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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 de la Directora del Trabajo de Titulación

Doctora.

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DOCENTE DE LA TITULACIÓN

De mi consideración:

El presente trabajo de fin de titulación: The influence of large classes in the English language teaching-learning process in Ecuadorian high schools, realizado por Pérez Capote Pedro Pablo, ha sido orientado y revisado durante su ejecución, por lo tanto se aprueba la presentación del mismo.

Loja, marzo de 2017

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Dedication

I dedicate this project to my family and friends. Thank you for your support during these years I've been studying at UTPL. Additionally, I want to dedicate it to all the educators who teach large classes, wherever they live and work; teachers who admirably cope with several difficulties in their classrooms and overcome the enormous obstacles fully described in this study. I hope this work motivate them to keep struggling for better educational practices and encourage them to demand active support from schools, authorities, and governments.

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore and examine the implications large classes have on the teaching-learning process in Ecuadorian high schools. The research was guided by three questions that addressed instructional, social, and psychological aspects. The project presents the findings of an inquiry carried out in a school in Tumbaco, Ecuador, where classrooms accommodate 35 students or more. The on-site research was carried out during a 2 day visit to the school, when 180 middle/high school students responded to a survey consisting of 21 questions. The data obtained from the survey were tabulated, analyzed, and interpreted.

The results were controversial and many contradictions were found between previous studies and the survey findings. On one hand, the authors consulted mainly uncovered the negative consequences large classes lead to. On the other hand, the survey results showed that a high number of learners had positive thoughts about the majority of the issues analyzed, implying that schools can develop viable strategies to mitigate the problems that can result from large classes.

KEYWORDS: Class size, large classes, English as a second language, teaching methods.

Resumen

Este estudio tuvo como objetivo examinar las implicaciones que las aulas con muchos estudiantes tienen en el proceso enseñanza-aprendizaje, en el contexto ecuatoriano. La investigación se basó en tres preguntas que abordaron aspectos académicos, sociales y psicológicos. El proyecto presenta los datos obtenidos tras realizarse una investigación de campo consistente en una encuesta hecha en una escuela en Tumbaco, Quito, donde las aulas contienen a 35 estudiantes o más. Los participantes en esta investigación fueron alumnos de secundaria y bachillerato que recibieron un cuestionario con 21 preguntas. Los datos obtenidos fueron tabulados, analizados e interpretados.

Los resultados fueron controversiales y en general, muchas contradicciones se evidenciaron entre los estudios previos y los resultados de la encuesta. Por un lado, los autores consultados, en su mayoría describieron aspectos negativos presentes en las clases grandes. Por otro lado, la encuesta mostró que la gran mayoría de alumnos consultados tienen ideas positivas acerca de la mayoría de las situaciones analizadas. Esto indica que los colegios pueden desarrollar estrategias viables para moderar los problemas que pueden surgir en dichas clases.

PALABRAS CLAVE: tamaño de clases, clases grandes, inglés como segunda lengua, métodos de enseñanza.

Introduction

In recent decades, many Latin-American countries have experienced an unstoppable spread of bilingual schools. These schools openly boast about the implementation of the newest methodologies, and show off their excellent, up-to-date facilities to help learners to become competent English speakers. Ecuador is no exception. The reasons why this phenomenon has occurred in such a short time and in such an abrupt way are no secret. We all know that speaking English is now an essential ability in a globalized world. Whether people like it or not, or are fond of languages or not, learning English and using it properly is not an option today, it is a necessity.

Having set their eyes on this fact, educational institutions in Ecuador, along with teachers and educators, adopted a number of policies established by the Ecuadorian government in 2012. These policies were intended to improve the teaching quality in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classes in the country, and mainly dealt with curriculum improvement and the implementation of new strategies, methods, and technologies. The new guidelines were applied after considering day-to-day experience in this field all over the world, and previous studies on teaching English to non-native speakers. Such studies had proved that language learning best occurs in classrooms where some aspects are taken into account, class size included (Correa, Vidal, Cevallos, & Franco, 2012).

Long before the implementation of the policies, it had been observed that the average Ecuadorian student seemed not to demonstrate solid communicative bases in English after studying the language for six years or more. Now, quite a while after the establishment of the policies, it can be assured that the problem remains the same, and appears to be far from changing. In this sense, it has been noticed that the majority of Ecuadorian learners do not achieve the necessary competences to communicate, in spite of the fact that English is widely taught after Spanish. Public schools seem to be unable to escape this problem, while some

underprivileged private institutions do not elude the reality either (Correa, Vidal, Cevallos, & Franco, 2012).

In brief, when it comes to assessing the language skills Ecuadorian middle and high school students have developed during the school years, it is evident that something wrong has been happening for a long time. Unfortunately, the Ecuadorian government failed to notice – or purposely turned a blind eye to – some essential aspects when framing and introducing the policies mentioned above, among them, the problems large classes bring forth. Although considerable efforts have been devoted in today's Ecuador – where major investments have been made, and substantial reforms have been adopted by national, provincial, and local authorities – the battle towards an adequate language learning sometimes seems to be lost, and all attempts fruitless. Today, the circumstances seem to be more adverse than favorable since a great percentage of the Ecuadorian EFL students does not possess the abilities to understand the language, much less to get their ideas across in English. On top of that, many of them fail to meet the international standards required by pre-university and college courses.

Having considered this situation and explained the context, the purpose of this research was to inquire into "The influence of large classes on the English language teaching-learning process in Ecuadorian high schools". In order to achieve this goal, a key objective was promoted: the study set out to respond to three questions related to the instructional, social, and psychological implications large classes have on the teaching-learning process. The importance of the research lies in its usefulness to lay the foundations for a paradigm shift in education regarding large classes.

In order to accomplish the purpose of the research, a revision of previous literature and studies on the topic was made. It not only allowed the researcher to acquire deeper knowledge of the problem and gain familiarity with it, but permitted to know what previous inquirers had

found on the topic, opening up the possibilities to build the entire research on a solid theoretical basis.

The literature consulted made evident that some Ecuadorian (and foreign) researchers and specialists in education have stressed the importance of focusing on strategies that help to confront the problems caused by large classes, instead of regretting the situation. For example, getting more resources for the educational systems – especially for schools where classroom space is reduced and classes increase in number of learners – is one of the suggestions put forward by Meno, Alcaraz, and Salaberri (2004). These authors also insist on the necessity of additional training for instructors to manage large classes in an effective way, and most importantly, better infrastructure and facilities for schools, i.e., bigger and more appropriate classrooms for large groups of learners. Accordingly, other authors agree with some hypotheses which support that elementary and secondary school levels are the perfect time window for second language acquisition, and that large classes represent a barrier for an adequate language learning during those ages. In this respect, Jedynak (2009) expresses that a large part of the funds, time, and efforts expended by school authorities should be channeled appropriately, giving priority to the students within the age range mentioned above, but especially to students of that age who are part of large classes.

From this point on, it is important to mention some of the studies analyzed for this project. One of them was conducted by Blatchford, Russell, Basset, Brown, and Martin (2006) and focused its analysis on child contact and individual attention from teachers in both, large and small classes, comparing the quality of teaching procedures. It also considered the differences in time spent on teaching or instructional activities. Several limitations were confronted by the researchers, among them, the enormous diversity of methods implemented by previous studies and the poor quality some of them had. Also, the study aroused doubts due to inconsistencies between teacher reports and classroom observation evidences.

Another research considered for the present thesis project was carried out by Shamim (1993); it had three initial purposes. One of them was to understand teachers and learners' perceptions of the teaching-learning process in large ESL (English as a Second Language) classes. The second was to identify different types of behavior, and the third objective was to inquire into the participants' awareness of the teaching-learning opportunities that take place in such classes. Shamim (1993) mentions three limitations for this study: The first deals with the fact that most early researches had been conducted in North America, where teaching conditions and educational standards differ significantly from those in poor or developing countries. Second, previous studies on the topic were mainly quantitative in nature; and a third limitation was that setting apart class size as an independent variable was very difficult.

