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**Teachers' and students' perceptions of teaching English in small
classes in Ecuador**

TRABAJO DE TITULACIÓN

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Doctora

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family, who have supported me during my studies, to my stepmother and my lovely aunt Piedad Calvache and my uncle Mauricio Jurado for encouraging me to pursue this career, to all my teachers as well as to my friends who in one way or another have been with me all this time.

Soraya

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ABSTRACT

This study is about teachers' and students' perceptions of teaching English in small classes in Ecuadorian schools; the purpose is to determine what are the positive and negative results regarding to the students' English language teaching-learning process.

The general approach is based on a quantitative and qualitative method. Questionnaires were administered to a sample population of 60 students; 60% female and 40% males, between the ages of 12 and 17 and 5 English teachers 80% female and 20% male. The participants were divided between 5 classes from two different elementary and high schools located in rural areas.

The main aspects included students' and teachers' perceptions about students' performance, interaction, and classroom atmosphere. The results of each question were presented individually, examined and analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively in comparison to the most relevant literature previously investigated.

The results obtained indicate that small class size does not limit the implementation of varied activities and different types of student interaction. However it does so regarding students' opinion and critical thinking especially at elementary schools as the students created a codependency interaction relationship with their teacher.

KEYWORDS: English language teaching-learning, small classes.

RESUMEN

El estudio es sobre las perspectivas de estudiantes y maestros en clases pequeñas en colegios de Ecuador. El propósito es determinar los aspectos positivos y negativos de clases con pocos estudiantes en el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje del idioma inglés.

Dentro del estudio se aplicó un método cuantitativo, se repartieron 60 cuestionarios a estudiantes, 60 % mujeres y 40% hombres, entre 12 y 17 años, dividida en 5 cursos de 2 colegios en las afueras de Quito.

Fueron tomados en cuenta asuntos académicos, sociales y psicológicos. En lo académico se consideró actividades y estrategias utilizadas en las clases. En lo social, interacción entre alumno-maestro y en lo psicológico, aspectos como el ambiente del aula durante el aprendizaje.

Se analizaron y tabularon los resultados de los cuestionarios cuantitativamente, los datos cualitativos son referentes a las observaciones y comparadas con la literatura.

Los resultados demuestran que la cantidad de alumnos en el aula no limita la implementación de actividades y de diferentes tipos de interacción entre estudiantes.

En primaria la opinión del alumno cambia porque estos han creado una codependencia con su mentor.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Enseñanza del inglés, clases pequeñas.

INTRODUCTION

The theme of this research study has been chosen due to the deficiency of English language teaching and learning in Ecuadorian elementary and high schools as apparently in our country most of the students lack the ability to communicate fluently and write with coherence in English considering the spent time throughout their student lives.

As a consequence, the Ecuadorian government has developed teacher training programs to improve teaching quality but nevertheless it is thought that one of the aspects that may contribute to deficiency of English language skills is that most of the schools have a big amount of students in the typical foreign language classroom. Furthermore that in small classes, which represent a minority of schools, the students tend to generate a co-dependency with their teacher in which the pupils are used to receiving more attention and feedback than is necessary.

For this reason, “teachers’ and students’ perceptions of teaching English in small classes in Ecuador” have been researched. The purpose of this study is to determine whether or not small classes affect the English language teaching-learning process regarding the pupil’s academic progress by discovering teachers’ and students’ perceptions through answering the following questions: 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?

This study is of vital importance in the Ecuadorian educational context as the results will provide insight for the teachers and students of the English language in

relation to the influence of small classes on the English language teaching-learning process in Ecuadorian elementary and high schools.

During this thesis development, teachers, students and authorities cooperated in the process of gathering the required information.

Limitations considered were that few classes were observed, in short periods of time. Furthermore the results would have been more reliable if a greater number of participants had been involved during the field research as well as if the learners had answered the questions honestly.

In order to avoid these limitations, the future researchers should observe classes for longer periods of time; thus, they can register more strategies, activities and students' behavioral attitudes for reliable results.

The beneficiaries of this project will be the students who study English as a second language as well as graduated students who are starting to work in the teaching field and the education community.

Various studies have already been carried out on the influence and the perceptions of students and teachers in small class sizes on the teaching-learning process of the English language. Some of them will be mentioned to emphasize this research.

A study performed by Zeinab, Khazaei and Saeed (2012) shows that class size has a crucial effect on an individual's WTC (willingness to communicate) in a second language classroom. Furthermore, the results lend support to Chang-Well's (1992) statement which states that students in smaller classes are more motivated to participate in communicative activities and conversations. In other words, the greater the class size, the less willing to communicate students tend to be. These authors

believed that small classes in schools facilitate classroom management as well as a more individualized help from teachers to students, effectiveness teaching, better learning atmosphere, better student-teacher interactions, and a reduction in teachers' duties and workable hours. Another study by Din (1999) demonstrated that the Chinese rural teachers perceived class size as a beneficial factor that is not necessary in close relation with student achievement.

A third study was conducted by Blatchford, Bassett and Brown (2011). They indicated that smaller classes can benefit all pupils as a personalized teaching can be provided from teacher without mentioning that the lower attaining pupils can also benefit in their academic achievement from small classes at secondary level.

The study by Bahanshal (2013) states that class-size has great effects on the teaching and learning of English Language. He found that students of the large class-sizes struggle in the process of acquiring English Language skills as they lack adequate materials and a sufficient amount of hours to dedicate to the study of English as a second language. The teachers of large class sizes find it difficult as well to complete their duties as a result of the big amount of students enrolled in the class.

The Blatchford, Bassett, Goldstein and Martin (2003) study indicated that in a large group there is a less effective educational environment. Furthermore, results also showed that there exists a correlation between the size of the class and teaching time. That means, the larger the class, the lesser the academic learning time. On the other hand, the results showed that children in small classes had a better interaction with their peers as well as with their teacher. Teachers were able to provide effective feedback, and during the class period, students were the focus of the teachers' attention resulting in a more feasible classroom management.

In this study, the collected data also showed that children in large classes were twice as likely to be distracted and off set tasks during the lesson. Limitations in this research are displayed in influential variables that might not have been included in the analysis which might explain relationship between class size and outcomes. Another problematic issue is the use of mixed method approaches, as they can cause discomfort between teachers and students.

Harfitt (2011) states that in small classes a harmonious teaching-learning atmosphere is perceived whereby levels of anxiety tend to decrease. Furthermore, in small classes, a closer relationship between student teachers as well as a more engaging attitude is observed. A limiting factor for this study was the small amount of previous information available about class size in Hong-Kong and Asia.

Another study by Çakmak (2009) shows that there exists a strong relationship between class size and students' motivation; that is, the smaller the class the easier it is to motivate each student and to know each individual's differences and needs. Here, the results also demonstrated that the teaching methodologies might vary according to the number of pupils in the classroom and that there exists a relationship between class size and classroom management; that is, the larger the class, the more time the teacher spends managing the classroom instead of teaching the lesson which can affect students' achievement. Some of the identified limitations were the validity and the reliability of the study which was limited to 41 student teacher responses, and that the data was collected in just one university.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section relates previous research about teachers' and students' perceptions of teaching and learning English in small classes. The research emphasizes the importance of an array of themes including: managing learning, the importance of teachers' instructions, class activities, performance, feedback, timing, teacher-student and student-student interaction, and class size. Finally, the research provides techniques, strategies or activities for teaching English while taking into consideration the different learning environments and socio-emotional atmosphere where the process takes place.

The current study is based on five previous studies related to teachers' and students' perceptions of teaching and learning English in small classes with a focus on the pros and cons that might arise when teaching large and small classes.

Managing Learning

According to Harmer (2007), some of the most important challenges that an English teacher faces when teaching small groups are organizing the students, dividing them into pairs or groups, assigning places to start the task(s), and how to end the activities in a suitable manner.

