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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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APROBACIÓN DEL DIRECTOR DEL TRABAJO DE TITULACIÓN

Magister

Nina Nesterenko

DOCENTE DE LA TITULACION

De mi consideración:

El presente trabajo de titulación: The influence of large classes in the English Language teaching-learning process in Ecuadorian high schools, realizado por Rivera León Jimmy Darío, ha sido orientado y revisado durante su ejecución, por cuanto se aprueba la presentación del mismo.

Loja, Abril del 2016

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DECLARACIÓN DE AUTORÍA Y CESIÓN DE DERECHOS

“Yo Rivera León Jimmy Darío declaro ser autor del presente trabajo de titulación: “The influence of large classes in the English Language teaching-learning process in Ecuadorian high schools”, de la Titulación de Ciencias de la Educación mención Inglés, siendo Nina Nesterenko directora del presente trabajo; y eximo expresamente a la Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja y a sus representantes legales de posibles reclamos y acciones legales. Además certifico que las ideas, conceptos, procedimientos y resultados vertidos en el presente trabajo investigativo, son de mi exclusiva responsabilidad.

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DEDICATION

To God for giving me breathe every day, to my mother for her love and teachings. And to my wife and children because they are my reason and motivation to accomplish my professional goals.

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Abstract

The present study is about the influence of large classes in the English language teaching-learning process in Ecuadorian high schools. This study aims to determine how instructional, social and psychological aspects of the teaching-learning process are affected by large classes.

The research was developed in a high school of Arenillas city in El Oro province. A questionnaire was applied to 215 students from 8th grade of basic education to third grade of senior high school, between 12 and 17 years old. Quantitative and qualitative methods were used in this study in order to interpret and analyze the information gathered. The questionnaire consisted of 21 questions divided in instructional, social and psychological aspects.

Results of this study show that large classes do affect the teaching-learning process in areas such as appropriate feedback, motivation to speak in front of peers, remembering students' names and so on. However, it was observed that teachers can use effective techniques that may alleviate the negative impact of large classes, for example pair work, group work and useful activities that help students to put into practice what they have learned.

Keywords: large classes, teaching-learning process, teachers, students

Resumen

El presente estudio es la influencia de las clases numerosas en el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje del idioma Inglés en las escuelas secundarias ecuatorianas. Este estudio tiene como objetivo determinar cómo los aspectos didácticos, sociales y psicológicos del proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje se ven afectados por las clases numerosas.

La investigación se desarrolló en una escuela secundaria de la ciudad de Arenillas en la provincia de El Oro. Se aplicó un cuestionario a 215 estudiantes de octavo año de educación básica a tercer año de secundaria, entre los 12 y 17 años de edad. Los métodos cuantitativos y cualitativos se utilizaron en este estudio con el fin de interpretar y analizar la información recopilada. El cuestionario consta de 21 preguntas divididas en aspectos educativos, sociales y psicológicos.

Los resultados de este estudio muestran que las clases numerosas afectan el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje en diversas áreas, tales como la retroalimentación adecuada, la motivación para hablar delante de sus compañeros, recordar los nombres de los estudiantes y así sucesivamente. Sin embargo, se observó que los profesores pueden utilizar técnicas efectivas que pueden aliviar los efectos negativos de las clases numerosas, por ejemplo el trabajo en par, trabajo en grupo y actividades útiles que ayudan a los estudiantes a practicar el lenguaje aprendido.

Palabras clave: clases numerosas, proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje, maestros, estudiantes.

Introduction

Ecuador is considered a country with a low level of English teaching, as well as other countries in Latin America. In our education system, English is a mandatory subject from eight year of basic education to senior year, with five hours of study per week. In spite of this study program, most of students who finished secondary education do not develop the basic written and oral skills to communicate appropriately in the English language.

For this reason, in the last years, Ecuadorian government is implementing policies and strategies in order to get better results in the teaching-learning process of the English language, such as improving the quality of teachers' training through scholarships, improving the curriculum or applying updating methodologies.

Among the many aspects that may influence students to have a poor mastery of English language, large classes is one of particular interests because this condition is a reality in Ecuadorian high schools. Large classes represent some common problems teachers face in a lesson, for example “too many people and fixed objects in a restricted space, not enough materials for everyone, not being able to respond to differing needs” (Woodward, 2001, p. 218). Considering these features and the fact that large classes are part of our reality, a research about its impact on students' performance deserves to be studied.

The present research has been titled “The influence of large classes in the English language teaching-learning process in Ecuadorian high schools” with the purpose to find out answers to 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?

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

This study is of vital importance because there is little information about this theme in our country. However, there are other authors who have researched similar topics related with large classes in other areas of the world such as in Hong Kong, where a study was conducted by Harfitt (2012) in order to examine how class size reduction might help to alleviate language learning anxiety in students. The research was developed in eight classes both large and small, these classes used the same materials, topics and tasks. The main results from this study show that students in small classes supported each other rather than criticize their work, therefore self-confidence, participation and learning was improved. On the other hand, students in large classes reported they felt nervous when speaking in front of class and that there was no sense of community or support between them, instead, students said that in large classes there were many classmates they do not really know or trust. This result showed that large classes produce more learning anxiety and that even teachers felt smaller classes facilitated interaction between students. A limitation for this research was the focus on just four cases, it means eight classes and four teachers.

Kathi (2010) also conducted a research about large classes in Nepal. This study was focused on exploring the common expectations of students who were learning English in a large group. The results gathered were categorized in six different areas: classroom management, establishing collaboration, range of tasks, giving feedback, classroom English and home assignment. The findings show that students like to be called by their first names, participate in sharing activities and group or pair work. Most of the students also expect fixed rules for the class, a dynamic teacher who moves all around and speak in English with limited use of mother tongue in the classroom, always

introducing new words to learn every lesson. Individual feedback is the preferred option and personalized home assignments due to the different levels of students in the same class.

Another study about large classes was conducted by Forero (2005) in Bogota, Colombia. The emphasis of this study was on finding out how task-based learning could be used to promote oral interaction in large groups. Results indicated that students changed their opinions about learning English after applying the task-based learning method, they were more interested in participate actively in class, they also were more confident to read and speak in English, as a result oral interaction was improved. The author concludes that to achieve good results it is important to give students plenty of opportunities to participate, change activities very often, change classroom settings, and use colorful and attractive materials. A limitation for this study was the fact that most of students who participated in class were the same students.

As well as the studies mentioned above, the present document aims to contribute to a better understanding of the influence of large classes on the teaching-learning process of the English language. For this reason, high schools, primary schools or any educational institution that is looking for improve the teaching of this language are among those who can benefit from the results of this study. In addition, teachers and students can also refer to this research to find useful information on the different issues about large classes' management. However, this study has some limitations. For example, the main source of data about this research is a questionnaire, although other useful data collection methods such as interviews or recordings were not used. Another limitation was the lack of a questionnaire applied to teachers because they have important viewpoints about the teaching-learning process in a large class.

Method

Settings and Participants

The present study was developed in Arenillas city, in El Oro province. The selected institution was Santo Tomas de Aquino high school. The sample population were 215 students from 8th grade of basic education to third grade of senior high school aged between 12 to 18 years old. Students were both male and female and they belonged to a medium-to-low social and economic level, their English level was very basic.