A third study considered for this research raised a query that deals with the reasons why large classes should be investigated. It was conducted by Hull et al. (2006) and poses an interesting discussion about the importance of analyzing teachers and students' perspectives, various types of behavior, and situations that take place in large classes. The researchers went deep into problems such as why large classes exist, their negative impact on learning, and the possible solutions to ameliorate the inconveniencies that may result from them. One limitation mentioned by the authors was that previous studies presented ambiguous ideas or definitions of what a large class is. The numbers varied from 25 to 60 students in a room, and this fact represented a serious difficulty for the authors to reach conclusions.

Having mentioned some of the studies consulted, it is crucial to state that teachers and students are the main beneficiaries of this research; it will surely be a valuable source of information for future inquiries on the subject, as it describes and examines what is happening today in large EFL classes in Ecuador, and compares the scenario with others analyzed in the studies mentioned above. Hopefully, this project will serve as a truthful, unbiased reference for future researches.

There were some limitations that should be mentioned, for instance: 1) The participants' difficulties to understand the purpose some of the questions had, 2) the inconsistencies many survey sheets contained after being filled out by the students e.g. scribbles, blots, and repeated answers, and 3) the vast majority of the students who took part in the survey had limited abilities to read and speak in English, thus, the questions were translated into Spanish (initially, the questionnaire was planned to be completed in English); the explanations had to be given in Spanish too.

It is the author's desire that the analysis and discussion in this paper give a serious cause for concern about the way our elementary, secondary, and high school students are learning English in large classes. Hopefully, this project will be useful to increase awareness of the implications large classes have on the teaching-learning process at diverse levels, such as the Ecuadorian Government, the Ministry of Education, educational institutions, and educators in general.

Chapter I: Literature Review

"Of all the languages in the world today, English deserves to be regarded as a world language" (Verghese, 1989, p. 1). Guided by the previous statement, it is not difficult to understand why English is an ever-present area of study in most educational institutions, and constitutes a fundamental part of their curricula and programs. For this reason, English is a core subject students everywhere have to take. As we all know, through the years, English has grown in importance in global communications, technology, education, the arts, and almost in every aspect of life. Therefore, it is coherent to asseverate that learning English is more than essential today, it is a must. Professional development, personal growth, school or job requirements, and/or vocation to languages are other incentives that motivate people to learn it.

According to Verghese (1989), English language has expanded globally over time, and is still spreading today. It is currently spoken by more than 350 million people around the world (Ecuadorians included), who use it in their homes, schools, and workplaces, both as their first (L1) and second (L2) language. However, in our country, especially in public schools, many learners do not meet the educational standards and seem not to get a grasp of the language, even though English is taught and learned mandatorily as L2. On top of that, a large percentage of the population has little knowledge (or no knowledge at all) of the language, and is not able to communicate in English properly, not even at a survival level. There are uncountable explanations for this dilemma, and large classes might be one of the root causes of the problem, or not. After acknowledging the preceding doubt/issue, a review of previous literature and studies was necessary to inquire into the conclusions other authors and researchers have arrived at. The objective of this section is, consequently, to review the literature related to the effects large classes have on the English teaching-learning process. The books and journals consulted will be mentioned below.

Teaching approaches and methods

There are different ways to engage with the process of teaching a language to a class. According to Zainuddin, Yahya, Morales, and Whelan (2011), some efficient teaching approaches and methods in language teaching can be implemented in a class depending of its necessities and actual conditions. These methods are listed and explained as follows.

One of the oldest language teaching methods is The Grammar Translation Method. Traditionally, it has been considered an evolution of the classical methods used to teach Latin and Greek around five centuries ago. The Grammar Translation Method was included in school curricula during the 19th century in Europe and North America. It emphasizes the study of grammatical aspects and the use of translation as the means whereby trainees acquire the language. Learners of this method are expected to learn numerous grammar rules and translate sentences or paragraphs into their native tongues.

The Grammar Translation Method involves memorization and long, exhausting written activities – especially at advanced levels. This fact brought about little or no success in terms of language proficiency, but above all, it caused the rejection of learners. Students who have been taught this way are usually not able to speak or comprehend oral language, while on the contrary, they can easily read and understand written information. It is true that these learners get to acquire knowledge of the form of sentences, but ignore content and context. During the implementation of the Grammar Translation Method, reading and writing activities are preferred over communicative exercises. This is seriously detrimental to language learning, and the main reason why learners find it difficult to express their ideas and thoughts orally (Zainuddin, Yahya, Morales, & Whelan, 2011).

Contrary to what the Grammar Translation Method pursues, the Total Physical Response (TPR) asserts that through physical activity and body movement every individual learns faster and in a more efficient way. Zainuddin et al. (2011) states that TPR is a language

teaching method that was developed in 1974 by James Asher. After conducting various researches and observing that the interactions between children and their parents included verbal and physical aspects, Asher came up with three hypotheses that ended up as the foundations of TPR. One of these assumptions states that the brain is naturally predisposed to learn a language through listening. A second one suggests that both, effective language learning and physical movements take place in the right hemisphere of the brain. The third hypothesis asserts that negative emotions and stress may block cognitive processes in the brain. Therefore, Asher concluded that the best way to learn a second language was through play and leisure activities.

As stated before, TPR is based on the coordination of language and physical movement as a means of helping the students to recognize meaning and associate actions with commands, whether they are presented as separate words or in short phrases. Through directives given by the teacher and physical responses made by the students, TPR works out satisfactorily, as long as the difficulty of the instructions is increased slowly and gradually. Thus, good results can be achieved if the learners are exposed to a moderate but continuous increment in the complexity of the tasks that are proposed and executed in class. In brief, TPR makes emphasis on listening comprehension and oral expression; it is, therefore, a convenient method to keep an eye on if vocabulary and idiomatic phrases are the goal of a lesson or academic term. However, critics of this method say that TPR makes no emphasis on writing and reading skills, and grammar is neglected as well.

Not very distant from the TPR – in terms of communicative emphasis and reinforcement of conversational skills – the Natural Approach has been a popular language teaching method for decades. According to Zainuddin et al. (2011) the Natural Approach was created by Tracy Terrell and inspired by Krashen's Monitor Model. The Natural Approach dates back to the late 1970s and early 1980s, and its purpose is to develop communicative

abilities, but only in a natural way. It implies that no step in the learning process should be forced or hurried; instead, spontaneity is expected to appear in class. In order to create an environment conducive to this method, a large amount of comprehensible language input is required. The teacher or instructor, therefore, plays a crucial role here. Stress and anxiety are expelled from the classroom and the learners are motivated to participate whenever they feel comfortable. They are supposed to go through natural stages, from the simplest words and phrases to more complicated sentences.

Most of the activities proposed by the Natural Approach help the learners to strengthen communicational skills and acquire vocabulary at their own speed, paying no attention to form or grammar. In this sense, the Natural Approach represents an adjustable method to the trainee's pace and learning style. For those reasons, it has enjoyed an immense popularity among language teachers since its creation, especially in the United States. It is considered as a simple, appropriate method for teachers who implement it alongside regular teaching practices.

None of the methods mentioned above, places such a strong emphasis on communicative elements as the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) does. The CLT gained reputation in the 1970's and 1980's, and was established on three theoretical assertions: communication, task, and meaningfulness. The main goal of this approach is to help the learner to become communicatively competent (Zainuddin et al., 2011).

The CLT makes emphasis on activities which allow negotiation of meaning in day-to-day experiences that require certain level in oral expression and listening comprehension. It allows the learner to develop expertise in using the language adequately in different social situations. This method grew in importance in Europe during the decades mentioned above, mainly because of the educational context and conditions that arose in that continent. By the time it gained popularity, Europe was experiencing an explosion of bilingual schools where

foreign languages were a core part of their curriculum. This meant that the possibility of studying other languages gradually ceased to be a privilege confined to elite families. By then, schools of all social levels were expected to show an immediate progress in terms of student's achievement in the second language.