Harmer suggests that the teacher should keep in mind, that the most important goal is to engage the student in the activity and to aid them by providing clear, detailed and chronological instructions. For example, Harmer proposes that one of the students performs the activity for the class. This will clarify the teacher's expectations and help the students gain confidence.

Capel, Leask, and Turner (2005) and Underwood (1989) argue that immediate feedback is important in order to succeed in the learning process. According to them, when adequate feedback is provided, the performance of the class, including students with low academic progress, can increase.

Underwood (1989) explains that feedback can motivate students and provide information which they can use to improve their learning process because they can understand where they are in their learning and what to do next. In addition, feedback allows students to internalize the information learned. Another advantage of feedback is that it gives students the chance to keep track of their learning progress. So, if a student makes a mistake and receives immediate feedback, he can correct himself and prevent that error from happening again as the feedback allows the learners to make corrective modifications and prevent continued practice of the incorrect performance.

Capel, Leask and Turner (2005) believe that feedback can also reward a student whose output is correct, as it motivates him/her to keep studying. Yet another benefit of feedback is that it provides learners with information about the progress they are making towards their goals. It is necessary to keep in mind that feedback should be done right after an activity is finished and before a new one is introduced because the pupils can relate the feedback directly to the outcome of the activity. This is highly beneficial for them as it is like going step by step. In contrast, Spaulding (1992) believes that the teacher should avoid giving excessive praise to students when they have reached a goal; that it is better if the teacher puts emphasis on feedback no matter if the student was able or was not able to reach the proposed objective thereby providing the same opportunities to all the students. This will develop a positive

attitude between the students. Spaulding also believes that teacher's feedback should be based on roles of ability and effort based on those students' successes and failures. These would improve the productive motivation between teacher and students as well as enhance the appropriated orientation. Even though spending more teacher's time would be needed to accomplish the goal of having an adequate atmosphere, if it is done correctly, students' performance would show improvement.

Underwood (1989) stresses how difficult it can be to maintain the students' memory of past lessons as the teacher will need to repeat and re-teach the most significant and difficult topics, causing the focus of the discussion and the flow of the class to lose coherence. As a consequence, relevant and valuable mistakes and thoughts that could be used to improve tasks approaches will be lost if feedback is carried out correctly. Additionally, time must be adequately planned as it can be easily wasted; the goal is to maximize the amount of useful time, by controlling the time that the students need to get ready to perform the activity.

The teacher needs to supervise the students' behavior before, during and after the lesson as well as the academic performance of all the activities and the packing up time when the lesson is over. McLeod, Fisher and Hoover (2003) stress that: "time management is critical to student achievement and attitudes towards learning". They state that a successful lesson consists of preparing and handing out the materials, teaching the lesson properly, delivering instructions and assigning the work. Under those parameters, they believe that effective time management is a skill necessary to succeed and in the long run. By doing so, students would have a better opportunity to make connections between the new material learned and the old, being

able to apply it in their daily lives, developing positive personal habits and making a wiser use of their time.

Teacher Student- Student Teacher Interaction

Spaulding (1992) explains that the student-teacher relationship is of utmost importance, and that this relationship must be based on trust, support, and respect. This can be easily achieved by not overdoing punishment as a mechanism to control the behavior of the group.

Teachers who want to build successful relationships with their students and foster increased levels of academic motivation, must not rely too heavily on penalizing students when trying to help them learn how to behave appropriately in school as most punishments used in schools are designed to cause the transgressing students pain, shame or inconvenience and this can lead to a negative effect on the students' self-esteem. For instance, when teaching small classes, one of the ways that teachers can gently punish students is by using a subtle time-out procedure. For example, if a child is poking the student sitting in front of her with a pencil, the teacher can unceremoniously walk over and take the pencil away from the student, acting quietly and calmly saying, "You can have this pencil back when the period is over". In this instance, the child experiences a time-out from the instrument she used to aggravate the other students.

Englehart (2009) states that teachers send messages to the students, verbally and nonverbally, that give the students information about who teachers are; what their academic expectations are; whether the teachers respect the students or not; how they feel about what they are teaching; or whether asking questions is welcomed or discouraged. For that reason, teachers should develop a suitable teaching style

taking into consideration interaction and communication as important tools that enrich mutual affection; whenever a teacher makes a point, illustrations with examples need to be done as often as possible and those examples need to be related to the students' lives.

Spaulding (1992) argues that teachers should avoid mocking, classist or racist comments. If the teacher wants to build a trusting relationship with their students an avoidance of using humor that is directed at students must be considered. Teachers, like other human beings, bring unfounded prejudices to their job. Racist attitudes such as looking down on and belittling individuals with a skin color or facial features different from their own is deplorable behavior that would be unconscionable as teacher behavior.

Englehat (2009) and Spaulding (1992) agree that providing the students clear explanations about the "why" behind assignments, lessons, projects and class policies - as well as good communication - shows how much the teacher cares about the students' success in the course and that this behavior will benefit interaction between teacher and students.

They also consider that the teacher should be aware not to create a co-dependency interaction relationship between students and teacher and that a teacher should be conscious of being a fair grader, who is able to show competence and precision whenever a problem arises in the classroom, and who has high but attainable expectations for students' performances on academic tasks.

In other words, teacher-student relationships characterized by mutual affection, respect and trust seem to be the ones that are most likely to lead to high levels of

academic motivation. In addition, these types of relationships also prevent students from becoming dependent on their teacher (Spaulding, 1992).

When referring to teacher-student interaction, Thompson (1998) says, “The most powerful weapon available to secondary teachers who want to foster a favorable learning climate is a positive relationship with our students”.

Canter, (1997) makes the statement that we all can recall classes in which we did not try very hard because we didn't like our teachers. This should remind us how important it is to have strong, positive relationships with our students. Kohn (1996) goes a step further, saying, “Children are more likely to be respectful when important adults in their lives respect them. They are more likely to care about others if they know they are cared about.” Marzano (2003) states that students will resist rules and procedures along with the consequent disciplinary actions if the foundation of a good relationship is lacking. He goes on to assert that relationships are perhaps more important at the elementary and junior high levels than at the high school level. And according to Zehm and Kottler (1993), students will never trust us or open themselves up to hear what we have to say unless they sense that we value and respect them.

Spaulding (1992) agreed with the Lewis and Hill (1985) statements which consider that an adequate teacher–student interaction provides a better understanding of the students regarding the way they are as self-individuals as well as their academic needs. Furthermore, they think that when the right interaction is performed, a wide space is left in which the teacher-student trust increases and as a consequence, the pupils work harder and henceforth they start considering their teacher an important and valuable person.

If the teacher's aim is to improve each pupil and at the same time the whole class performance in order to succeed, then taking into account several aspects such as understanding the student's culture; considering the student's likes and dislikes; getting involved in the relationships with their peers; promoting home support; and learning about their dreams, strengths and vulnerabilities must be considered as important factors that will help in their personal and academic development.

Lewis and Hill (1985) agree that when the teacher realizes that students' personal preferences will lead to a better communication and will help with the planning curriculum, the teacher will be able to organize better approaches to activities in order to cater for the students' needs. Finally, the teacher helps to encourage students' skills when the pupils start acting as self-reliant individuals who are able to solve their own problems and are capable of working with the teacher as a team establishing both whole-class and individual learning and relationship goals.

There are some articles based on previous investigations that support the above authors perspectives. For example Blatchford, Bassett and Brown (2011) examined the effect of class size on two key procedures: pupil classroom engagement and teacher-pupil interaction. For this study multiple observations in the United Kingdom were conducted in 88 classes, with 686 pupils observed in 27 primary schools and 22 secondary schools. Multilevel regression methods were used to examine the relationships between class size and observation measures, the observations took place during the class activities. The goal was to provide a representative and systematic account of pupils' behavior.