Procedures

In order to conduct this research, relevant literature about the effects of class size on the teaching-learning process of the English language was reviewed, sources such as books, journals, articles and previous studies of other authors were very useful. These sources helped to deepen understanding about the different teaching approaches, class management, class size, activities for large classes and so on; furthermore, the previous studies gave excellent examples about what happens within a large class and its effects on students' achievements.

The researcher used the quantitative method in order to gather and organize data collected; then this information was recorded and tabulated in a spreadsheet in excel program. Also the qualitative method was employed to observe class interaction and how it was developed during the lesson; afterward this method was applied to describe and analyze the statistical data gathered.

The process of data gathering began by applying a survey to students. The survey consisted of 21 questions divided into three features, instructional, social and psychological. Students answered each item by choosing one of the different options according to their points of view about the teaching-learning process in the classroom.

The options were “totally agree”, “agree”, “partially agree” and “disagree”. Also, the researcher used note-taking technique and observation. The questions were open-ended and written in English, after gathering of results, data was recorded in a spreadsheet and tabulated according to the three main aspects of instructional, social and psychological, and then these data was represented in statistical charts. These data and charts are the foundation of the analysis and description of results, also comments of authors and previous studies included in the literature review were used to describe survey results using the qualitative method.

DISCUSSION

Literature Review

How challenging could be teaching an English class? Would it be enough just the knowledge I have acquired? Does the class size matter? How should I control discipline? These are some of the questions teachers have when beginning teaching English language. Very soon they recognize it is essential to understand how a second language is learned and taught. One of the main challenges are the implications of working with large classes such as discipline, participation and assessment of each student. What teachers need to know is how to apply the different teaching approaches and methods to teach English, the techniques to teach large classes, and also they need to understand how class size affects the behavior or progress of a student during the class.

In this section, these important aspects of teaching English will be reviewed one by one according to the different criteria of many outstanding authors and several important studies about class size and its effects on students.

Teaching approaches and methods

Language is about communication between people and not only to have knowledge about it (Harmer, 2007). This is the essence of communicative language teaching approach. Harmer expresses that in this approach there are two chief characteristics. The first characteristic is that students need to use language to communicate about something they want, agree, disagree, or invite, suggest, reject, etc. The second characteristic is that language will be acquired for itself as students are exposed to enough practice of communicating real messages to each other and not only

using chunks of grammar structures, it is also very important that students have a lot of opportunities to use language in real situations.

Another important approach mentioned by Harmer is Task Based learning (TBL). In this approach the task is the main element of learning. In contrast with communicative language teaching where language is the focus, in TBL students complete a task and then they reflect on the language used including grammatical mistakes. In this method, tasks must be real-life tasks such as sharing personal information, presenting a certain topic, asking directions, etc. Harmer also says a syllabus for this approach could be a list of activities that involve real communication.

The TBL approach also explains that it is not enough to give students comprehensible input but to provide tasks that engage them in naturalistic and meaningful communication. In addition, tasks are motivational because they may be presented in several ways and formats, for example, tasks may include physical activities, authentic language, real situations, partnership collaboration and different experience of the learners (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

An important traditional approach to review is the Grammar-Translation Method. This approach sustains that "a fundamental purpose of learning a foreign language is to be able to read literature written in the target language." (Larsen-Freeman, 2000, p. 17). The process of language teaching is through the student's native language, there is little or no explanations in the target language. Exercises and practices are focused on reading and writing skills, while listening and speaking skills receive little attention.

In Grammar-Translation Method the basic unit of teaching and language practice is the sentence, it is used to develop the different stages of the lesson. In a typical class using this approach, there will be a lot of practice translating sentences into and out of

the target language, while vocabulary and grammar are taught in an organized and systematic way (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

Other common approaches used to teach English are Total Physical Response (TPR) and Content-Based Instruction. Richards & Rodgers (2001) explain that the main goal of total physical response method is to teach basic speaking skills, this method is based upon physical activities, teacher plays a central role giving instructions in imperative form, and students listen and respond physically to these commands. Meaning is emphasized rather than specific elements of language such as grammar. Finally, in the Content-Based Instruction approach, there is a central principle, "People learn a second language more successfully when they use the language as a mean of acquiring information, rather than as an end in itself" (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 207). According to this principle, it is expected that students learn a second language while they study full content about a subject in that language. Lightbown & Spada (2006) state that this method is well known and used in institutions to give bilingual education, obtaining as a result some advantages such as the increase of motivation because topics and material studied are valued to students, moreover vocabulary, language structure, comprehension skills and communicative competence are improved. However, these authors clarify that accuracy is not fully developed using just this method, it is necessary to give a form-focused instruction to students to achieve better results.

As we have seen, each method of language teaching has its own characteristics, it is not enough to use just one method in particular, but it is more important to use the method that best applies to accomplish the objectives of a lesson. A wise teacher should learn to use the different approaches in order to give students a wide range of experiences in class and promote the process of teaching-learning of a language.

Class size

As stated by Harmer (2008), the techniques used by a teacher depends in some way on the class size. This author also explains that teachers who manage a large class may ask themselves about how to give personal attention to each student, promote enough interaction and set effective organization for the classroom. Most people think of a big class as more difficult to teach than a smaller one, but this is not true. Research has shown that student learning depends more on quality of teaching than on class size, opportunities for learning are similar in both, large or small classes (UNESCO, 2006). Furthermore, the definition of large class may be different around the world, in some areas a class of 25-35 students is big, while in others this is still a small one, inclusive some teachers would say for them a large class has 60 or 80 students, as a conclusion a large class has no exact size (Harmer, 2008; UNESCO, 2006).

According to Harmer (2008), class size is an important issue to teachers because they would use different techniques and activities to teach students, for example, practicing speaking skills, arranging logistical problems, changing from an activity to another and so on.

Managing learning

During a lesson there are many things to do, at the beginning, at the middle and at the end of the class; a teacher must be well prepared to teach a lesson, this include many instructions in order to have students to perform the activities. About this topic, Gower and Walters (2005) explain that brief instructions are more efficient and more comprehensible than longer explanations in order to avoid misunderstanding. They suggest common instructions like “Everybody; All together; Again; Try again; Look (at the picture); Listen; Repeat; Say (X); Tell me; Look at the board; Stand up; Turn to

page...”(Gower & Walters, 2005, p. 41). Maxom (2009) highlights the importance of talking slow and clear, using lots of gestures, and planning of instructions beforehand.

An essential element of managing learning is feedback. According to Maxom (2009), feedback is a time to correct errors and to stand out achievements; this must be scheduled in each lesson plan. This author states that it is appropriate to give feedback after the end of an activity in order to review students’ work, at the end of a lesson in order to review errors not related to the main topic of the class, and finally after written homework to check if there is a point needing to be reinforced.

It is said that feedback is a fundamental responsibility of a teacher; it is used in order to help students to be self-conscious of their learning and to correct themselves to evaluate their progress (Gower & Walters, 2005).

Managing large classes

Managing large classes has additional problems related with the amount of students, such as controlling of the discipline, giving enough attention to each student, checking progress, setting classroom arrangement and so on. There are some practical ideas presented by Woodward (2001) to manage a large class. First, to control discipline it is vital to learn students' names, use eye contact and use a clear system to attract students' attention; otherwise, you can waste a lot of time trying to control the whole group. Second, use students to do basic chores such as taking the register, cleaning up the classroom and handing out materials. Third, to have effective pair and group work, teachers have students involved in interdependence activities, they also plan clear step by step instructions, and give clear timing for each task.