Having some similarities but also differences with the methods explained so far, the Content-Based Instruction Method (CBI) implies the total integration of language and content learning (Stryker & Leaver, 1997). This method is a tailored frame that takes into consideration several learning conditions that, as mentioned before, include and blend language skills and content. As the CBI emphasizes the use of context to acquire language, it usually implies specific subjects through which language is taught. Core subjects, for instance Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies, and sometimes parallel, supporting subjects such as Music, Visual Arts, and Physical Education are instructed in English through this method.

Today, the CBI is a popular, widespread method that has been implemented by uncountable schools and even higher learning institutions all around the globe. It has become a very attractive, well-known approach for teachers, especially those teaching at low levels of education, due to its adaptability to elementary and secondary school curriculum requirements. Through CBI, students can be instructed in English and they usually feel motivated to learn and use the language, particularly if they are fond of the subject being taught. The CBI also aims at involving the students in all aspects of class environment, making it more appealing, comfortable and functional (Stryker & Leaver, 1997).

Class size

Teachers of various levels of education tend to blame class size for many of the difficulties and problems they deal with along the academic year. According to a popular belief among educators, as the class grows in numbers, negative situations are multiplied, and

this may have an impact on the teaching quality, thus on the learner's outcomes. Accordingly, it is essential to figure out what a large class is.

After conducting various researches and analyzing previous studies on the topic, Blatchford (2003) mentions some ciphers that are usually associated with large classes. The numbers vary from 27 to 30 students in a room. Although he does not define what a large class is, he does suggest that a class of that size is generally labeled as a large one. Similarly, Martensson, Bild, and Nilsson (2008) asserts that 35 students is commonly thought to be the top number of learners a class can hold, while other authors express that "a group of forty students may be considered too large" (Hornsby, Osman, & De, 2013, p. 47).

Nevertheless, many factors must be taken into consideration when the label Large Class is applied to any groups of students. These factors include the subject matter, the characteristics of the learners, and the teaching style of the instructor. Elements other than those already mentioned are also key components, for example, the type of class, the objectives of a lesson, testing, and feedback.

One final element to be taken into account in order to define what a large class looks like, is the teacher's perception. "In other words, if a teacher is used to teaching classes of 20 students, he or she will often say that 30 students is a large class; but for another teacher whose regular class size is 40, a large class might comprise 60 students" (Hull et al., 2006, p. 1).

Having considered some numbers, it is important to inquire into what teachers and students experience in a large class. For example, some authors think that teaching a big class represents one of the most difficult tasks language teachers cope with on a regular basis. Paraphrasing Harmer (2007), it is understood that big classes equal little individual attention provided by the teacher, fewer possibilities for proper learning moments, and hardly any student-teacher, student-student lesson centered interactions. It results, therefore, in an

unfavorable learning time for the students and a not desirable, almost avoided challenge for the teachers, especially if they are inexperienced. On the other hand, there are some positive points regarding large classes. Other analysts support the idea that a large class helps the teacher to establish rapport with more students, opening up the possibility to make a difference in more lives (Martensson, Bild, & Nilsson, 2008).

Small classes, by contrast, are defined as classes with 15 to no more than 20 learners. Blatchford (2003) expresses that small classes of about 15 students, provide with certain conditions that improve the teaching-learning process. These improvements include a positive learning environment that allows the teacher to give instructions comfortably and smoothly. Small classes also empower the teacher with an appropriate classroom control in terms of better concentration by the students, more and convenient attention, and a favorable environment for learning to happen. Additionally, the instructor can interact with all the students and work with them cooperatively. Teachers who teach a small class have the chance to get to know the students better and deeper, hence, they are able to help pupils in every weak area. Negatively, Blatchford (2003) also mentions a possible drawback to small classes and ironically, it is connected with the possibility to give immediate feedback. After some observations in a class of 20 children, during whole class carpet sessions, the researcher noticed that the teacher used to respond to children constantly, whether to correct them or express approval. This tendency kept the class getting continually interrupted by the teacher, thus, the fluency of the lesson seemed to be lost at several times. It was also noticed that adults such as secretaries and nurses happened to interrupt the teaching in an inconvenient way for the learners. This situation is more likely to occur in small classes.

Managing learning

"The teacher's physical approach and personality in the class is one aspect of class management to consider. Another is one of the teacher's chief tools: the voice. Perhaps the teacher's most important instrument is the voice" (Harmer, 2007, p. 16).

According to this author, managing learning involves taking into consideration various crucial aspects of the teaching-learning process, especially in large classes. One of these aspects is audibility, and audibility needs to be planned and meditated by teachers in advance. As cited in the previous paragraph, one of the most useful instruments educators possess to teach, is their voice. There is no other way to teach large classes, teachers need to be audible, and audible here means that every student in the classroom, those at the front as well as those at the back, can hear their teachers and peers clearly. This will influence the teaching-learning process remarkably, and will help the teachers during three important moments of the lesson: when giving instructions, giving feedback, and managing time.

Instructions are usually given or explained using oral language. Whenever the teacher uses his or her voice to instruct, it is important that the information be eloquent and meaningful. Yoon and Kim (2012) points out that there are some instructional strategies teachers must consider when managing learning in large classes. First, they suggest fortuitous questioning; second, positioning students to have analytical abilities; and last, a consistent use of inference. These strategies will help to build linguistic proficiency and foster good comprehension skills in the students.

Going back to Harmer (2007), this researcher insists on the importance of the educator's instructions as a tool to manage learning processes adequately: instructions should preferably be clear and easy to understand, and most importantly, given in a repetitive way. This author also stresses the relevance of the teacher's tone and volume of the voice especially in crowded classrooms; depending on the type of activity and lesson, the voice tone

should be varied. Other critical factors to consider when managing learning, are the teacher's appearance, and the way they move and speak, these elements have an impact on how the teachers are perceived by the learners.

Another aspect to be thoughtfully planned and carefully carried out by teachers relates to the way they give feedback to the students. Feedback is widely seen as an essential part of the learning process in any subject matter. "Its importance is acknowledged in process-based classrooms, where it forms a key element of the student's growing control over composing skills, and by teachers employing scaffold learning techniques" (Hyland & Hyland, 2006, p. 10). These authors also assert that feedback practices have changed and have been improved over the years. Accordingly, these practices nowadays coexist with peer feedback, workshops, and computer-delivered feedback, being all of them very helpful in large classes.

Finally, the correct use of time in the classroom – known as time management – is an indispensable variable to look at if teachers want to help their pupils to achieve any learning goals. McLeod, Fisher, and Hoover (2003) consider time management so important that they suggest teachers to plan instructional activities thinking of every moment of a lesson. Preparing and distributing materials, introducing the lesson, delivering instruction, assigning work, and closing the lesson, are crucial moments that have their own characteristics. Therefore, it's mandatory that the teachers plan the amount of time needed for each activity very carefully; in each phase, using time wisely becomes a key factor. For example, when preparing and distributing materials, teachers must estimate the time they need for class setup, passing out materials, and getting the students ready in their work areas. When introducing the lesson, the teacher will need more or less time depending on the objectives and the complexity of the topic. When delivering instruction, various teaching strategies must be considered by the teacher depending on the time available. He or she could do a demonstration, a lecture, a whole-class activity, or a debate, for example. But the decision to

implement one or another strategy depends on the time at hand. Class work is also an important moment of a lesson. Teachers must keep an eye on the clock and decide whether the activities can be executed in the classroom or if it is better to send homework, due at a future time. Last, time management is necessary when closing a lesson. This is a crucial moment to give feedback, make corrections, and celebrate students' participation (McLeod, Fisher, & Hoover, 2003).

