obstacle of overcrowded classrooms. The rest of investigated instructional aspects were not affected by large classes because the participants' opinions did not allow the researcher to confirm expected problems at the participant classrooms.

By considering the current literature and the obtained results via the items about social implications, it might be concluded that the excessive number of students provoked that students had a less tense learning environment and more chances to know classmates and that the teachers did not remember the pupils names.

Finally, the opinions of the participants about psychological implications revealed that large classes influenced the occurrence of a general student's relaxation due to a feeling of being unnoticed throughout lessons. Nonetheless, the expected obstacle of not giving attention to all students and the fact that refers to an adequate competition between learners were not caused by the overcrowded classrooms.

Recommendations

- Future research about large classes should specify the mechanisms of the instructional, psychological, and social implications that affect the teaching-learning process. In other words, once the effects of large classes are identified, it is necessary to discover how such variables influence the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language in public and private high schools.
- The educational institutions (Ministry of Education and high schools) ought to promote the learning of principles for managing overcrowded classrooms via workshops or conferences, with the participation of recognized experts in the preceding topic, since some of the results of this study suggest that excellent skills to teach large classes might have a positive impact in the teachers' practice and the students' English acquisition.
- Ecuadorian teachers ought to learn the names of all their pupils. This habit is relevant because learners might be engaged in class activities if they notice that the educator concerns his or her personal details.
- Future studies should deal with the influence of class size on the students' feedback due to its direct impact on the students' achievement. Another reason that justifies the preceding topic resides in the absence of reasons to explicate that the participant teachers did not give feedback to their students in the present study.

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Annexes

Example of the questionnaire (version in Spanish)

UNIVERSIDAD TÉCNICA PARTICULAR DE LOJA MODALIDAD ABIERTA Y A DISTANCIA TITULACIÓN A DISTANCIA

Estimado estudiante:

Este cuestionario tiene como objetivo conocer la influencia de las clases numerosas en el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje del inglés.

La información que usted brindará a continuación se usará únicamente con fines académicos-investigativos. Le rogamos contestar honestamente de acuerdo a la siguiente escala de referencia.

Muy satisfactorio	Totalmente de acuerdo
Satisfactorio	De acuerdo
Poco satisfactorio	Parcialmente de acuerdo
Nada satisfactorio	En desacuerdo

Datos informativos

Nombre de la institución: _____

Tipo de institución: Pública () Privada ()

Curso: 8vo. () 9no. () 10mo. ()
1ro. Bach. () 2do. Bach. () 3ro. Bach. ()

Ciudad: _____

Instrucción: Marque con una X según su criterio.

A. Aspectos Académicos

		Muy satisfactorio	Satisfactorio	Poco satisfactorio	Nada satisfactorio
1	En clases con bastantes estudiantes				
	Se realizan actividades que permiten poner en práctica lo aprendido.				

2	Se realizan actividades que permiten practicar las habilidades de escucha, habla, lectura y escritura.				
3	Todos los estudiantes están atentos y participan en las actividades desarrolladas en la clase, inclusive los estudiantes de la última fila.				
4	Se utilizan actividades variadas dentro de la clase, como por ejemplo, actividades en grupo, actividades individuales, actividades en pareja, etc.				
5	Se utilizan actividades tales como dramatizaciones, concursos, debates, juegos, etc.				
6	Se puede copia durante los exámenes.				
7	Se puede realizar tareas de otras materias.				
8	El espacio de la clase permite desarrollar adecuadamente las actividades asignadas por el profesor.				
9	No puedo recibir una retroalimentación adecuada por parte del profesor debido al número elevado de estudiantes.				

B. Aspectos sociales.

		Muy satisfactorio	Satisfactorio	Poco satisfactorio	Nada satisfactorio
	En clases con bastantes estudiantes				
10	Existe interacción entre los estudiantes y el profesor.				
11	Tengo la oportunidad de relacionarme con más personas.				
12	El profesor no recuerda el nombre de todos los estudiantes.				
13	El ambiente es menos tenso ya que hay menor probabilidad de que el profesor realice preguntas constantes al mismo estudiante.				
14	Puedo usar mi teléfono celular o algún otro dispositivo electrónico sin ser descubierto por el profesor.				

C. Aspectos psicológicos.

	En clases con bastantes estudiantes	Muy satisfactorio	Satisfactorio	Poco satisfactorio	Nada satisfactorio
15	El ambiente es estresante.				
16	Me siento cómodo al momento de hablar frente a mis compañeros.				
17	Tengo menos oportunidad de expresarme.				
18	No me gusta participar porque me siento tímido.				
19	El profesor no presta atención por igual a todos los estudiantes.				
20	Siento que puedo competir sanamente con otros estudiantes.				
21	Me siento relajado porque puedo pasar por desapercibido.				

¡Gracias por su colaboración!