Harmer (2008) claims that establishing good routines will improve the daily management of a large class. He sustains that if students are taught to recognize routine activities, they will work more efficiently and more quickly with daily tasks such as

setting and collecting homework, organizing students into groups, taking the register, etc. This process should be taught at the start of a course, although it “might take some time at the beginning but will save time later on” (p. 125).

Other techniques mentioned by Harmer to manage large classes are worksheets and chorus reaction; the last is especially useful to give an opportunity of repetition for each student, and it is also useful at beginning levels.

To summarize, a good management of large classes will always include a good management of students work; this suggests that teachers will try to have students doing something during all the lesson; as a result, it will be easier to control discipline and give instructions. In fact, the key is to maintain students doing individual work to mitigate the effects of working with a large group (Harmer, 2008).

Activities for working with large classes

As we have seen, in big groups, participation is very important, for this reason, activities for large classes should require each student to be involved. In its publication, UNESCO (2006) refers to a variety of activities such as drawing, labeling, making outlines, listing and brainstorming in order to find out a solution to the problem or task given. Other examples of useful activities are short in-class writing assignments, oral summaries, readings, reports, self-evaluation between students. In brief, the key is to assign tasks so that students resolve the problem by themselves individually or in groups rather than to ask questions to the whole class.

Baker and Westrup (2000) also present us some examples of activities for working with large classes. First of them is dominoes, which is a funny game that can be used to match words, pictures, definitions of words, words with its suitable translation, and so on. For beginners, it can be very useful to make the dominoes cards by themselves. Second activity could be a spelling game on the blackboard, for

example, reordering jumbled-up letters, guessing the right word according to the blank spaces provided or the well known game noughts and crosses. As a third activity, Baker and Westrup mentioned that crosswords are helpful to have students work in groups.

Finally, using the memorizing lists as explained below:

Go round the group or class, in random order. The first student thinks of an item from a list, for example, a shopping list or a list of favourite games. The next student repeats the word and adds their own word. The other students, in turn, repeat the full list and each student adds an item of his or her own. The list gets longer and more difficult to remember. (p. 41)

Classroom space and seating arrangement

Classroom space influences directly the teaching-learning process during a class. It has been said that classroom space has a negative effect on student's achievement, particularly in large classes because "hot, crowded, and noisy, small classroom overflowing with many students offer a poor learning setting" (UNESCO, 2006, p. 6). Teachers have to prepare to face this challenge, because neither classroom space nor amount of students enrolled in a class is a variable upon teachers have control, in fact "very few classrooms are ideal settings for learning and, especially in large classes" (p. 6)

Nevertheless, UNESCO also claims that despite of classroom space, it is possible for teachers to establish a good classroom environment. If teachers consider their creativity, energy, and preparation in order to create a relaxed environment for the learning process, than students will feel more comfortable in the classroom, as a result, activities and tasks will be done more efficiently. One way to maximize classroom space is to organize the appropriate seating arrangement according to the task, which main purpose is to get students in an atmosphere that promotes group discussion.

Harmer (2007) gives some models of seating arrangement. For example, orderly rows are arrangements where teachers and students can face each other directly, facilitating lectures, eye contact, discipline and observation. However, this arrangement does not facilitate the exchange of information, and does not allow eye contact between students, since this would cause a disorder in classroom. On the other hand, circles and horseshoes offer a friendly atmosphere where students feel more comfortable to talk openly and switch feelings and information. In horseshoes the teacher is situated “at the open end of the arrangement”, near the board, projector or tape player, while in circles the teacher’s position is less controlling (Harmer, 2007, p. 20). Another way of organization is having students working in groups or pairs. The advantage of group work is that students have more opportunities to put in practice the language they know because it is expected that each member of the group does his or her part of the task.

Different levels of proficiency

Learning how to manage different levels of proficiency is vital to reach success in an English class. Ur (1991) defined that present learner’s proficiency or ability is a result of previous learning experiences, whether good or bad. The question is “How do I get students to work according to their full potencial?” (Ur, 1991, p. 308). This author suggests to use the ‘compulsory + optional’ strategy, this means that an activity or task will have some requirements that each student should do, while other components can be done by some. For example, this strategy may be used in tests by giving students some compulsory questions to answer and at the same time giving some extra activities that offer bonus points. Experience indicates that rather than do less, lower proficiency students do more, may be because they prefer challenge instead of easiness (Ur, 1991).

Another strategy indicated by Ur (1991) is open-ending; this technique refers to learning tasks that allow a variety of acceptable answers rather than a single answer, it

means there is not a 'right answer' because tasks let students share their own views and opinions. For example, the question 'Can you suggest things a good teacher does?' suggests there are many possible responses. This technique may be very suitable for mixed ability classes because learners may answer at their own level while working in the same task at the same time.

Similarly, Harmer (1998) also recommends useful techniques to manage classes with different levels of proficiency; he proposes to use different materials and to group students according to their abilities, for example, while a group is working on a piece of language study or doing writing exercises, the other group may be doing advance grammar exercises or discussing a topic. Harmer also suggests to use the same materials to do different tasks according to their abilities, for example, some students may be working on repetitions with a specific vocabulary while others may use the new language to do more complex sentences. Finally, Harmer (1998) recommends to use stronger students in order to help weaker ones. These students may work with pairs or groups and serve as models of language performance in speaking and writing.

In addition to the criteria above reviewed, below there are some important studies to be analyzed. These studies show us different aspects of the influence of large classes in the English language teaching-learning process.

The first study was done by Thaher (2005) at An-Najah National University in Palestine, which purpose was to discover the effects of large class on EFL students. In this study, the researcher used a questionnaire divided in instructional, psychological and social aspects. The results showed that large classes have both positive and negative effects on students' learning.

Firstly, about instructional aspects, students' responses indicate they were more willing to share answers with classmates to compare and evaluate each other, and to get

information from teachers. In addition, students reported in large classes there was more time to answer a question because of class size. Responses to psychological area showed that students' self-esteem was increased when they got good grades. Finally, students' answers about social area confirmed that in large classes it is easier to make friends; thus, competition between them is fostered.

However, large classes have many negative effects on students' learning. According to students' responses on instructional area, it was difficult to see information on the board if they were sitting on the last row seat. Also the inefficiency of teachers to manage a large class complicated the practice of required skills. Moreover, students sometimes felt just passive learners because teachers centered teaching on themselves. The negative psychological effects on students are due to noisy and stressful environment. At last, responses on social area showed a low level of motivation and enthusiasm to participate because teachers did not remember students' names.

The author concludes that negative effects of large classes could be diminished if teachers consider the existing interrelation between instructional, psychological and social aspects. Even though large classes are a reality in many developing countries, if English teachers apply effective teaching techniques, promote interaction whether in pair or group work, and give suitable feedback, then students' learning will be enhanced.

The second study was done by Harfitt (2012), who investigated if reducing class size might help to avoid the negative effects of language learning anxiety. The participants for this study were Chinese students between 13 and 15 year-old from four Hong Kong secondary schools. The research was done with eight classes; the largest class consisted of 41 students and the smallest of 21. There was one teacher for each pair of classes, one small and one large. Students preferred to use English rather than

Cantonese to answer interview questions, which were focused on learners' views about the English teaching-learning process. It is important to underline that in this study, both small and larger classes used the same materials, topics and activities with the appropriate adaptation.