In addition to class size, the following factors were also included in the analyses done by Blatchford, Bassett and Brown, (2011): pupil level of attainment

at the start of year (low, medium or high), special educational needs (SEN), status of pupils (none, school action, school action plus/SEN), gender, number of teachers, school subject, and support staff presence.

In the light of this investigation, researchers concluded that small classes are beneficial because it is easier for students to focus their attention on the teacher's explanations. It was found that students at high schools that were below the average grade point got more individual attention from the teacher and this extra help improved their task performance.

Evidence also showed that during the whole of classes the students were more susceptible to go off task and that the teacher had to spend more time to bring pupils back to the task(s), resulting in time being wasted.

Another key point found by Blatchford, Bassett and Brown (2011) was that class size does not change group work engagement but that it does have an effect on students' individual academic progress. They concluded that small classes allow teachers to have more time for individualized teaching and task instructions. Although teaching small groups is easier than teaching large groups, some teachers do not heed this advice and continue teaching their students with odd methods for large classes in which the subject is taught through exposure and there is little teacher-student interaction.

Another study that took place in a rural area of China confirms some of the above statements. Here, Din (1999) concludes that small classes facilitate classroom management and that communication is more feasible between students and teachers when the group is reduced.

He states that when there are fewer students in the classroom, teachers are able to provide individualized help and meet students' needs, and a more pleasant environment can be easily created. He doesn't, however, find any direct relationship between the size of the class and the students' achievements.

Class Size

Buller (2010) considers that one of the main problems when teaching small classes is that limited opinions are put forward due to the small amount of students enrolled.

Additionally, it is very difficult to exchange opinions as the students get to know each other so well that it is hard for them to contradict a friend when someone has a different perspective.

In contrast, Tomlinson (1999) emphasizes that in a small group, students' readiness, interest, and learning are easily internalized as they use their essential or basic skills to make sense of what has been taught by the teacher and as a consequence, the students obtain a better understanding related to key concepts based on multiple assignments and time management is workable, as it can be distributed in a flexible way in accordance with the students' needs - not mentioning that a wide range of materials can be easily provided and that the students have more opportunities to express their thoughts while feeling more comfortable to interact with each other.

Buller (2010) lets us know some strategies that the teacher could use for successful performance in lessons when teaching small groups. These include starting off the lesson with a discussion performed by introvert students and contemplating their judgments. Another class assignment might be asking the pupils

to do research about different views based on the same topic and make them defend those perspectives in a debate. It is also useful to assign students different opinions to investigate and arrange them into an informal discussion through role-playing instead of a formal debate.

The author also points out some benefits of having small classes: he believes that in small classes the teacher will have more time to interact with the pupils, and a more enhanced speaking and writing time will take place during the assignment. Under those circumstances, teachers would have enough time to correct and give argued views on students' drafts.

This scene won't happen in large classes as it is very difficult for the teacher to get to know each student's individual strengths and weaknesses and possible special needs. According to Buller's view in large classes, pupils feel uncomfortable when sharing opinions so, most of them remain in silence when someone is speaking and it is hard for the teacher to engage them in an adequate learning process. A similar view is shared by Tomlinson, (1999) who sets down his opinion and states that classes with a big number of students have single assignment options since a single basic text prevails and as a consequence little interpretation of ideas may come to the light.

Finally, Tomlinson (1999) makes a comparison based on his perspective applied to small and large class sizes. In light of his investigation, he states that while in reduced groups, focus on multiple forms of intelligences is evident and excellence is defined in large measure by the students' growth from a starting point. In large classes however, he argues that a narrow sense of intelligence prevails and a tiny definition of excellence exists. He also believes that students in small classes are

frequently guided by the teacher when they are making interest-based learning choices and that a lot of instructional arrangements are used to fulfill the lesson. On the other hand, he thinks that in large classes, the students' interest is minimal and that during the whole-class instruction, the attention is based on a single text and curriculum guides.

The author argues that with big groups time is inflexible and that in this kind of atmosphere, the teacher is the only one who directs the pupils' behavior and seems forced to solve the possible problems that might arise, as well as is obliged to provide grading standards for every class.

Supporting evidence regarding the above opinions is shown when Bahanshal (2013) studied the possible effect of class size on the teaching of English language.

The study took place in Nigeria. It consisted of 24 teachers and survey answers from 150 students that were randomly selected from twelve (12) schools. A random sample technique was used in order to achieve the possible outcomes of the whole population. The main aims were to examine if students' population causes effects on learning English, and also to know how effective teachers' methods and techniques are in large and small classes .

Bahanshal (2013) wanted to discover if the objectives were correctly achieved as well as to quantify the students' participation. Results showed that class size has a huge impact on students when learning English. They conveyed that the larger the class, the more difficult it is for students to learn English as a second language.

It was found that large classes also have a lack of didactic materials and as a consequence, a poor average in terms of the students' engagement. Furthermore,

teachers cannot fully carry out their required duties as it is difficult and demanding for them to teach in overcrowded classrooms.

He concludes that small classes are easier to handle in terms of discipline and feasibility of teaching as the teachers have more time on their hands to provide a clearer lesson explanation, the necessary reinforcement of tasks and a better teacher-student / student-teacher communication. Therefore, a greater personal and academic result is found when comparing with academic development in large classes.

Teaching Techniques, Strategies or Activities for Teaching English to Small Classes

Buller, (2010) proposes the most common strategies that teachers might use when teaching English in small classes. Some examples of strategies are explained below:

In seminars, the students do a brainstorming activity related to the topic that was already developed during a past lesson. For this kind of assignment, the teacher sits them in a horseshoe or in a circle in order to facilitate the communication so the discussion can flow easily.

Usually this activity requires a set of questions in which students are asked to reflect before the seminar class starts. The lesson begins with a question or a statement usually performed by the instructor or by any of the pupils in the class, to which other members respond. When the seminar is performing well, it can lead into a very interesting atmosphere where different students' thoughts and perspectives are shared and used as valuable tools that will help to enrich the learning of the other attenders.

The Socratic Method is also proposed by Buller (2010) who argues that this is a useful strategy when the teacher manages a reduced number of pupils. In this

method, the teacher attempts to give a more profound understanding of the subject by proposing questions with the purpose of clarifying doubts and improving students' approach related to a specific issue.

The author states that the Socratic Method could be used to solve puzzles in which questions have at least one real answer and also for conundrums in which none of the answers are correct. In the latter approach, the students need to think about fairer alternatives to solve the riddle. During the Elenchus process or Socratic Method, students are forced to participate; defending their views and opinions in response to questions that other members asked. This form of inquiry and discussion between individuals stimulates critical thinking because the discussion view is constantly questioned.

Underwood (1989) proposes a different strategy for teaching English successfully in small classes. He claims that by putting up a jigsaw activity for listening tasks, just as in a jigsaw puzzle, each student is an essential piece of the completion and full understanding of the final product. When jigsaw is correctly completed it is an effective strategy that will enrich the speaking and the writing of each individual in the class.

He yields a good topic example for this activity: the possible theme could be the story of a crime told by two or three different witnesses with their respective views.

To start the activity, each group is provided with the evidence of just one witness, and then everybody, from each group, has to try to work out who committed the crime. In order to solve the murder, students need to share the given information and must pay special attention to their peers if they want to succeed.

Role-playing is another teaching strategy proposed by Doff (1988). This strategy emphasizes the social nature of learning and sees cooperative behavior as stimulating students both socially and intellectually.

Doff (1988) states that role-playing offers several advantages for teachers and students. First, the students' interest in the topic is raised, and secondly, there is increased involvement on the part of the students in a role-playing lesson. When role-play is applied, students have the opportunity to demonstrate how to use English in real life situations and focus on communication instead of grammar.

The author states that the benefits are that students become active participants in the lesson and are able to experience what it must have felt like to have been in a particular situation, simulating a real life experience. Therefore, students develop empathy and a deeper understanding. Also, students are more likely to remember something they have personally experienced rather than something they simply heard or read. The author argues that teachers benefit because students are learning more and becoming more engaged in the lesson even though to get willing participation and effort from the students is more time consuming and takes more planning.