As we have seen so far, managing learning is an important element within the classroom; it does not involve a single situation, but a compendium of conditions that must be thought over carefully. Teachers perform a decisive role here. In these regards, Thomas & Jere (1994) states:

> The classroom learning environment develops gradually, in response to the teacher's communication of expectations, modeling of behavior, and approach to classroom management. The most important determinant is the teacher's method of classroom management, especially his or her techniques for keeping the class actively engaged in independent or small-group activities. (p. 131)

Managing large classes

Even though teaching a large class is usually seen as an undesirable experience most teachers try to avoid, large groups become a reality for many educators. Since large classes seem to be unavoidable, knowing how to manage them and not die trying is indispensable for educators to reach positive results in their classes.

Teaching is said to be the ability to create a bond with the learners, and make a difference in how they think and live (Martensson et al., 2008). Considering this premise, it is important to stress out that in large classes teachers have the opportunity to be in contact with more individuals. That is one of the most beneficial facts about teaching big groups.

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Therefore, a large class should be regarded as favorable instead of disadvantageous. The point here is that teachers should shift their focus onto class management rather than avoiding the situation.

There are several ideas, criteria, and feelings among researchers about teaching and managing large classes. For instance, Michaelsen, Knight, and Fink (2002) have stated that team-based learning is the answer to the problem. They support the theory that promoting small learning groups of students help to ameliorate the difficulties present in big classes. According to these researchers, in a team-based learning course, pupils are carefully arranged into permanent groups for a whole term or academic unit. Their theory asserts that team-based learning rests on four elements for its appropriate application: groups, accountability, feedback, and assignment design.

Likewise, Carbone (1998) shares more ideas and suggests the use of visual aids and technology as a means of managing large classes without necessarily having to split the group. This author's findings put emphasis on the usefulness of teaching tools such as videos, the Internet, Power Point presentations (or similar), and electronic tutorials, inside and outside the class. However, some authors think that the elements mentioned will not work out in all groups if they are implemented separately. Hornsby, Osman, and De (2013) expresses that in order to cope with large classes, teachers must make use of multiple teaching strategies; one or two will not produce any solutions. Big groups bring along restrictions and limitations, and being totally aware of these problems may help to plan actions in order to balance the situation.

Activities for working with large classes

All language teachers, depending on the ages they teach, must contemplate a wide variety of activities and procedures to be successful throughout every lesson. Herrell and

Jordan (2012) suggest the implementation of the following small group activities in large classes.

Skill Grouping works by having the learners gathered according to their need of guidance in a specific skill. This strategy may be done for a short period of time depending on the learners' progress. Similarly, in Partner Work, learners have the chance to collaborate and help each other by pairing up and performing a task together. Once they have accomplished the goals, they are supposed to share the results with the teacher and the rest of the class. These activities allow the students to interact and practice the target language without being intimidated by the multitude.

Peer Tutoring is an excellent choice to strengthen the confidence of a strong learner who is capable of guiding and helping a weak one. High attainment learners are expected to model the language and then act as mentors that support low attainment students in some aspects of the learning process.

Usually, students need some time on their own to do activities that help them to sharpen their senses and bone up on language abilities they have already acquired. Learning Centers are one of the best options to do it. This strategy aids to develop autonomy and gives the chance to work with classmates, for example, through self-evaluation procedures, reading, and listening activities.

Herrell and Jordan (2012) also insists on the importance of working together as the best way to learn efficiently. In Cooperative Learning, students are expected to perform various types of tasks that cannot be undertaken neither by one single student nor a large group of learners. This kind of activities fosters togetherness and teamwork along with empathy and mutual respect.

Aiming at similar objectives, Stanley and Porter (2002) suggests the following activities for working with large classes: think-pair-share, jigsaw reading groups, notecards, and

attendance sheets. In Think-Pair-Share the learners are expected to solve a problem by answering questions asked by the teacher. After a short time to look for the answers, students pair up and share their ideas. Teachers can choose some of the students randomly to share their answers with the class.

Jigsaw Reading Groups is an activity where the learners are divided into cooperative groups. Each member is given a paragraph from a piece of reading i.e. a magazine article or short story. After each member reads their part, they have to teach the content of their paragraph to the rest of the group. Comprehension of the story is checked by the teacher through administering a brief quiz or asking in-class questions.

Notecards consist in the distribution of slips of paper to the class with the intention of asking relevant questions about content or class procedures. Students write the answers and the teacher reviews the notecards and gives feedback during the next lesson.

Lastly, through Attendance Sheets teachers ask questions related to the lesson being taught. Students write the questions and their answers down on a piece of paper. When the lesson is over, they must turn in their sheets as their "pass" to exit the classroom.

Classroom space and seating arrangement

The way a teacher arranges the furniture in a classroom exerts a significant impact on the results the students obtain during a lesson or a series of lessons. So does the space, including the size of windows, doors, and walls (Savage & Savage, 2010).

Classroom space and seating arrangement immediately guide our thoughts to classroom density and the difficulties that may arise if this is not carefully contemplated by the teacher. In this regard, large classes have proven to be places where appropriate learning does not take place efficiently, especially crowded ones. In big, populous rooms, there is much of inattentiveness, indiscipline, stress, and lack of student self-control; these issues may cause distraction and give the learners a feeling of remoteness. Therefore, the shape and

organization of objects within the classroom are essential aspects to be considered when planning a lesson (McLeod et al., 2003).

Accordingly, teachers must be cautious when designing a classroom setting. It is important to consider the best way to make the learners feel comfortable and part of the learning community. Sometimes the teacher will not be able to take out all the furniture and teaching aids from the room, and moving the class to an open space in the school might be an impossible action to take. However, making other decisions and putting some ideas into practice will be of great help.

Williams (2009) stresses the importance of creating empty spaces and removing unnecessary furniture that do not allow the students to spread out whenever they feel the need. This author insists that, depending on the activities we have planned and according to the outcomes we want the learners to achieve, our setup must change frequently. The following are a few ideas for classroom arrangement suggested by various authors.

Traditional classrooms are usually arranged in a way popularly known as Orderly Rows. Although this setup has been declined lately and has many detractors, Harmer (2007) asserts it has many advantages. For instance, the teacher is able to exert complete control over the students since he or she can monitor them from different spots in the classroom. Besides, the teacher can move up and down the room in order to watch, give feedback, or simply be in closer contact with the learners. Also, Orderly Rows is a good strategy when a whole class activity has been designed, for example, listening practices, whole-class discussions, grammar explanations on the board, watching a video, among others. Harmer (2007) also states that Orderly Rows have worked out all over the world in rooms packed with 40 to 200 learners.

In a previous section dealing with activities suggested for large classes, the importance of dividing the class into small groups was highlighted. In that sense, Separate Tables is a setup that allows the students to work cooperatively feeling a less hierarchical atmosphere

(Harmer, 2007). When trying this strategy, the teacher has the opportunity to interact with a group of learners while the others work on their own.

The teacher can ask the students to sit in a Circle or a Horseshoe shape too. According to Harmer (2007), these arrangements have unquestionable benefits for a large class, giving the students a sense of equality that allows them to talk, share information, make visual contact, and notice each other's body language. However, these two setups are not advisable if the room is not big enough. In that case, teachers are suggested to use Banquet or Fishbone patterns which have similar advantages to those described for Circles and Horseshoe but can hold more people in reduced spaces (Andersen & Schiano, 2014).

Different levels of proficiency

Classroom heterogeneity is a complex situation, especially in large classes. Today, classroom heterogeneity is seen as a positive characteristic of dynamic courses. It also represents a productive advantage teachers may turn into their favor, if they are wise enough to make good use of it. When the word heterogeneity is mentioned in an educational context, it is commonly associated to class diversity and different levels of proficiency.