The findings of this study indicate that reduced-size classes have many positive effects on students' learning according to interview responses. In smaller classes students developed more confidence on the support provided by their classmates because they help each other instead of criticize their performance. Consequently, participation and a sense of community were increased during the lessons; similarly, students felt less nervous about negative evaluation from their companions.

On the other hand, students in larger classes reported they don't like to do presentations to the whole class because they felt their classmates would mock on them or would say harsh things. These students were not willing to answer questions, neither to read nor to speak when teacher request it; therefore, students in larger classes felt more language learning anxiety.

In his conclusion, the author states that this study shows the importance that teachers facilitates participation in class in order to reduce learning anxiety and the benefit from knowing the student's perspective about how class size impacts on the teaching-learning process.

The next study was developed by Forero (2005). This research was done to investigate if task-based learning could improve oral interaction and how it can be managed in large groups. Forero conducted this research at Isabel II School in Bogota with students between 11 and 13 years old from seventh grade, class 701. In this class there were 21 boys, 30 girls and 5 teachers participating in the process of teaching and observing.

Teachers who were collecting data used a proforma instrument, class recordings and two questionnaires to evaluate and record the teaching and learning process during the lesson. The questionnaires were especially useful to know the students' perspectives about the learning process. After applying these techniques and analyzing the results, the following aspects were established: task, interaction and large classes. Task has its three different parts: Pre-task, the task cycle and language focus.

The findings in the pre-task stage showed that students are more likely to speak or participate in class when they talk about topics related to their interest and when teachers use creative, colorful and user-friendly materials such as flashcards, guides or visual aids. These resources helped students to increase their vocabulary, understanding and motivation; as a result, students developed more confidence in oral skill without worrying about apathy or shyness.

In the task cycle it was confirmed that it is more difficult for students to understand teacher's instructions when these are given to the whole class, than when they receive them individually. To complete the last step, language focus, after the end of every lesson students had to practice what was learned in class and complete an outcome to demonstrate their comprehension of the lesson.

According to the teacher's notes taken during the observations in large classes, oral interaction was improved because students were more willing to participate and to answer teacher's questions. In order to achieve this result, it was very productive the use of good materials such as colorful flashcards and guides. It was also important the variety of activities and techniques used to motivate participation in a class of 52 students. In addition, it was observed that students answered to teacher's questions in short sentences, and they also were listening to what a partner said in the classroom. However, this oral interaction was always performed by the same students in the groups,

while others who did not participate too much were rejected because they were not good at English.

The results obtained from questionnaires showed students changed their opinions about learning English. At the beginning, students indicated they preferred to do individual tasks such as writing rather than activities concerning speaking or pronunciation skills. But at the end of stud, after second questionnaire, students were more interested in group or pair work activities and they felt more confident to read, listen or speak in English.

The author concludes stating that task-based learning method is a useful tool to develop oral interaction in a large class; however it must to be combined with the appropriate stimulation through a wide range of visual aids, flashcards, interesting topics and a dynamic lesson plan. Forero also explains it is important to maintain motivation and control discipline using different classroom arrangements. To sum up, task-based learning proved to be a productive method to promote oral participation of students in large groups.

Another research about large classes was conducted by Kathi (2011) in Nepal. The purpose of this study was to explore the common expectations of students who were learning English in a large group. Two schools from the rural and urban area of Nepal were chosen to develop the research. Students were asked to complete one structured questionnaire divided in six different areas. The first aspect was about classroom management. In this area most of students showed more interest in having clear rules for the class, being called by their first names, and having orderly rows in the classroom. The second aspect was enhancing collaboration, whose results indicated that only fifty percent of students enjoyed group and pair work activities, while nearly eighty percent indicated they liked to work by their own. Additionally, students liked that their

partners speak English with little use of mother tongue. The third topic was the expectations that students had about the kind of tasks developed during the class. Some students were interested in oral activities, others in contests, projects works, language songs, games, etc. The study demonstrates that teachers have to plan a good range of tasks in order to fit the different interests and learning styles of students.

Another important aspect to consider was the amount of English a teacher should use in class. In this case, more than seventy-five percent of students expected a teacher who speaks in English with limited use of mother tongue, and just twenty-five percent expected to have full class in English only. Feedback was the fifth element in the questionnaire, whose results showed that most of students agree to be reported about their progress not only in oral form but also with comments on their notebooks. Finally, in this study, students indicated their home assignments should be checked every day. Similarly, students preferred teacher's correction rather than peer and self-correction.

At last, the author explains that this study proves that students have many expectations in a large multilevel class, whose characteristics have already been mentioned. In summary, students expect to learn English in a simple way with diversity of methods that fit their different levels and at their own pace.

The fifth study is a research done again by Harfitt (2013) in Hong Kong secondary schools to find the relationships between class size and pedagogical practice in both large and small classes. In this study, four female teachers with master's degrees in education accepted to participate to be interviewed and observed. Each teacher was in charge of two English language classes, one large (37 or more students) and one small (27 or fewer). Each class had the same level and similar abilities. Teachers were asked to answer 29 semi-structured interviews, one before observation period in order to know teacher's perspective about the teaching process. Most of interviews were centered on

teacher's viewpoint of objectives of the lesson, organization of classroom, classroom interaction, and pedagogical decisions, etc. In addition to interviews, there were classroom observations to get better understanding of the teaching process during the lessons.

According to interviews, teachers said they apply the same pedagogy to teach both small and large classes, however, these statements did not agree with practice in classroom. Results in this study showed that teachers felt more comfortable teaching small classes because it is easier to maintain a close relationship with students. In small classes teachers changed more times classroom layout than in large ones; thus, student's interaction was more enjoyable. One teacher admitted that their lessons in large classes were more teacher centered.

Teachers also said they do not vary their approach from large to small classes because of time and convenience, but again, observational data indicates the opposite. All teachers agreed that in small groups was easier to manage the class, implement instructions and develop interaction, while in large groups it was difficult to deal with these aspects.

In his conclusions, Harfitt (2013) states that teachers in this study worked more effectively in small classes than in larger ones. In small classes teachers applied more teaching approaches, organized different classroom patterns, did more group and pair work, and did more open-ended questions. To sum up, teachers participants said that small classes offer a better environment to have a successful lesson.

Description, Analysis and Interpretation of Results

In this section, there is a quantitative analysis of the results. This analysis will give answers to the three questions proposed for this study. Data collected are divided in instructional, social and psychological aspects, according to the questionnaire answered by students. Each section shows the influence that large classes have on the English language teaching-learning process.