Learning environment in small classes

Harmer, (2007) argues that in small classes the way in which the desks are arranged can positively influence the verbal and emotional development of the students.

The author indicates that when the students are located in a circle or in a horseshoe, an equality environment is created and the students' potential to share

feelings, exchange information through talking, eye contact and body gestures, is greater than when they are sitting in rows or one behind another.

It is complicated for the teacher to reproduce this kind of atmosphere when students are placed in rows, as this particular arrangement gives a sense of hierarchy so, the students perceived their teacher as an authoritative person. Although this may be true, as Voltz, Sims and Nelson (2010) mention, there are some other important factors that the teacher needs to have in mind to establish an appropriate environment.

In addition to seating arrangements, aspects of physical environment such as bulletin words must be included; using didactic material could help the students to see themselves reflected in the classroom's physical environment, and as a result, a sense of belonging is developed. When students' work reaches the target, teachers should keep in mind that the work should be displayed and celebrated.

They also point out how important it is to have an environment that is physically, emotionally and intellectually safe. Intellectual safety is as important as the other variables mentioned as it provides to the pupils the right to be respected for whom they are and the capability to express without fear of failure.

All the students should have the right to search for meaning in the learning process and have their cultural identity represented and respected in the classroom.

Harmer (2007) agrees with Voltz, Sims and Nelson (2010) regarding external factors such as materials, equipment, and furniture arrangement. In fact, they share the idea that these external factors can seriously affect the child's self-esteem, security, comfort, autonomy, self-control as well as his/her interaction. For this

reason, they suggest setting flexible seating arrangements for small classes, such as dyads, triads, quads, horseshoes, semicircles or circles.

Voltz, Sims and Nelson (2010) state that thoughtful and strategic furniture arrangement and sitting plans can contribute to students' physical safety. They agree with Hammer (2007) in that social interaction improves when students work together in small groups as they are able to share diverse opinions, materials, and are able to help to each other.

As it can be seen, when teaching in small classes, both an atmosphere of fellowship and a flexible grouping pattern, can encourage student collaboration and help to dismantle long held stereotypes about other cultural groups.

A further study by Blatchford, Bassett, Goldstein and Martin (2003) (aimed at discovering if differences in class size are related to the pupils' educational progress and classroom process) concluded that in small classes there is more teacher task time with pupils; more teacher support for learning; and that it is easier to manage the students and control classroom. Results show that while small classes will not make a bad teacher better, they can allow teachers to be more effective. On the other hand, Blatchford, Bassett, Goldstein and Martin (2003) concluded that in large classes students were less likely to attend and were more likely to go off task during the lesson; and that some of them were even off task(s) all the time, not to mention a less effective educational environment.

Teachers' experience demonstrates that with large classes there are often difficult choices to make and this could have an adverse effect on the amount of teachers' time needed for planning the lesson. When teaching large classes, the

quality of teaching and the quantity of pupils' work and concentration can also be affected if the number of students is higher than twenty per classroom.

Zeinab, Khazaei and Saeed (2012) conducted a study in Iran, in which the main purpose was to demonstrate if willingness to communicate differs across different class sizes when English is taught as a second language.

As a matter of fact, the findings showed that class size has a crucial effect on an individual's willingness to communicate in a second language classroom. Furthermore, the results lend support to the belief that students in smaller classes are more motivated and actively engaged in participating in communicative activities.

METHOD

Settings and participants.

This study was conducted in five classes of elementary and high schools located in rural areas in Quito. A group of approximately 60 students was selected.

The participants were female (60%) and males (40%) between the ages of 12 and 17, and out of the 5 teachers, 80% were female and the 20% left over were male.

In this study, quantitative and qualitative data were used; quantitative data was taken from the questionnaires and described numerically in a percentage scale in addition to qualitative data that was taken from the observation sheet. The data was analyzed by students and teachers of the respective schools. These research findings, along with the statistics, helped to create concrete results.

Procedures

Literature related to the theme of this study was researched in order to get a clear idea of the themes and to have a better understanding of this research topic. Within this literature review, books related to managing learning, teacher-student student-teacher interaction, class size, teaching techniques, strategies or activities for teaching English to Small Classes and learning environment were examined. In addition, five correlated studies were examined as well.

A questionnaire was applied which was designed to collect data from the sample group. This data was obtained by giving each participant a questionnaire with 22 questions. The aim of this questionnaire was to obtain the opinion of the participants regarding the social, and psychological implications of a small class size

on the teaching and learning process. These questionnaires were given to each group only on one occasion.

After the questionnaires had been completed, the data was gathered in tables to give a clear picture of the results. These tables showed the amount of students who chose each particular option for the various answers provided on the questionnaire, the responses (*Totally agree*, *agree*, *partially agree*, and *disagree*), showing what percentage of the total sample that number represented. One table was presented for each of the four aspects examined.

Once the results had been tabulated, an inferential analysis of the results was done and the findings were described in detail. In all cases, the effect of small class size was studied in relation to each of the variables. The variables related to academic issues were the different teaching techniques; strategies and methodologies applied during the lesson; the importance of the feedback provided by the teacher; and time management.

The social issues examined student and teacher–student interaction; the learning atmosphere; and the organization of physical space. The psychological aspects that were examined were the level of stress and anxiety in the classroom; the amount of freedom that students feel to express themselves and their competitiveness with their classmates; as well as the amount of attention and feedback from the teacher that students received in relation to their classmates.

The above aspects were examined in the light of four questions: 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 the learning English in small classes? Are there any limitations when teaching English in small classes?

DISCUSSION

Description, analysis, and interpretation of results

In an attempt to identify teachers' and students' perceptions of teaching English in small classes in Ecuador, three investigating tools were developed. The first one was a questionnaire that was administered on five elementary and high school English language teachers in Ecuador. The second questionnaire was performed by the students and the last tool was an observation sheet where note taking showing the researcher's point of view was expressed.

Questionnaires resulted in no 'neutral' position being taken on the Likert-scale and therefore worked to dissuade 'fence sitting' by the respondents throughout the surveys. The original survey response fields were read, from left to right: *totally agree, agree, partially agree, and disagree*. The questions were related to teachers' and students' perceptions about the benefits of teaching and learning English in small classes; teaching strategies and resources that benefit teaching English; students' and teachers' feelings about learning and teaching English in small classes and possible limitations. Finally, the gathered data from the students' and teachers' questionnaires was presented in a statistical table.

This data was analyzed by comparing the teachers' and students' responses and then contrasted with the classes observation results. Moreover, the responses were supported with the literature review information.

Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis

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

Table 1.

Teachers' perceptions

N°	In classes with small number of students:	Totally agree		Agree		Partially agree		Disagree		TOTAL	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1.	It is easier to design activities that help students to apply what they have learned.	5	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	100
2.	The students are attentive and participate in class activities.	3	60	2	40	1	20	0	0	5	100
3.	Classroom space allows students to properly do the activities designed	5	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	100
4.	Appropriate feedback can be given	5	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	100
5.	Activities that allow more interaction among students are performed	4	80	1	20	0	0	0	0	5	100
6.	There is more interaction between the teacher and the students.	5	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	100
7.	It is easier to remember students' names	5	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	100

Author: Soraya Del Pozo

Source: Teachers from three elementary schools and two high schools

Table 2

Table 2. Students' perceptions

N°	In classes with small 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.	51	85	3	5	6	10	0	0	60	100
2.	The students are attentive and participate in class activities.	30	50	18	30	3	5	9	15	60	100
3.	The students can better concentrate because there is less noise in the classroom.	40	67	5	8	9	15	6	10	60	100
4.	The classroom space allows students to carry out the activities assigned by the teacher	55	92	5	8	0	0	0	0	60	100
5.	Students receive proper feedback from the teacher.	35	58	18	30	4	7	3	5	60	100
6.	There is interaction between the students	51	85	1	2	8	13	0	0	60	100
7.	There is interaction between the teacher and students.	48	80	10	17	2	3	0	0	60	100
8.	The teacher remembers the students' names.	57	95	3	5	0	0	0	0	60	100

Author: Soraya Del Pozo

Source: Students from three elementary schools and two high schools

All teachers' responses from the sample show their agreement as a 100% *Totally Agree*. It confirms that it is easier for them to design activities for small classes that help students to practice the lessons that they have learned. Students' responses to the same question show almost similar results.