In a mixed, miscellaneous class, students bring a realm of experiences and cultural backgrounds. They also are at different developmental stages in terms of skills and knowledge, and show dissimilar personalities and aptitudes. This, is the perfect scenario to make a lesson become more lively, progressive, and productive. In classes with students at diverse proficiency levels, weak students are helped and encouraged by strong ones, thus, group challenges and tasks are easy to do. In a large heterogeneous, multilevel class, it is advisable that the teachers divide the group into two or three proficiency levels, and have the pupils do activities according to their capabilities (Richards & Burns, 2012).

Heterogeneous classes have some inconveniences as well; for instance, when the learners' abilities in the language are too distant – some are very strong, others are too weak –

the objectives may not be accomplished. It means that the teacher must try different strategies and diverse methods in order to fill the gap between learners. Special attention must be paid during assessment, when differentiation based on the students' ranges of expertise must be contemplated (Gottlieb & Ernst-Slavit, 2014).

Up to now, the bibliography consulted for this research was summarized and reviewed. From this point onwards, five earlier studies on the topic will be exposed as part of the theoretical framework. As will be seen, the studies revised shed light upon real situations teachers and learners face in large class environments. Below, different educational contexts will be featured and described.

One of the studies analyzed was conducted by Blatchford, Bassett, and Brown (2011). Aiming at examining some aspects of the language teaching-learning process in primary and secondary schools, the researchers mainly focused on the repercussions of class size on student performance, as well as the learner's interactions with teachers and peers. This research was carried out in 27 elementary schools and 22 secondary schools in the UK during the years 2005-2006. The schools were selected randomly, and the study involved a naturalistic, non-experimental approach. The global plan of action intended to choose participating schools at random to gauge the effects class size had on the students. Measuring tools were selected carefully based on preceding studies and a pilot work. Factors that had a direct impact on classroom processes were handled statistically. As a methodology, regression procedures were adopted at several levels of the research, going backwards from more complex levels to the less developed stages, in terms of teaching practices and classroom dynamics. The relation between class size and observation measures played an important role all through the research.

According to the researchers, the results were different from those predicted, especially in elementary schools. It could be observed that class size had little or no effect on teaching

and classroom management at that level. However, in secondary schools, the results were different and in some cases the observations showed that an increase of only five students in a class represented 15% of decreasing class behavior. It means that the researchers observed an increasing number of students exhibiting lack of attention with the addition of only five students to a group. Additionally, teachers had more difficulties maintaining discipline and the students did not interact with each other or the teacher effectively. The study concludes that large classes have a negative influence on students, because they tend to go off task more easily and teachers have to make greater efforts to bring them back on task.

Another study considered in this paper was carried out by Fidler (2001). It principally paid attention to the effects of class reduction on student attainment. Although the aim was not to conduct a study about large classes, the purpose is clearly related to it since numerous large classes were scrutinized. The study was conducted in elementary schools in Los Angeles, California, from 1997 to 2000, specifically, 3rd, 4th and 5th graders were observed and examined. The methodology through which this study was made, followed a quasi-experimental design; it permitted to compare the effects of Class Size Reduction (CSR) on student achievement. The participants were divided into four cohorts (or groups), as defined in Statistics. Each cohort had their own characteristics and included students from two different grades with previous or no exposure to CSR. A dose-response design was used at different moments of the research, being the learners under the influence of CSR.

Student progress was estimated through tests in three subjects: language, mathematics, and reading, in a similar learning environment as that of the Content-based Instruction Method (discussed previously in this paper). The marks of the exams were tabulated and gain scores calculated.

The conclusions of the research were mixed. On the one hand, it showed that class size reduction had positive effects on student achievement, especially in language and reading

classes. It concluded that students who learn a second language in a large class are more likely to fail meeting the educational standards, whereas in a small class, the situation is the opposite. Additionally, the majority of learners with more exposure to CSR reached the goals set by the teachers and had better performance. On the other hand, there was a small but consistent group of students whose results showed a favorable progress disregarding CSR. The author suggested that future studies should include information about teachers and examine the impact they have on the students' academic success.

The third study took place in large ESL (English as a Second Language) classes in Pakistan. It turned its attention to classroom processes and teacher-learner behavior in large, medium, and small classes. The study was undertaken by Shamim (1993) and attempted to observe and analyze three main facts: first, teachers and learners' perceptions of the teaching-learning process; second, behavioral facts; and third, effectiveness of teaching a class of numerous students. Case study, onsite data collection, and a qualitative approach were the methods used by the researcher. A total of 20 teachers and 21 groups of learners were interviewed from 232 classes of different sizes. The study was carried out in six secondary schools in Karachi, the capital of Pakistan. Through this research, Shamim (1993) proved that there are marked differences in the interactions between teachers and students, depending on the number of the latter: the bigger the class, the more difficult and less effective these interactions became. Furthermore, there were obvious disparities in terms of the teaching styles implemented by the instructors, again, depending on the number of students.

Some of the findings of this study are condensed as follows: In large classes, teachers are usually in front of the class and learners tend to divide the classroom into two zones, 1) the front, where circumstances are appropriate and conducive to learning, and 2) the back, where learning conditions are minimal and insufficient. The students' behavior and attention are set by/depend on how far or near the teacher is from them; the instructor's location is

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therefore, crucial. According to this study, learners usually pay more attention if they are under the direct gaze of the teacher.

Shamim (1993) also expresses that class size is neither an independent nor a controlling variable, as it was assumed in the past. In fact, class size is perceived by the participants in relation to other variables in the teaching-learning process. The study concluded that more attention to pedagogic solutions must be paid, especially considering how to teach large classes well in different socio-cultural settings. It also reaffirmed the need for an interest in the pedagogy of large classes, and emphasized the importance of surmounting the difficulties teachers run into when they introduce progressive ideas, particularly in English language teaching. Finally, the author suggests that instead of a frontal attack on the problem, other alternatives to reduce class size negative effects should be explored.

The fourth study, was carried out by Hull et al. (2006), a group of professors working at the School of Liberal Arts Kmutt, in Thailand. It was entitled Reflections (originally rEFLections) and was subdivided into five sections that deal with the implications of teaching large classes at various levels of education. The study also includes an extensive literature review by R. Watson (first section of Reflections) and four interrelated on-site researches described below.

The first on-site research, by P. Jimakorn and W. Singhasiri (second section of Reflections) was intended for a close look into class management, techniques, strategies, and teaching procedures. A questionnaire was given to 75 educators so as to inquire into the teachers' feelings and thoughts about large groups. The survey included open and close-ended questions focused on evaluation, classroom space, and affective relationships. Participants' responses were interpreted in a descriptive way. Percentages and averages were determined as well.

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The second on-site research included in Reflections (third section) by R. Watson, compared two EFL classes, one large group of 41 students and one small of 23. The data was obtained from two lessons taught and videotaped, one lesson per class. Watson and his colleagues analyzed the recordings and compared them to 14 common hypotheses about class size. In the end, various elements were described and evaluated, such as the teacher and student talking time, the use of L1 (native language), feedback, and discipline.

The third research conducted by P. Darasawang and W. Srimavin (fourth section of Reflections) aimed at comparing the use of lectures vs. tutorials when teaching large classes, assessing all implications for students and teachers. The researchers first planned a lecture to 65 students and then a tutorial session for 15-16. Later, two instruments were implemented to collect the data: a questionnaire given to the students, and an anecdotal report written by the teacher. The latter was a record of what happened in class. The information provided by both tools was compared and analyzed carefully.

Finally, a fourth research included in Reflections (fifth section) was carried out by S. Keyuravong and K. Maneekhao and relates to the use of technology in a large class of 60 students. Particularly, the use of e-mails in an online, off-campus class discussion was contemplated. The research showed interesting information about students' attitudes towards email consultation and the practical problems that arose during the experiments.