Academic Aspects

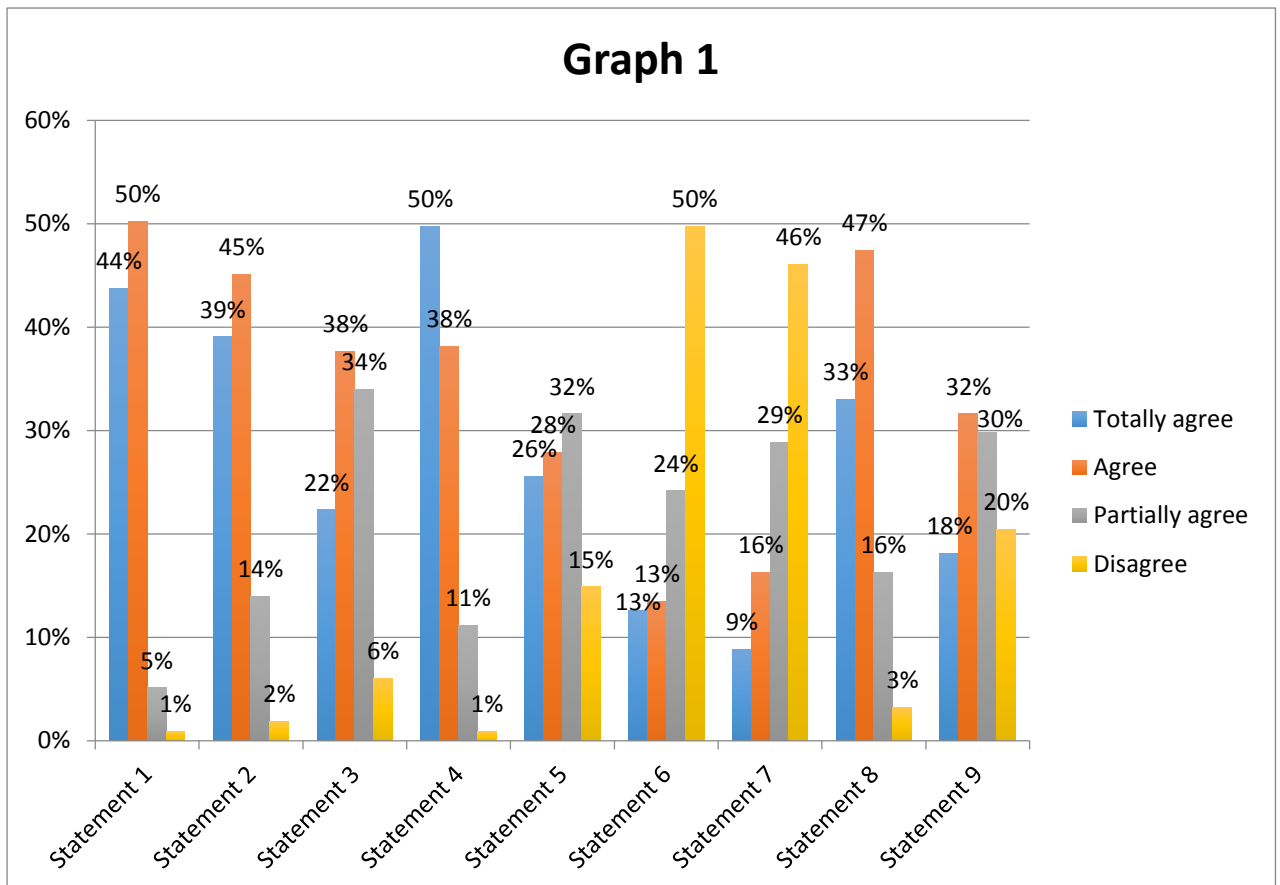
What instructional implications do large classes have on the teaching-learning process?

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	94	44%	108	50%	11	5%	2	1%	215	100%
2	The activities done allow to practice listening, speaking, reading and writing skills	84	39%	97	45%	30	14%	4	2%	215	100%
3	The students are attentive and participate in class activities, including those sitting at the back of the classroom	48	22%	81	38%	73	34%	13	6%	215	100%
4	Varied class activities are used such as group, individual, pair-work activities, etc.	107	50%	82	38%	24	11%	2	1%	215	100%
5	Activities such as plays, competitions, debates, games, etc. are used in class.	55	26%	60	28%	68	32%	32	15%	215	100%
6	Students can cheat during the test	27	13%	29	13%	52	24%	107	50%	215	100%
7	Students get distracted by doing assignments from other subjects	19	9%	35	16%	62	29%	99	46%	215	100%
8	The seating arrangement facilitates the tasks that are carried out in class.	71	33%	102	47%	35	16%	7	3%	215	100%
9	Students cannot receive regular feedback from the teacher due to the large number of students.	39	18%	68	32%	64	30%	44	20%	215	100%

Author: Rivera Leon Jimmy

Source: Students' questionnaire



Author: Rivera Leon Jimmy

Source: Students' questionnaire

Table 1 is made up of nine statements, represented in Graph 1, whose purpose is to determine how instructional implications affect the English language teaching-learning process. In statement one, 44% of students totally agree and 50% agree that class activities are helping them to put into practice what they are learning. On the other hand, just 5% partially agree and only 1% disagrees. This means that large classes are not a serious impediment to perform useful activities that will help students to apply what have been learned. This finding confirms what UNESCO (2006) published, stating that both small and large classes can achieve excellent results, it just depends on quality of teaching.

Statement two shows that most of students feel that classroom activities are helping them to practice listening, speaking and writing skills because 39% totally agree

and 45% agree, that is a total of 181 students. However, 14% students partially agree, this means that large classes environments could be an obstacle to practice the main language skills. This result could be related to statement three where it is observed that 73 students, that is a 34%, partially agree that all students are attentive and participate in class tasks. It is probably that in some occasions many of those students sitting at the back of the classroom are not adequately participating in class tasks (statement three); consequently they are not practicing listening, speaking, reading and writing skills as much as they should (statement two). Another reason may be that some students do not participate too much in class because they are not good at English, thus they are rejected by the rest of the group (Forero, 2005). Despite of this, 48 students totally agree and 81 agree with statement three, that is 22% and 38 % respectively, while only 6% disagree. This shows that in general terms, learners feel there is enough student participation in classroom despite of being in a large group.

Findings in statement four indicate that 50% of students totally agree and 38% agree that teachers used a variety of class activities such as group, individual and pair work. This result supports those observed in statement three because if there are a variety of activities, then students' participation will be increased. Harmer (2007) also explained that in large classes both pair work and group work offer opportunities to participate more equally, to practice language and to share responsibilities. On the other hand, 11% students partially agree and just 1% disagrees with fourth statement, therefore, it is deduced that large classes are not a serious problem to have varied activities organized in different grouping styles.

In statement five, learners were asked if activities such as plays, competitions, debates or games are used in class. Results show divided opinions among students, 26% totally agree, 28% agree, 32% partially agree, and 15% disagree. These findings

indicate that in some classrooms teachers are applying techniques above mentioned while in others not. In fact, most of students (32%) partially agree with this statement. It means that teachers need to do improvements in their lesson plans to include these useful activities and add more variety to their lessons. According to Khati (2011), students enjoy having various techniques and activities that break the monotony of textbook, indeed, students are expecting to have contests, games, projects works and specially challenging activities. Similarly, in the study done by Forero (2005) it was found that to teach English in large groups, it is essential to use different strategies such as changing activities very often to maintain motivation in classroom.

The next statement is about cheating during tests. According to learners' answers, 50% of students disagree and 24% partially agree. In other words, most of students think it is not allowed to cheat during test, however, 13% of students totally agree and 13% agree, which indicates that teachers must pay more attention to procedures during tests in order to avoid cheating. This proves that a negative aspect of being in a large class is that students may think they will not be caught cheating due to the amount of students.