Table 2 shows that 85% of the students *totally agree*, 5% of the participants *agree*, and 10% *partially agree* with the question "The activities done in class help to apply what students learn." This means that most students believe that strengthening academic activities are performed in class.

As it can be appreciated, no hindrance was found for the teacher's question: Are the students attentive and participate in class activities?

Teachers as well as students share their perceptions of feasibility and workability when teaching and learning in small classes.

The results are in agreement with Hoover (2003), who explains the idea when teachers are working in small classes a successful lesson consists of preparing and handing out the materials, beginning the lesson, delivering instructions and assigning the work.

The aforementioned results coincide with the class observations, in which it was confirmed that all of the students were involved during English class activities. Regarding item 2 from table 1, "The students are attentive and participate in class activities," the teachers demonstrated that more than a half of the students pay attention and actively participate during the lesson. The students also felt the same as there are no physical or emotional problems for the students to get involved in the performed activities because the reduced number of students help to focus on the lesson and improve the class participation.

Referring to the statement that in small classes the students are attentive and participate in class activities, the results show that 60% of the teachers *totally agree*, 40% of the participants *agree*, and 20% of them *partially agree*. These results are similar to the responses of the students in which the 50% *totally agree*, 30% *agree*, 5% of them *partially agree* and 15% *disagree*, which means that the teachers and the students believe that, in small classes, it is easier to be attentive and to get involved with the activities.

According to Harmer (2007), the most important goal is to engage the student in the activities and to aid them by providing clear, detailed and chronological instructions.

During the class observations it was impressive to see that no students were ever neglected, but instead they were incorporated into the learning plan and got the chance to be involved in the class activities.

Continuing with the analysis, teachers feel that in small classes the physical space is sufficient for the performance of their activities. In table 1 item 3 “Classroom space allows students to properly do the activities designed,” 100% of the teachers *totally agree*. In table 2 in same item, “the students can easily concentrate because the classroom is not a noisy place,” 67% of the students *totally agree*, 8% of the participants *agree*, 15% of them *partially agree* and 10% *disagree*; and referring to the statement in item 4 that the physical classroom space allows for a proper development of the activities assigned by the teacher, 92% of the students *totally agree* and 8% of them *agree*.

Making reference to the classroom environment, Jalomgo and Isenberg (2004) state that teachers must be mindful not only of the physical environment but

also of the atmosphere in the classroom to ensure that students avoid injuries and to maximize their learning. A noisy environment can seriously affect a child`s self-esteem; security and comfort; autonomy; self-control; and peer interaction.

The observations at elementary schools demonstrated that the classroom flows in a quiet and harmonious atmosphere and that the physical space is sufficient to perform class activities within which the students can easily concentrate and move around. It was a surprise to see how many of the students were eager to answer the teachers` questions and they were very willing to participate in the games that were designed to practice relevant grammar and vocabulary in a relaxed and fun format. This does not tend to happen in high schools as the students murmur and joke around with their peers, creating noise and discomfort for the teacher even when the space is adequate and an appropriated planning has been done.

The teachers believe that feedback can be easily provided when working with small classes as it is more feasible to give continuous feedback.

Regarding item 4 in table 1 “Appropriate feedback can be given,” 100% of the surveyed teachers *totally agree*. In table 2 item 5, “Students receive proper feedback from the teacher,” out of the 60 surveyed students, 58% *totally agree*, 30% of the students *agree*, 7% *partially agree* and 5% *disagree*.

With regard to feedback, Capel, Leask and Turner 2005 agreed that feedback can help with the performance of the class as well as with the academic progress as it gives the students the chance to keep track of their learning progress.

During class observations, it was noticed that teachers provided adequate feedback during the lesson as they were easily able to manage groups with few students enrolled and that this extra help provided by the teacher was beneficial for

the students' academic performance as the class activities were completed on time. The students believe that there is an active interaction between them and this perception is shared by the teachers as they can easily interact with the students.

Regarding item 5 from table 1 "Activities that allow more interaction among students are performed," 80% of the surveyed teachers *totally agree* and 20% of them agree. In table 2 item 6 "There is interaction between the students," 85% of the students *totally agree*, 2% of the participants *agree* and 13% *partially agree*.

Spaulding (1992) explains that in small classes, it is easier to have teacher student relationships characterized by mutual affection, respect and trust which leads to high levels of academic motivation.

The observations demonstrated that the smaller the class, the more interaction between students and a greater communication between teacher-pupil is achieved. Students feel more confident interacting and helping each other as they repeatedly clarify their doubts between them instead of asking the teacher.

Making reference to teacher-students interaction in item 6, table 1, 100% of the teachers *totally agree*.

Regarding item 7, table 2 for the questions "There is interaction between the teacher and students," 80% of the students *totally agree*, 17% of the participants *agree*, and the 3% *partially agree*.

Regarding interaction in the class, Spaulding (1992) affirms the results as he states that students tend to have a better relationship with their teacher and that an improvement in the students' academic competence is shown, when the teacher is not an impulsive person who doesn't rely too heavily on punishment when trying correct the students' behavior.

The observations showed that in small classes teachers had the chance to interact with their students thereby optimizing the time management at elementary schools. However, at high school, students did not interact contrary to what they answered in the questionnaire, so the teacher was encouraging them all the time and trying to control the students' behavior.

Regarding item 7, in table 1 "It is easier to remember students' names," 100% of the teachers *totally agree*. In table 2 item 8, "The teacher remembers the students' names," 95% of the students *totally agree* and 5% of the students *agree*.

In respect of rapport, Lewis, and Hill, (1985) suggested that if the teacher wants to improve the students' performance in order to succeed, then it is necessary to bear in mind several aspects such as understanding the students' culture; considering the students' likes and dislikes; getting involved in the relationships with their peers; promoting home support; and knowing what their dreams, strengths and vulnerabilities are. Furthermore, the observations showed that the teacher knows all the students names as well as their academic needs. The students share the teacher's perception as they affirm that the teacher is able to remember their full names.

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

Table 1
Teachers' perceptions

N°	In classes with a small number of students, it is easier to:	Totally agree		Agree		Partially agree		Disagree		TOTAL	
		F	%	F	%	f	%	F	%	F	%
8	Design and apply activities that allow students to practice listening skills.	5	100							5	100
9.	Design and apply activities that allow students to practice speaking skills.	4	80	1	20					5	100
10.	Design and apply activities that allow students to practice the reading skills.	5	100							5	100
11.	Design and apply activities that allow students to practice the writing skills.	5	100							5	100
12.	Design and apply group work activities	2	40	3	60					5	100
13.	Design and apply individual activities	5	100							5	100
14.	Use technology tools.			2	40			3	60	5	100
15.	Use didactic materials	4	80	1	20					5	100

Author: Soraya Del Pozo

Source: Teachers from three elementary schools and two high schools

Table 2

Students' perceptions

N°	In classes with a small number of students:	Totally agree		Agree		Partially agree		Disagree		TOTAL	
		F	%	F	%	f	%	F	%	F	%
9.	The activities done allow students to practice the listening skills.	24	40	18	30	6	10	12	20	60	100
10.	The activities done allow students to practice the speaking skills	42	70	3	5	12	20	3	5	60	100
11.	The activities done allow students to practice the reading skills	45	75	2	3	7	12	6	10	60	100
12.	The activities done allow students to practice the writing skills.	48	80	4	7	6	10	2	3	60	100
13.	Group work activities are used.	36	60	3	5	3	5	15	25	60	100
14.	Individual activities are used.	48	80	4	7	6	10	2	3	60	100
15.	Technological tools are used.	18	30	6	10	30	50	6	10	60	100
16.	Didactic materials are used.	30	50	9	15	15	25	6	10	60	100

Author: Soraya Del Pozo

Source: Students from three elementary schools and two high schools

When analyzing small classes, teachers feel more comfortable when applying their teaching strategies as it is easier to work on listening activities during the lesson when a small amount of students are enrolled.