Some findings by Hull et al. (2006) uncovered negative, inconvenient situations that are likely to happen in large classes. For instance, undesired results in learning, low quality learning experiences, discipline issues, and space/setup problems. Poorer feedback practices and less efficient evaluation mechanisms (compared to small classes), and fewer moments for student-student/teacher-student interactions were mentioned as well.

The researchers reached the conclusion that even though teaching a large class is not an impossible task to perform, it implies working within severe constraints. They also concluded

that in large classes, teachers can make several adjustments and develop strategies so as to lessen any negative impacts on learning. Likewise, the inquirers stated that large classes are not appropriate for teaching productive skills since the students are at a potential risk of becoming non-contributors. The researchers also pointed out that technological aids are necessary to help the teacher to cope with the pressure, and that class management may become a headache for educators who are not likely to devote enough attention or provide valuable feedback to their pupils.

Finally, to complete the review of previous studies considered for this thesis project, a fifth study should be mentioned. It was conducted by Blatchford, Russell, Bassett, Brown, & Martin (2006) and deals with the effects class size has on elementary school students. The research found important drawbacks overpopulated classrooms suffer from. A multi-method approach was adopted, integrating qualitative information from the teachers' end-of-year accounts, and quantitative data from case studies and systematic observations.

The results showed clear differences between small and large classes as to teacher-pupil interactions. Two allied behaviors were more common in large classes: 1) the child listens to the teacher, and 2) the child as an audience. The former denotes moments when the learner's contributions and interactions in class are passive; they act as mere listeners. The latter refers to times when they are not the focus of the teacher, that is, they are one of the crowd. According to the authors, these two types of behavior were exhibited in the large classes observed.

Additionally, the study asserts that teachers see the necessity for regular interactions with each pupil on a daily basis, but it becomes more difficult as the class gets bigger. Another downside found by the researchers relates to the problems teachers are confronted with in order to spot difficulties early and offer opportune feedback. Immediate comments are easier to make with fewer children. In that sense, teachers try to behave towards all pupils

equally, but find that in large classes some groups can miss out. Perhaps most commonly, teachers worry that the extremes of the attainment range – the most and the least capable learners – tend to be neglected as the class size increases, and only the "middle" of the class have their needs adequately met.

Other conclusions reached by this study suggest that large classes foster passive pupil role. What is more, teachers are not able to personalize their teaching style due to the high number of students and thus cannot manage different abilities and knowledge levels.

Chapter II: Method

Setting and participants

This research was conducted in Quito, Ecuador, in December 2014. Up to 180 middle and high school students (8th to 11th grade) from Unidad Educativa Tumbaco participated in it. Most students surveyed belonged to lower and lower-middle class families. The majority of them were laborers and housewives' children. In terms of ethnicity, most of them had Hispanic and mestizo characteristics. Some students had the ability to speak both, Spanish and Quechua as their everyday communication languages; however, the majority could only speak Spanish.

Unidad Educativa Tumbaco is a K-12 public school under the supervision, jurisdiction, and control of the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education. It is located in Tumbaco, in the outskirts of Quito. Unidad Educativa Tumbaco is one of the few public schools in Ecuador that have satisfactorily implemented both, the Ecuadorian BGU (Bachillerato General Unificado) and the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program. These programs are targeted at training high school students to meet the highest national and international educational standards.

Procedures

The development of the theoretical framework comprised two stages: 1) the review of preceding literature and 2) the adoption of a theoretical perspective. The first step of the process was seeking, reading, examining, and analyzing previous literature on the research topic. Several books and earlier studies were considered as the foundation of the theoretical frame of the research. In order to review the literature existing on the topic, a considerable number of visits were made to the libraries at Colegio Alberto Einstein (Quito) and Universidad San Francisco – USFQ (Tumbaco). Additionally, much of the information was gathered from the textbooks provided by UTPL as part of the university curriculum, and

some websites were accessed to continue the research of previous studies on the subject. The Queen's University of Kingston (Ontario, Canada) online library was very useful for this purpose. Most of the journals and studies contemplated to support this thesis project were found on Queen's online database; others were browsed through web search engines such as Academic Info, Refseek, Google Scholar, and Infomine.

The on-site research was carried out through a questionnaire and note taking. During the process, the participants received a survey sheet with a set of 21 questions that had to be filled out anonymously (see Annex). The questionnaire was designed to inquire into instructional, social, and psychological aspects of the teaching-learning process. All the information gathered was tabulated and displayed in the tables and charts provided for this purpose. The graphics were made taking into account four descriptors: STRONGLY AGREE and AGREE as positive responses, and PARTIALLY AGREE and DISAGREE as negative ones. Later, this information was thoroughly analyzed, quantitatively and qualitatively.

After having explained the context of the project, it is crucial to state that this quantitative and qualitative research intends to explain, rather than simply describe, the problems and in general, the phenomena revolving around large classes. It focused upon determining what influence large classes have on the English language teaching-learning process, and understanding why certain events occur in this scenario, examining the conditions in which they take place.

Chapter III: Description, Analysis and Interpretation of Results

In this section, the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data obtained from the on-site research will be shown in tables and graphs, and explained thoroughly. The analysis was supported by and compared with relevant information collected and shown in the Literature Review section. In order to have a better understanding of the problems brought about by large classes, all the evidence gathered will be analyzed from three different but interrelated perspectives. These perspectives are the instructional, social, and psychological implications large classes have on the teaching-learning process. The tables and graphics in this paper were drawn up taking into account four descriptors: STRONGLY AGREE/AGREE, considered as positive responses, and PARTIALLY AGREE/DISAGREE, regarded as negative ones.
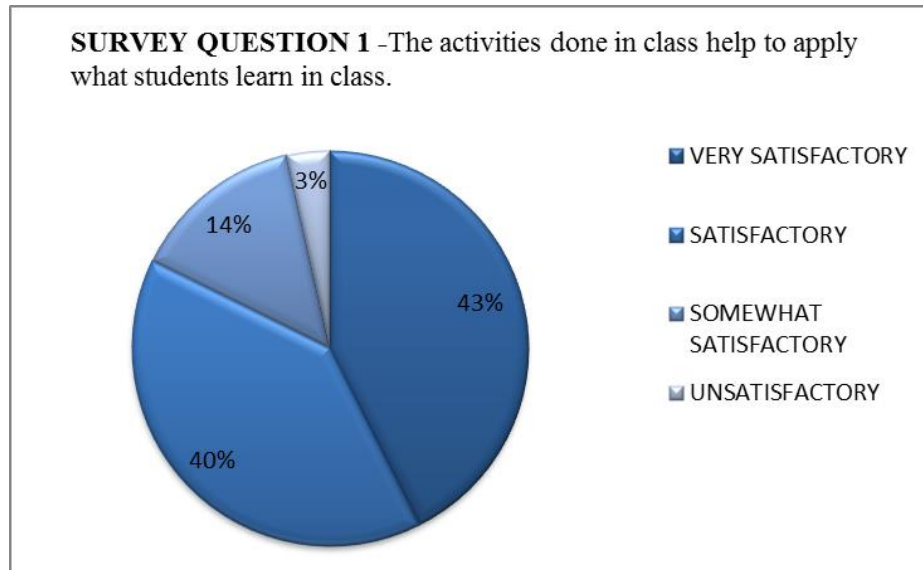
In order to begin the analysis, the Table below shows what a total of 180 students who participated in the survey think about some instructional aspects of their class environment. Each row shows the number of participants who chose each descriptor. The two columns on the right under the word TOTAL, include the number of students who responded to each question and its percentage. It is important to clarify that some questions in various survey sheets were annulled due to inconsistencies. For example, some answers were unreadable, and in some cases, students doubled the x or the tick mark in one box on the questionnaire sheets. The results for each question will be shown in graphs and analyzed below.