The following statement aims to know if students get distracted by doing assignments from other subjects. In this case, 99 students, that is 46%, disagree and 62 students, that is 29% partially agree, which indicates that most of students are paying attention to the lesson. Nevertheless, there were 35 students, that is 16%, and 19 students, that is 9% that marked "Agree" and "Totally agree" respectively. This finding is similar to previous question, that is, large groups may affect negatively to the class because learners may think they may go unnoticed due to the large number of students. In this case, it was supposed that all should pay attention to the lesson; on the contrary, some students are doing assignments from other subjects.

Results from statement eight are clear, while 33% and 47% of students marked “Totally agree” and “Agree” respectively, only 16% marked “Partially agree” and 3% marked “Disagree”. Therefore, results evidently show that students can develop tasks and activities in a large class despite of challenges of classroom space. UNESCO (2006) has explained that there are very few classrooms that fit the ideal settings for learning; on the contrary, space is often limited, hot and noisy, especially in large classes. However, although we do not have control over classroom space, we can control classroom environment through effective seating arrangements and planning skills.

The last statement in this section aims to know if large classes affect the quality of feedback students receive. According to students’ answers 18% of them totally agree and 32% agree that they cannot receive regular feedback from the teacher due to the large number of students. Results also show that 30% partially agree and 20% disagree. These answers indicate that learners are not receiving feedback as much as they should, for this reason, it is inferred that large classes have a negative impact on this important aspect of the teaching-learning process. The importance of feedback is stressed by some authors, for example, Gower and Walters (2005) claim that feedback is one of the most important responsibilities of a teacher because it will help students to evaluate themselves; as a result, they will learn more effectively. In addition, Khati (2011) found in his study that 95% of students reported they like to receive feedback at personal level by their teachers. On the other hand, the lack of feedback “leaves students wondering whether or not they were successful or actually overconfident”, (Maxom, 2009, p. 108).

To summarize analysis of table 1, it can be said that instructional implications of large classes affect both in positive and negative ways to the teaching-learning process. Among the positive aspects, it was found that students put in practice what they learn,

they practice the main skills of English language and work in groups or in pair activities.

Social aspects

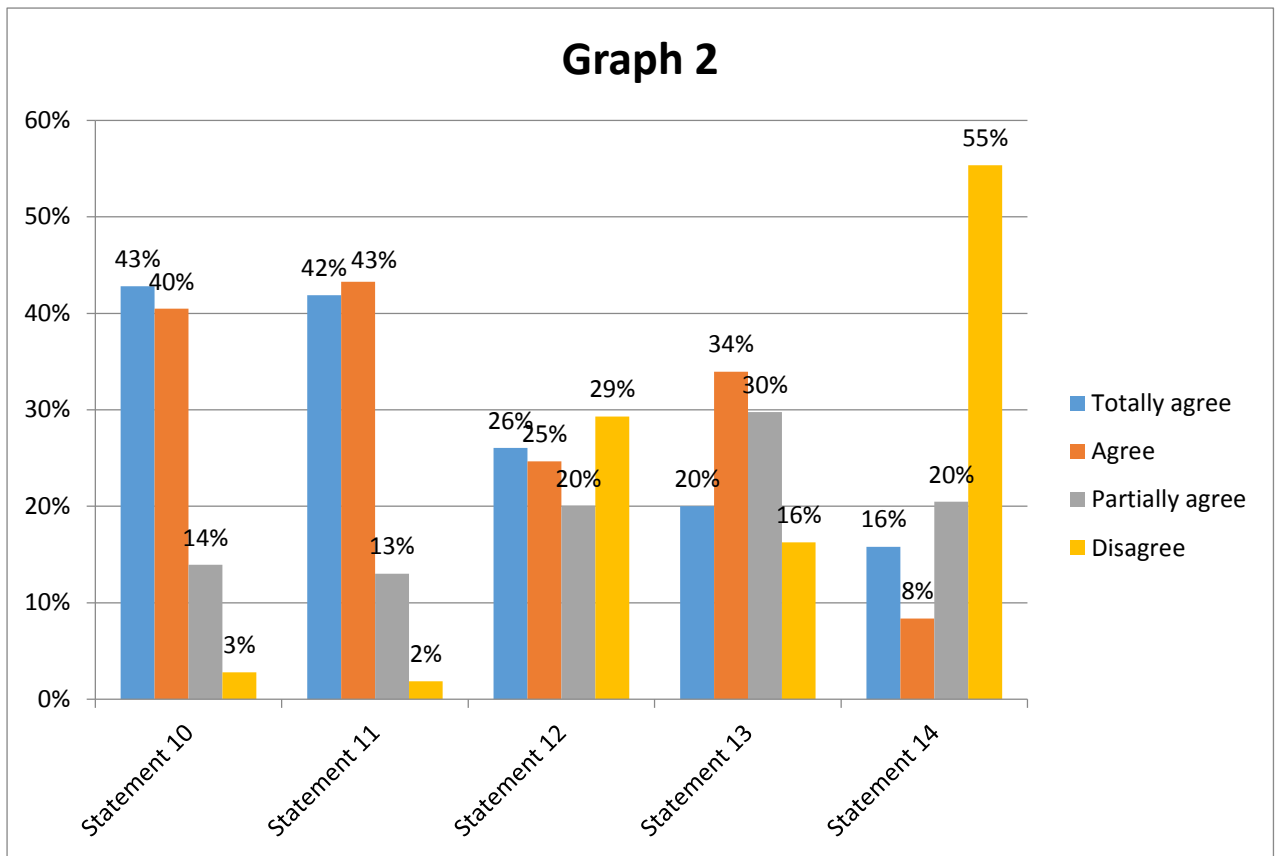
What social implications do large classes have on the teaching-learning process?

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 a proper balance of student-student and teacher-student interaction.	92	43%	87	40%	30	14%	6	3%	215	100%
11	Students have the opportunity to build relationships with their classmates.	90	42%	93	43%	28	13%	4	2%	215	100%
12	The teacher has problems remembering all the students' names.	56	26%	53	25%	43	20%	63	29%	215	100%
13	The atmosphere is less stressful since the teacher does not ask several questions to the same student	43	20%	73	34%	64	30%	35	16%	215	100%
14	It is easier for students to use their cell phone or any other mobile device without being seen by the teacher.	34	16%	18	8%	44	20%	119	55%	215	100%

Author: Rivera Leon Jimmy

Source: Students' questionnaire



Author: Rivera Leon Jimmy

Source: Students' questionnaire

Table 2 and Graph 2 show the answers about social aspects, considering how they affect positively or negatively the teaching of English language in large groups.

According to statement 10, 43% of students totally agreed and 40% agreed which demonstrates that in large classes students can interact between them and with the teacher. This finding tells us that large classes are not affecting negatively to this aspect of the teaching and learning process as much as we could think. Harmer (2008) and UNESCO (2006) explain that most of us think that large classes present a difficult environment to get adequate interaction between students, personal attention or smooth organization due to a perception that learning occurs in proportion to class size.

However, large classes have many benefits for the learning process. As quoted by

Harmer (2008), Natalie Hess pointed out that in large classes, having so many students is the best resource to easily improve class interaction.

In contrast, 14% partially agree and 3% disagree with statement 10, which means that teachers still need to do improvements in this aspect of teaching English language.