According to the results of the questionnaire, all of the surveyed teachers (which represent 100%) *totally agree* that in small classes it is easier to design and apply activities that allow students to practice listening skills. In addition, the responses of the students coincide with the responses of the teachers that in small classes the activities done allow the students to practice the speaking skills. Thus in table 2 item 9, 40 % of the students *totally agree*, 30% of the participants agree, 10% of them *partially agree* and 20% disagree. Teachers and students perceive that they have the opportunity to communicate with each other easily which supports the opinion of Olantunde and Sunday (2011) who concluded that it is only possible to give enough individualized attention to those who need it in classes of 20 students or less when listening activities are performed; the smaller the group is, the more manageable it is in terms of academic and behavioral issues. On the other hand, Underwood (1989) proposes strategies such as jigsaw activities for listening tasks when working with small classes.

During the observation, CD audio activities were performed and all the students did their best matching the speakers A–E with the comments in 1–6. The students showed a cooperative attitude but, out of the whole class, 20 % of the students weren't able to complete the activity. The teacher's recollection was that the small percentage of students in the group who were unable to complete the activity occurred because they were shy students and some of them did not have the sufficient vocabulary nor the grammar skills because they had been recently enrolled at the school.

Regarding item 9 from table 1, in small classes it is easier to design and apply activities that allow students to practice speaking skills. From the teachers surveyed,

80% *totally agree* and 20% *agree*. In table 2, item 10, regarding the question that in small classes the activities performed during the lesson allow students to practice speaking skills, it shows that 70% of the students *totally agree*, 5% of them *agree*, 20% of them *partially agree* and the other 5% *disagree*.

The results are concurrent with the findings of Doff, (1988) who proposes role-playing as a speaking strategy which encourages the students to become active participants in the lesson who are able to experience what it may have felt like to have been in a particular situation, simulating a real life experiences while giving them the chance to improve their vocabulary, pronunciation and oral syntax skills.

It is evident from the results that the majority of the students felt that communication flowed in a suitable manner when the teacher applied the right tools. Furthermore, the observation demonstrated that the students made an effort by talking in English even when they were asking for materials or when talking about personal issues as the teacher was encouraging the students all the time and asking them to speak in English during her class. Therefore, the results of the observations are consistent with the responses of both questionnaires.

Teachers and students believe that activities are more easily carried out in small groups. In table 1, item 10, regarding the question that in small classes it is easier to design activities which allow students to practise reading skills, all of the teachers (which represent 100%) *totally agree*. In table 2, item 11 regarding the question that the activities performed during the lesson allow students to practice reading skills, 75% of the students *totally agree*, 3% *agree*, 12% *partially agree* and 10% of them *disagree*. Regarding table 1, item 10 and table 2, item 11, teachers as well as students have the perception that activities can be performed easily.

The head teacher said that it is easier to work with small groups as the students can practice individual reading one day per week. This activity is complemented by writing essays in order to reinforce the mentioned skills. This perception backs up what is suggested by the National Reading Panel (NICHD 2000) researchers as they recommend the following instructions regarding comprehension strategies to help readers become purposeful and active in small classes: understanding text structure, asking questions, summarizing, using schema, making use of prior knowledge, visualizing, using mental imagery, monitoring, inference, graphic organizers, and deeper meaning.

The observations demonstrated that students spend time and effort when applying reading comprehension activities as approaches to tasks are focused on different skills such as vocabulary, discernment capacity and pronunciation. Half of the students weren't able to finish the assignment and were asked to finish it at home.

Teachers agreed that designing activities in order to practice writing skills are easier as feedback can be provided during the learning process and complemented with previous knowledge. This is demonstrated by the answers to the question in table 1, item 11 that in small classes it is easier to design and apply activities that allow students to practice the writing skills: all of the teachers (which represent 100%) *totally agree*.

In table 2, item 12, that the activities performed during the lesson allowed the practicing of writing skills, 80 % of the surveyed students *totally agree*, 7% of them *agree*, 10% *partially agree* and 3% *disagree*.

This second table result reflects the opinion of Buller (2010), who points out that when teaching small groups, there is more time provided for the writing of

assignments by the students and that the teachers also have sufficient time to correct and give considered views on students' drafts. This statement is the opposite of what was observed and it is unclear the reasons for not completing the assignment even though the results of the survey showed that in table 2, item 12, 80% of the participants agreed that the activities performed allowed them to practice writing skills.

The various researches and the observations demonstrated that individual writing activities are often used with large classes but with small classes written activities can be optimized by using them as complement for providing feedback in difficult salient points. During the lesson, the students performed written activities related to a previous reading assignment; 50% of the class found it challenging as it was an individual piece of work.

Item 12 from table 1 regarding the question that in small classes it is easier to "design and apply group work activities", 40% of the surveyed teachers *totally agree*, and 60% of the participants *agree*.

Table 2, item 13, regarding the question that group work activities are used, 60% of the students *totally agree*, 5% *agree*, 5% of them *partially agree* and 25% *disagree*. The results displayed in table 1 and table 2 showed that when there is a lack of academic strategy when designing group work activities, the students tend to struggle as there are not enough of them to share opinions and to ask questions in order to clarify doubts as well as for exchanging different points of view.

In order to emphasize the importance of group work activities, Buller (2010) considers that one of the main problems when teaching small classes is that limited opinions are put forward due to the small amount of students enrolled.

On the other hand, Underwood (1989) and Doff (1988) propose different strategies to engage students when working in groups such as jigsaw activities and role-playing.

Furthermore, Mercer and Littleton (2007) assert that group activities allow students to improve their linguistic and social skills which are necessary to transmit ideas and to argue different opinions.

In spite of the pros and cons mentioned above, the observation demonstrated that the students finished an activity in ten minutes which was planned for at least twenty minutes as they quickly agreed with one point of view and weren't able to discuss the provided topic in more depth due to the lack of different perspectives.

Continuing with the analysis in table 1, item 13, regarding the question that in small classes it is easier to design and apply individual activities, it shows that 100% of the teachers *totally agree*.

In table 2, item 14, regarding the question that individual work is performed, 80% of the students *totally agree*, 7% *agree*, 10% *partially agree* and 3% *disagree*. Here, the result shows that teachers and students feel that it is easier to design and put into action individual activities when working with a reduced number of students. Buller (2010) proposes different strategies that might be used in order to facilitate individual work such as the Socratic Method and Seminars which stimulate students' critical thinking, instead of just focusing on book activities contrary to what was observed during the research.

The observation demonstrated that appropriate, individual academic development was performed as the students were using the workbook as well as the

student book during the class period and were able to complete the activities specified by the teacher on their own.

Regarding technological resources, these tools are easier to use when the school has an adequate infrastructure.

In item 14 from table 1, 40% of the teachers *agree*, and 60% of them *disagree* that in classes with a small number of students, it is easier to use technological tools. In addition, the majority of the responses of the students agree with the responses of the teachers as in table 2 item 15, where 30% of the students *totally agree*, 10% *agree*, 50% *partially agree* and 10% *disagree*. Although there were different responses from the students, the majority of them agreed with this topic.