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

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.	**60**	42.6	**56**	39.7	**20**	14.2	**05**	3.6	**141**	78
2.	The activities done, allow to practice listening, speaking, reading and writing skills.	**59**	32.9	**82**	45.8	**30**	16.8	**08**	4.5	**179**	99
3.	The students are attentive and participate in class activities, including those sitting at the back of the classroom.	**09**	5.0	**38**	21.2	**98**	54.8	**34**	19.0	**179**	99
4.	Varied class activities are used such as group, individual, pair-work activities, etc.	**95**	53.1	**61**	34.1	**18**	10.1	**05**	2.8	**179**	99
5.	Activities such as plays, competitions, debates, games, etc. are used in class.	**29**	16.1	**51**	28.3	**59**	32.8	**41**	22.8	**180**	100
6.	Students can cheat during the test.	**12**	6.7	**09**	5.0	**25**	13.9	**134**	74.5	**180**	100
7.	Students get distracted by doing assignments from other subjects.	**18**	10.3	**30**	17.1	**38**	21.7	**89**	50.9	**175**	97
8.	The seating arrangement facilitates the tasks that are carried out in class.	**48**	26.9	**73**	41.0	**41**	23.0	**16**	8.9	**178**	98.8
9.	Students cannot receive regular feedback from the teacher due to the large number of students.	**16**	8.9	**68**	37.9	**61**	34.1	**34**	19.0	**179**	99

TABLE 1 - Survey applied to the students
Percentage Results from a sample of 180 people

Author: Pedro Pablo Pérez Capote
Source: Survey conducted at Unidad Educativa Tumbaco

SURVEY QUESTION 1 - The activities done in class help to apply what students learn in class.
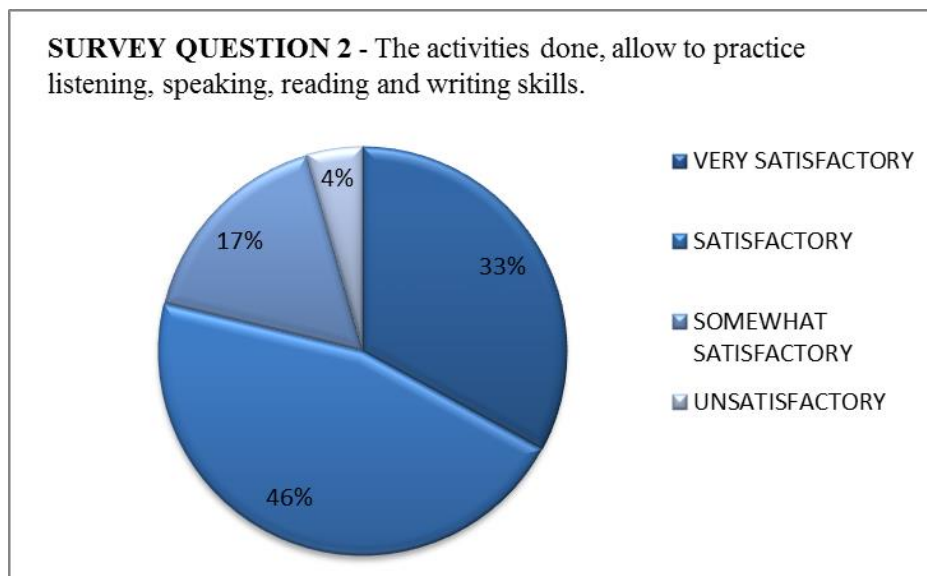
Author: Pedro Pablo Pérez Capote
Source: Survey conducted at Unidad Educativa Tumbaco

The first question relates to class activities and the purpose these activities have to support the learning process. Most of the participants surveyed in the school in Tumbaco had the same opinion about the way they exercise language skills in their classes. The majority of the students (43%) totally agreed that it is possible to do activities that allow them to practice what is being taught. Additionally, another large group of 40% showed positive thoughts and agreed with the statement as well. A minimum of 17% had a different idea, expressing their insatisfaction with this point (14% felt the activities are somewhat satisfactory and 3% of them unsatisfactory).

Evidently, the survey results show opposite ideas to what educators often think about this issue. A popular belief among teachers – and also among parents and the school community in general – asserts that the bigger the class, the lesser the time available for practice. However, the outcomes of the survey here analized, revealed that this popular assumption may not be applicable to all schools with large groups. It is clear that the majority of students polled, happened to have different thoughts about it. This is probably due to the implementation of make-up classes and small group practices as part of the strategies used by

the teachers in that institution, in order to cope with the problems posed by numerous pupils and a lack of time to practice.

According to various authors – mentioned later in this paragraph – practicing what is being taught is an important aspect to consider in a language class. The teacher's goal, therefore, should be routed to helping and encouraging the learners to achieve positive outcomes in terms of correct use of the target language, no matter the class size (Richter, 2008). This necessity inevitably grows in importance in large classes, as there are more students in a room and the teachers have to think out and suggest more types of training strategies to meet all the learners' needs. In addition, there are more personalities and discimilar learning styles in a large group of students, and this fact usually translates into the necessity of a carefully tailored class plan. Richter (2008) states that motor and cognitive skill improvement is achieved through practice, which is completely indispensable when new information or a skill is being taught/acquired. In these regards, Hull et al. (2006) points out that "If the schools or universities cannot avoid teaching in large classes, they need to provide sessions where students can practice in small groups and consult with their teachers" (p. 12). In a few words, in large classes, those practice sessions and the possibility of carrying out extra work in small groups seem to make a difference in the students' perception of the activities planned by the teacher, and ultimately in the class academic outcomes. The survey results are the best proof of this.

SURVEY QUESTION 2 - The activities done, allow to practice listening, speaking, reading and writing skills.

- VERY SATISFACTORY
- SATISFACTORY
- SOMEWHAT SATISFACTORY
- UNSATISFACTORY

4%
17%
33%
46%

Author: Pedro Pablo Pérez Capote
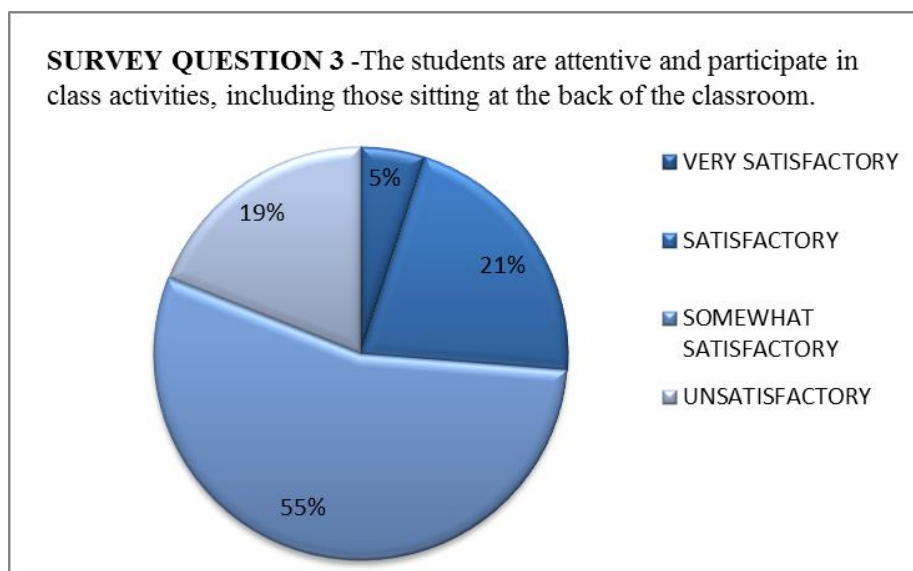Source: Survey conducted at Unidad Educativa Tumbaco

The questionnaire revealed that 33% of the students totally agreed and 46% agreed that the activities they engage in during lesson time allow them to practice listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. A small percentage (17%) partially agreed, and a minimal 4% disagreed. It means that the majority of participants considered that the activities proposed by the teachers favors practicing what is being taught.