In statement 11, students were asked if they have the opportunity to build relationships with their classmates. According to results obtained, it can be observed a relation with the previous statement because 42% of learners totally agree and 43% agree, which results are similar to those of statement 10. In other words, class interaction is increased as much as students receive opportunities to build relationships between classmates. Similarly, in his study, Thaher (2005) found that when students have chances to build good relationships with their classmates, then they have the opportunity to compare their answers, evaluate themselves, and create a sense of competition which leads to positive learning. Nevertheless, 13% of students partially agree and 2% disagree, which shows that some students do not feel part of the group, for this reason, teachers have to work to get better results on this issue.

The following item in this survey refers to teachers who remember their students' names. In this case, the four options for this questionnaire are almost at the same level. The first place is for option "disagree" with 29%. The second place is for "totally agree" with 26%. The third place is for "agree" with 25%, and at last place is "partially agree" with 20%. The different students' opinions are represented in Graph 2. These results are considered negative because when teachers use students' names, they help them to get involved effectively in the classroom (Thaher, 2005). Indeed, Khati (2011) explained in his study that 90% of students liked to be called by their first names.

In the next question, students were asked if classroom atmosphere is less stressful since the teacher does not ask several questions to the same student. A 20% of students totally agree with this statement, while 34% agreed, which represents the majority of students. This result shows us that just a little more than half of students surveyed feel less stressed in class due to have to answer teacher's questions. However, a 30% of learners partially agreed with this question and 16% disagreed, being in total a 46% that is almost half of class. This result is considered negative since many students feel stressed in large classes, thus, affecting the teaching-learning process.

The final question related to social aspects is about cell phone usage by students. Results of the survey indicate that 55% of students disagree that they can use cell phones or other mobile devices without being seen by the teacher. Even though most of students disagree with this statement, they are only half class, the rest of students are 20% partially agree, 8% agree and 16% totally agreed. These numbers point out that teachers need to apply more control over students in order to avoid mobile devices usage. For example, it is always important to use direct eye contact with individuals (Woodward, 2001), to assure that everyone is listening and watching (Gower and Walters, 2005), and also maximize individual work in order to avoid the effects of working with a large group (Harmer, 2008).

Psychological aspects

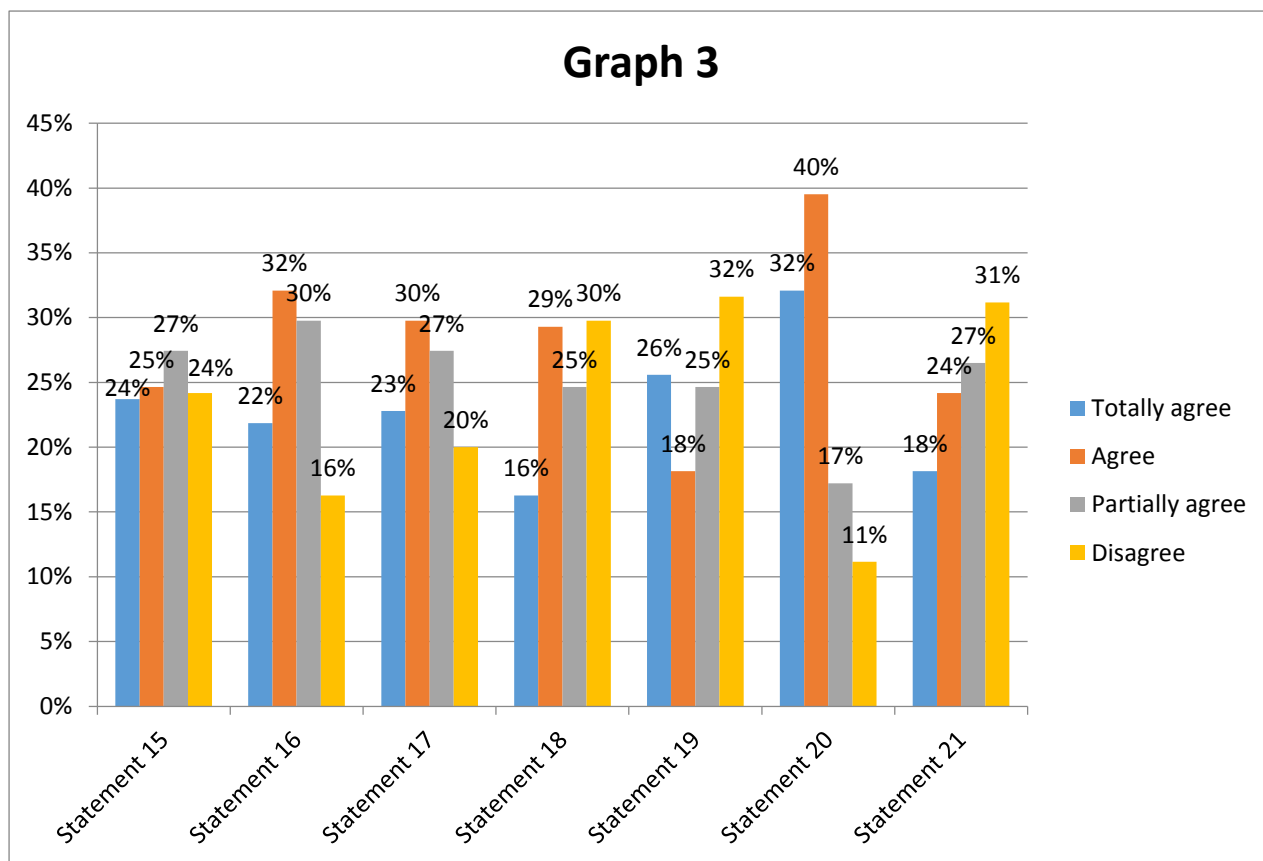
What psychological implications do large classes have on the teaching-learning process?

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.	51	24%	53	25%	59	27%	52	24%	215	100%
16	Students feel inhibited when speaking in front of the rest.	47	22%	69	32%	64	30%	35	16%	215	100%
17	Students do not have the opportunity to express their opinions.	49	23%	64	30%	59	27%	43	20%	215	100%
18	Students do not like to participate because they feel afraid.	35	16%	63	29%	53	25%	64	30%	215	100%
19	The teacher does not pay equal attention to all his/her students.	55	26%	39	18%	53	25%	68	32%	215	100%
20	Students feel they can act competitively with other students.	69	32%	85	40%	37	17%	24	11%	215	100%
21	Students feel relaxed because they can go unnoticed.	39	18%	52	24%	57	27%	67	31%	215	100%

Author: Rivera Leon Jimmy

Source: Students' questionnaire



Author: Rivera Leon Jimmy

Source: Students' questionnaire

The third aspect of this study aims to find out what psychological implications large classes have on the teaching-learning process. Results of the survey are represented in table 3 and graph 3 that contain seven statements. The first statement of this table attempts to find out if class atmosphere is stressful. Students' responses demonstrate that opinions are divided, since 24% of them totally agree, 25% agree, 27% partially agree and at last 24% of them disagree. In view of the fact that a class environment "affects how well your students can learn" (Harmer, 2007, p. 7), these results are considered as negative because answers show that 49% of students, that is, the sum of the first two options, do not feel comfortable. On the other hand, only 24% of students consider that class atmosphere is not stressful.

The second statement of this table refers to students who feel inhibited when speaking in front of the class. The higher point in this question is 32% for students who agree with this statement, then are students who answered “partially agree” 30%, this group is followed by students who totally agree 22%, and finally those who disagree 20%. These responses show another negative impact of large classes, in this case affecting speaking skill. There may be many reasons for students to feel uncomfortable in class; however, Harfitt (2012) found in his study that students in large classes felt nervous when they had to speak in front of their peers because they did not know or did not trust in all of them. In contrast, in smaller classes, students seemed to appreciate the support from each other, producing a sense of community in class.