The results were contrary to what Brinkley (1999) states as he believes that Computer technology is becoming both more useful and more cost effective for many fields of teaching as technology complements, and does not fundamentally alter, the elements of teaching.

The observation demonstrates that private schools have better infrastructure than public schools. But even when this feature was easily appreciated, teachers said that they do not use them much because the use of smart boards and technological tools needs an extra effort when planning the lesson. Furthermore, more time is needed to organize the class and on top of this, students' perspectives regarding the tools were that they were useless.

Regarding item 15, from table 1 for the question that in small classes it is easier to use didactic materials, 80% of the teachers *totally agree* and 20% of them *agree*.

In table 2, item 16 regarding the question that didactic materials are used, 50% of the students *totally agree*, 15% *agree*, 25% *partially agree*, and 10% *disagree*. The result confirms Hammer's view (2007) who expresses that classroom bulletin boards, worksheets, cds, projector and computers, are important didactic materials when shaping student's learning experience as these materials can create the sense of being reflected in the physical classroom environment.

The benefits of using didactic materials are stated by Dash and Dash (2007) who express that these materials help students to relate definitions to concrete practices as well as aid students to shape images with meanings. Moreover, didactic materials allow students to retain an acquired concept.

Students and teachers agreed that didactic materials are used almost in every single class and the observations result showed that didactic material is of utmost importance during the teaching-learning process as it helps to reinforce what has been taught and helped the students to improve in their visual discrimination skills.

How do students feel about learning English in small classes?

Table 1
Teachers' perceptions

N°	In classes with small number of students	Totally agree		Agree		Partially agree		Disagree		TOTAL	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
16	They are relaxed when speaking in front of their classmates.	3	60	1	20	1	20				100
17.	They are taken into account by the teacher because they have more opportunities to participate in the class.	5	100								100
18.	They are motivated to participate because of the small number of students.	4	80			1	20				100
19.	They are at ease because they can healthy compete with their classmates	3	60	2	40						100

Author: Soraya Del Pozo

Source: Teachers from three elementary schools and two high schools

Table 2

Students' perceptions

N°	In classes with small number of students:	Totally agree		Agree		Partially agree		Disagree		TOTAL	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
17.	I am relaxed when speaking in front of my classmates.	6	10	21	35	19	32	14	23		100
18.	I am taken into account by the teacher because I have more opportunities to participate in class	48	80	8	13	4	7				100
19.	I am motivated to participate because of the small number of classmates.	28	47	12	20	6	10	14	23		100
20	I am at ease because I can compete healthily with my classmates.	22	37	12	20	15	25	11	18		100

Author: Soraya Del Pozo

Source: Students from three elementary schools and two high schools

According to the results of the questionnaires 60% of the teachers *totally agree*, 20% *agree* and 20% *partially agree* that in small classes the students are relaxed when speaking in front of their classmates. In addition, the responses of students agree with this topic and with the responses of the teachers; as 10% of the students *totally agree*, 35% *agree*, 32% *partially agree* and 23% *disagree*.

Table 2, item 17 shows that 23% of the participants feel they are not as relaxed as they should feel contrary to the research carried out by Blatchford, Bassett and Brown (2011) who explain that in small classes is easier for students to focus their attention on their teacher's explanation as there is a pleasant atmosphere where the students can interact with out pressure.

During the observations the students only paid attention to the teacher for short periods of time; they were easily distracted and talked frequently.

Continuing with the analysis, all of the surveyed teachers 100% *totally agree* that in classes with small number of students that they are taken into account by the teachers as they have more opportunities to participate in class. Similar to these responses, the majority of the students agreed with the same topic as 80% of the students *totally agree*, 13% *agree*, 32% *partially agree* and 33% *disagree*.

The observations demonstrated that all the students got the chance to actively participate in the proposed lesson and that teachers were flexible in accordance to different student's academic and behavioral needs, getting though the subject at the student's speed.

In addition, Caspari, Kuhlthau and Maniotes (2007) states that when students are in groups of five or six members, they have more opportunities to express their academic and behavioral needs. Consequently, students feel comfortable when they take a chance to express their thoughts and opinions.

In table 1, item 18, regarding the question that in small classes students feel motivated to participate because there are few students in the class, 80% of the teachers *totally agree* while 20% *partially agree*.

In table 2 item 19, regarding to the question that in small classes the students feel motivated to participate as there are few students enrolled, 47% of the students *totally agree*, 20% *agree*, 10% *partially agree* and 23% *disagree*. Here, data shows that the majority of students feel motivated, backing up the findings of Zeinab, Khazaei and Saeed (2012) which showed that in small classes students are more motivated and actively engaged with the lesson and this is reflected in their class participation. Observations demonstrated that students were engaged during the lesson despite the fact that they were talking to each other about other issues.

In addition, Kottler, Kottler, and Street (2008) state that students are able to communicate in a less intimidating environment when there are not many students.

With regard to healthy student competition, 60% of the surveyed teachers *totally agree* and 40% *of them agree*.

In table 2, item 20 from the question that in small classes the students feel comfortable and can compete healthily with their classmates, 37% of the students *totally agree*, 20% *agree*, 25% *partially agree* and 11% *disagree*.

The results do not match with the criterion of Basset, Blatchford, Brown, Martin, and Russell, (2007) who think that in large classes, the role of the student during teacher-student interaction is more passive as they spend a lot of time

listening which is contrary to what happens in small classes where students interact more often.

This is contradictory to the observation results as it demonstrated that students were not interested in competing due to the few number of students as they easily agree with their peers opinion without much debate.

Are there any limitations when teaching English in small classes?

Table 1
Teachers' perceptions

N°	In classes with small number of students:	Totally agree		Agree		Partially agree		Disagree		TOTAL	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
21.	There is anxiety among students because there is more control from the part of the teacher.	3	60					2	40	5	100
22.	Listening and speaking skills are more difficult to develop.					1	20	4	80	5	100

Author: Soraya Del Pozo

Source: Teacher`s questionnaire.

Table 2
Students' perceptions

N°	In classes with small number of students:	Totally agree		Agree		Partially agree		Disagree		TOTAL	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	f	%
21.	There is anxiety among students because there is more control on the part of the teacher.	42	70	2	3	3	5	13	22	60	100
22.	Listening and speaking skills are more difficult to develop.			6	10	4	7	50	83	60	100

Author: Soraya Del Pozo

Source: Student`s questionnaire.

One of the most common problems facing small classes is anxiety among students. Certainly the added pressures of being in a small environment, involves disturbances in mood, thinking, behavior and physiological activity.

According to the results of the questionnaires, 60% of the teachers *totally agree* and 40% *disagree* that in small classes there is anxiety among students as there is more control on the part of the teacher. In addition to the responses of the teachers, 70% of the students *totally agree*, 3% *agree*, 5% *partially agree* while 22% *disagree*.

The results backs up Blatchford, Bassett, Goldstein and Martin's investigation in which they concluded that in small classes there is more teacher

task time with pupils; more teacher support for learning; and easier classroom control and student management.

The observation result shows that the majority of the students perceive the atmosphere more stressful as individual students are questioned repeatedly.

In table 1, item 22, regarding the question that in classes with a small number of students listening and speaking skills are more difficult to develop, 20% of the surveyed teachers *partially agree* whereas 80% *disagree*.

In table 2, item 22, regarding the question that in classes with a small number of students listening and speaking skills are more difficult to develop, 10% of the students *agree*, 7% *partially agree* and 83% *disagree*. The data demonstrated that teachers and students feel that listening and speaking activities are easy to perform when teaching small classes. The observation agreed with the results of a study made in Iran by Zeinab, khazaei & Saeed (2012) which shows that as class size increased, willingness to communicate decreased.

Another study by Jesness (2014) suggested that listening and speaking are the most difficult skills to practice in large classes and that the ideal condition to develop these skills are in classes with a small number of students.