The next statement indicates if students do not have opportunities to express their opinions. In this case, results are 23%, 30%, 27% and 20% corresponding to totally agree, agree, partially agree and disagree respectively. As we see, results are again divided similarly to the previous statement, with little differences. Only 20% of students disagree with this statement, which means that teachers are not providing enough opportunities for learners express their opinions.

With respect to the question if students do not like to participate because they feel afraid, responses show that 30% of students disagree with this statement, and 25% of them partially agree, which means they have no serious problems with this issue. Nonetheless, there are 63 students, which is 29%, who agree they do not like to participate because they feel afraid. Furthermore, that is not all; there are 35 students, it correspond to 16%, who totally agree with this question. The reason of these answers could be that students in large classes would not ask a question to the teacher because other classmates might laugh at them (Harfitt, 2012) or probably just because they are introvert in nature (Khatai, 2011).

Statement 19 is “The teacher does not pay equal attention to all his/her students”. The table shows that 26% correspond to students who totally agreed, this is only one quarter of all the sample study (215 students). The opposite option, “disagree” reached the 32%, and, although it represents the majority of students, it is not enough to say that there are no problems in this characteristic of the teaching-learning process. The other results are divided between "agree" and "partially agree" with 18% and 25% in that order. To analyze these results it is important to remember that in the teaching-learning process not only students, but also teachers are affected by positive or negative influence of large classes. Harfitt (2013) conducted a research that described relationships between class size and pedagogical practices applied by the teachers. In this study teachers recognized that manage a large class is harder than a small one. In fact, he observed that teachers in small classes adopt better techniques such as more group work and pair work, several interaction patterns, more use of open questions and more individualization. In brief, we could say that for teachers it is hard to give equal attention to all his/her students in a large class.

Concerning statement 20, it shows how students feel with respect to have opportunities to compete between them. Responses to this item were positive, since 32% of students totally agree and 40% agree. This results represent the most part of students and can be considered as positive because a sense of competition increases participation. In fact, Thaher (2005) stated that in large classes, competitiveness help students to make friends and lead to positive learning and achievement. The other results showed that 17% of students partially agreed and 11% disagreed. This result indicates there is a significant amount of students who think there is not an appropriate

atmosphere of competition in class. For this reason, teachers should pay attention to improve this aspect.

The last question in this survey aims to find out if students feel relaxed because they can go unnoticed. According to responses, 31% corresponds to “disagree”, which implies that these students think they do not feel relaxed. The rest of students' responses are divided between 27% partially agree, 24% agree and 18% totally agree. It is deduced from these answers that class environment is stressful for some students while for others not. According to studies done, in large classes, students may feel uncomfortable because they do not want to answer questions due to a lack of confidence in their peers or they feel nervous (Hartfit, 2012), this factor contributes to make students do not feel relaxed. On the other hand, in large classes, some students may feel safe because they do not have to answer every question due to the amount of people, instead they may go unnoticed (Thaher, 2005).

Conclusions

The present study shows that large classes are not a serious impediment for most of the students to use English during the lessons when teachers have a good classroom management, though there are some areas to improve such as assessing students speaking skills, and giving individualized feedback.

Students are attentive and more willing to participate when there are a lot of varied activities and tasks that help them to practice the four language skills. However, some students did not feel they were participating enough probably because they were sitting at the back of the classroom, which means large classes do affect learning process in this academic aspect.

In general terms, several kinds of activities such as group or pair-work can be developed in large classes without complications.

Negative effects of lack of classroom space are diminished when teachers use suitable seating arrangements that facilitate tasks and activities.

There is a sense of good interaction between students and teachers despite of amount of students in classroom. Students are allowed to interact between them.

Teachers who teach large groups have a tendency to forget their student's names, affecting negatively to the learning process because calling students by their names help them to get involve in the lesson.

In large classes, most of the students felt nervous when speaking in English in front of their peers because they did not trust in all of them.

Large classes are more difficult to manage if teachers do not apply effective techniques or activities that attract students' attention. As a result, class environment becomes stressful.

Recommendations

It is suggested that teachers in large classes pay special attention to those students who are sitting at the back of the classroom because they are not practicing language as much as they should.

Lesson plans for large classes should include a variety of activities such as debates, games, plays, competitions or projects and not only pair or group work. These kinds of activities will help to break the monotony of teaching only with textbooks and will increase motivation.

It is exceptionally important that teachers in large classes give enough feedback to students, this may be achieved through the development of marking guides to be used for teaching and assessing. It is also necessary that teachers speak frequently to students asking what they think about the lectures, tasks, and so on. To sum up, teachers need to apply effective techniques to give appropriate feedback to students.

Teachers in large classes should make efforts to call all their students by name since this will help them to get involved in the lesson.

It is essential to develop a good class atmosphere through effective classroom management, activities and tasks that lead to build good relationships between pupils in order to help them to feel more comfortable when speaking English in class.

Teachers should avoid asking questions to the same students and try to give attention to the rest of them.

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ANNEXES

INSTRUMENTS



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

ENGLISH DEGREE

Dear student,

The aim of this brief questionnaire is to obtain information concerning the: *influence of large classes on teaching and learning English*. The following information will only be used for academic/research purposes. Please answer the following questions as honestly as possible based on the following criteria.

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

Informative data: Please fill in the information below

Name of institution: _____

Type of institution: Public () Private ()

Year of study: 8th year. () 9th year () 10th year. ()
1st senior high school . () 2nd senior high school. () 3rd. senior high school. ()

City: _____

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

A. Academic issues

	In classes with a large number of students:	Very satisfactory	Satisfactory	Somewhat satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
1.	The activities done in class help to apply what students learn in class.				
2.	The activities done allow to practice listening, speaking, reading and writing skills.				
3.	The students are attentive and participate in class activities, including those sitting at the back of the classroom.				
4.	Varied class activities are used such as group, individual, pair-work activities, etc.				
5.	Activities such as plays, competitions, debates, games, etc. are used in class.				
6.	Students can cheat during the test				
7.	Students get distracted by doing assignments from other subjects.				
8.	The seating arrangement facilitates the tasks that are carried out in class.				
9.	Students cannot receive regular feedback from the teacher due to the large number of students.				

B. Social issues

N°	In classes with a large number of students:	Very satisfactory	Satisfactory	Somewhat satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
10.	There is a proper balance of student-student and teacher-student interaction.				
11.	Students have the opportunity to build relationships with their classmates.				
12.	The teacher has problems remembering all the students' names.				
13.	The atmosphere is less stressful since the teacher does not ask several questions to the same student.				
14.	It is easier for students to use their cellphone or any other mobile device without being seen by the teacher.				

C. Psychological issues:

	In classes with a large number of students:	Very satisfactory	Satisfactory	Somewhat satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
15.	The atmosphere is stressful.				

16.	Students feel inhibited when speaking in front of the rest.				
17.	Students do not have the opportunity to express their opinions.				
18.	Students do not like to participate because they feel afraid.				
19.	The teacher does not pay equal attention to all his/her students.				
20.	Students feel they can act competitively with other students.				
21.	Students feel relaxed because they can go unnoticed.				

Thank you for your collaboration!