Based on the results, no hindrance was found in order to develop speaking and listening skills in small classes. The responses of the students on the questionnaire showed that they feel anxious as there is more control by the teacher. However, anxiety among students was easily controlled by the teacher as she started a game related to vocabulary words.

CONCLUSIONS

This research demonstrates that students in small classes receive more benefits than drawbacks. They acquire continuous feedback from their teacher. In the same way, students have the opportunity to participate in class actively.

According to the results, teachers and students feel that teaching and learning in small classes provides the opportunity to get to know each other. Also, it is easier for the teacher to become aware of each student's academic level and behavior.

It was observed that when audio CD activities were performed, all of the students tried their best during this activity. The students showed a cooperative attitude during the listening exercise. The teachers recalled that a small percentage of students in the group were not able to complete the tasks because they were either shy or did not have the sufficient knowledge of vocabulary or grammar rules.

The results of this study demonstrates that in small classes, students do not feel comfortable competing and participating between peers because some students feel they are monitored and controlled all the time by their teacher. Additionally, they feel anxious and nervous to speak in front of the class.

In small classes, the space available allows the class room tables to be arranged in such a way that facilitates effective performance of the activities which are presented by the teacher. Students have the opportunity to build a close interaction not only with their classmates but also with their teacher.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Since teacher feedback is excessive, one recommendation is to let the students work by themselves by putting them into heterogeneous groups so they can help each other by inducting and deducting the information provided by the teacher; this will help to break the codependency found between students and teacher.

Due to the fact that students at high schools may become inattentive and fail to participate during class activities, teachers should place student's seats closer to the teacher in order to better monitor and control them thereby engendering a more suitable atmosphere for more effective learning. Furthermore, both written and speaking instructions should be given in order to ensure that students who get easily distracted can refer to the written instructions to get back on track. Instructions should be given chronologically and checklists should be provided so that students can self-regulate and accomplish the lesson goals.

Teachers should take advantage of the good relationships between students by making them to work in small groups in lesson activities with friends as a source of motivation, and by encouraging them to express their thoughts without fear of negative criticism for expressing different opinions.

The inclusion of activities and strategies that induce healthy competition within the classroom can help to create challenges between groups of individuals in order to keep the students motivated, engaged and actively participating.

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**UNIVERSIDAD TÉCNICA PARTICULAR DE LOJA
OPEN AND DISTANCE MODALITY
ENGLISH DEGREE**

Dear teacher:

The aim of this questionnaire is to obtain your opinion related to English teaching in small classes (20 students per classroom or less)

The information that you will provide will only be used for academic/research purposes. Please answer the following questions as honestly as possible

Informative data: Please fill in the information below

Name of institution:			
Type of institution:	Public () Private ()		
	Elementary school ()	High School ()	Institute()
city:			

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

Strategy: After reading each ítem, answer using the liker-scale.

Very satisfactory:	Totally agree
Satisfactory:	Agree
Somewhat satisfactory:	Partially agree
Unsatisfactory:	Disagree

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

N°	In small classes	Totally agree	Agree	Partially agree	Disagree	TOTAL
1.	It is easier to design activities that allow students to put into practice what they have learned in class.					
2.	Students are attentive and actively participate in class activities					
3.	Physical space allows that the activities performed by you are properly developed					
4.	Adequate feedback can be done					
5.	Activities that allow a greater interaction between students are performed					
6.	There is more interaction between teacher and students					
7.	It is easy for you to remember the students' names					

B. Teaching strategies and resources that benefit the teaching of English in small classes

N°	In small classes it is more feasible	Totally agree	Agree	Partially agree	Disagree	TOTAL
8	To design activities that allow students to practice listening skills					
9.	To design activities that allow students to practice speaking skills					
10.	To design activities that allow students to practice reading skills					
11.	To design activities that allow students to practice writing skills					
12.	To design and put into action group work activities.					
13.	To design and put into action individual activities					
14.	To use technological sources.					
15.	To use didactic materials.					

C. Opinion on students` feelings about learning English in small classes.

N°	In small classes students feel	Totally agree	Agree	Partially agree	Disagree	TOTAL
16.	Relaxed when they talk with their classmates					
17.	Included as they have more opportunities to practice in class.					
18.	Motivated to participate because there are few students in the class					
19.	Comfortable as they can compete with their other classmates.					

D. Limitations when teaching English in small classes

N°	In small classes (20 or less students per class)	Totally agree	Agree	Partially agree	Disagree	TOTAL
21.	There is anxiety among students as they are more controlled by the teacher.					
22.	It is difficult to practice listening and speaking skills					

ANNEXES



UNIVERSIDAD TÉCNICA PARTICULAR DE LOJA
OPEN AND DISTANCE MODALITY
ENGLISH DEGREE

Dear student:

The aim of this questionnaire is to obtain your opinion related to English teaching in small classes (20 students per classroom or less)

The information that you will provide will only be used for academic/research purposes. Please answer the following questions as honestly as possible

Informative data: Please fill in the information below

Name of institution:			
Type of institution:	Public () Private ()		
	Elementary school ()	High School ()	Institute()
	ity:		

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

Strategy: After reading each ítem, answer using the like-scale.

Very satisfactory:	Totally agree
Satisfactory:	Agree
Somewhat satisfactory:	Partially agree
Unsatisfactory:	Disagree

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

No	In classes with a small number of students:	Totally agree	Agree	Partially agree	Disagree
1.	It is easier to design activities that help the students to apply what they have learned.				
2.	The students are attentive and participate in class activities.				
3.	Classroom space allows students to properly do the activities designed.				
4.	Appropriate feedback can be given.				
5.	Activities that allow more interaction among students are performed.				
6.	There is more interaction between the teacher and the students.				
7.	It is easier to remember students' names.				

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

No	In classes with small number of students, it is easier to:	Totally agree	Agree	Partially agree	Disagree
8.	Design and apply activities that allow student to practice listening skills.				
9.	Design and apply activities that allow student to practice speaking skills.				
10.	Design and apply activities that allow student to practice reading skills.				
11.	Design and apply activities that allow student to practice writing skills.				
12.	Design and apply group work activities.				
13.	Design and apply individual activities.				
14.	Use technological tools.				
15.	Use didactic materials.				

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

No	In classes with small number of students,	Totally agree	Agree	Partially agree	Disagree
16.	They are relaxed when speaking in front of their classmates.				
17.	They are taken into account by the teacher because they have more opportunities to participate in class.				
18.	They are motivated to participate because of the small number of students.				
19.	They are at ease because they can healthy compete with their classmates.				

D. Limitations of learning English in small classes.

No	In classes with small number of students:	Totally agree	Agree	Partially agree	Disagree
20.	There is anxiety among students because there is more control from the part of the teacher.				
21.	Listening and speaking skills are more difficult to develop.				

Observer		Yes	No
1.	The activities performed by the teacher allow the students to practice what they have learned		
2.	Are all the students attentive and actively participating in the class activities.		
3.	Physical classroom space allows that the activities performed by the teacher develop in a suitable way.		
4.	The teacher provides appropriate feedback as there are few students in the class.		
5.	Is there interaction among students?		
6.	Is there teacher- student interaction?		
7.	Does the teacher remember the students' names?		
8.	Activities that allow students to practice listening skills are performed		
9.	Activities that allow students to practice speaking skills are performed		
10.	Activities that allow students to practice reading skills are performed		
11.	Activities that allow students to practice writing skills are performed		
12.	Group work activities are used		
13.	Individual work activities are used		
14.	Technological sources are used.		
15.	Didactic materials are used		
16.	The students are relaxed when they speak with their peers.		
17.	Students have a greater opportunity to express their thoughts.		
18.	The students show interest in participating in the activities performed during the lesson		

19.	The students can compete with their classmates		
20.	The students are relaxed because there is not a lot of noise in the classroom		
21.	The students do not feel relaxed as there is more control from the teacher		
22.	It is difficult to do listening and speaking activities		