All language teachers know that skill practice is a key factor for any language learner to master his or her competence to communicate effectively. Logically, having the opportunity to develop one's productive and receptive abilities is crucial to master a second language. In these regards, authors such as DeKeyser (2007) insists on the importance of skill practice in a language class. For instance, he observes that practice – understood as actions intended to exercise and master an ability, or increase the learners' knowledge on a subject matter – plays a significant role in language learning. However, DeKeyser (2007) also expresses that research supports the idea that in large language classes, practicing all four skills becomes a paramount task for teachers, who consider having too many students as an obstacle.

Similarly, authors such as Hull et al. (2006) accept the notion that practicing oral expression skills – speaking and listening – within a large group tends to be a difficult task

due to noise and behavioral problems. According to this author, prior studies indicate that in large groups of students, teacher-centered, reading-based, and grammar-translation methods tend to be overused by the teachers, thus, communicative approaches are commonly neglected. Hull et al. (2006) asseverates that large classes make it more difficult for learners to get better at language skills, especially those needed in oral expression.

In brief, the survey results and the authors' observations about this issue seem to be contradictory. This may be due to the implementation of different strategies to promote skill improvement in the school visited in Tumbaco, i.e. more opportunities for practice, activities where two to four students get together to perform a task, and organization patterns. These strategies go in hand with the ideas Rovegno & Bandhauer (2013) promote, asserting that teachers ought to foster group practice and skill reinforcement through small learning centers so as to provide enough time to exercise listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, among other language requirements.
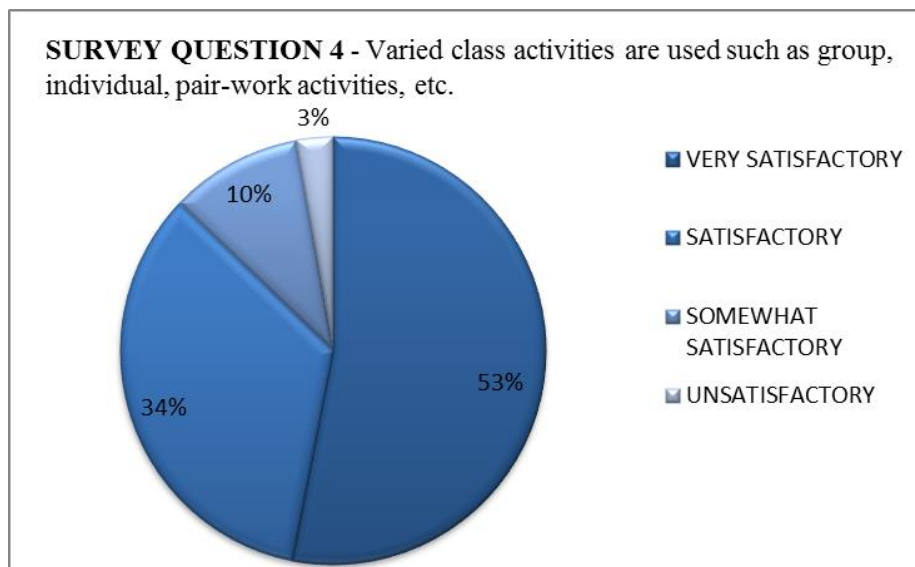

Author: Pedro Pablo Pérez Capote
Source: Survey conducted at Unidad Educativa Tumbaco

The third question unfolds a scenario that is associated with student discipline and participation in large classes. The chart above shows that a few participants expressed to be attentive and focused in class. According to the results, only 26% of the learners polled,

admitted that they pay attention to the teachers and participate in class activities (5% totally agreed and 21% agreed), while a large number of 55% partially agreed and 19% disagreed.

Concerning this issue, a study conducted by Blatchford et al. (2011) points out that adding a few students to a class may significantly affect some students' performance, especially of those sitting far from the teacher. This study also proved that both, low and high attainment students were observed to be off task more frequently, depending on their location in the room. In general, the study proved that the higher the number of students, the shorter their attention span. It also suggested that generally, teachers need to spend precious class time to bring the learners back on task.

As seen, an agreement can be noticed between the survey results and the authors consulted. In large classes, students' attention may be diverted, and their participation may decrease during a lesson. In this context, pupils sitting at the back of the room along with slow learners may take the worst part. They can easily get distracted by the noise and movement around, having more difficulties to concentrate on a task or follow the teacher's instructions adequately. In a large class, teachers are more likely to lose control over the group and might be unable to get the students back on task, jeopardizing the fulfillment of class objectives. This situation represents, therefore, one of the major drawbacks of large classes.

SURVEY QUESTION 4 - Varied class activities are used such as group, individual, pair-work activities, etc.

- VERY SATISFACTORY
- SATISFACTORY
- SOMEWHAT SATISFACTORY
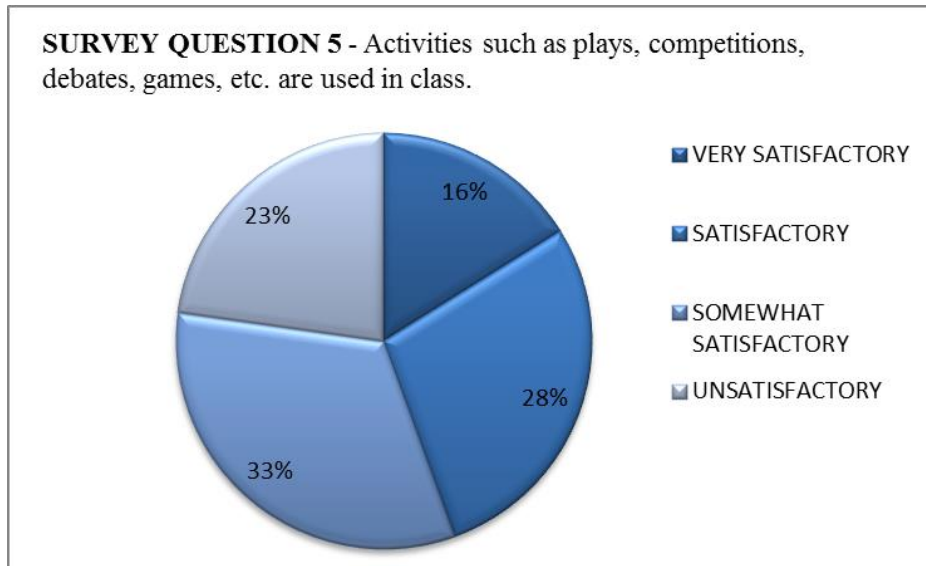- UNSATISFACTORY

3%
10%
34%
53%

Author: Pedro Pablo Pérez Capote
Source: Survey conducted at Unidad Educativa Tumbaco

The survey results indicate that most of the students who took part in it (53%) totally agreed that a wide variety of activities is done in their classes. The chart above also shows that a total of 34% of the participants agreed, while only 10% partially agreed and 3% disagreed. In this case, the participants expressed positive feelings about the variety of tasks they perform during lessons, and made clear that group, individual, and pair-work activities, are usually proposed by their teachers.

These results may be due to some reasons, for example, the teacher's methods and techniques to get the students enthusiastically involved in schoolwork. Thomas & Jere (1994) suggests that it is crucial that teachers implement a wide range of activities in a class with numerous students, rather than keeping them using the same setup or working in the same manner routinely. Skill grouping, pair work, peer tutoring, cooperative learning, and learning centers are some techniques that have proved to integrate all students in a convenient learning environment and are a must in large classes (Herrell & Jordan, 2012). These strategies also motivate pupils to actively engage in classwork and help teachers who have difficulties handling big classes to avoid repeating the same activities.

In that sense, both, the survey results and the authors consulted, support the notion that in large classes, planning and doing varied and dynamic lessons is not only the best alternative for teaching such groups, it is feasible as well.

SURVEY QUESTION 5 - Activities such as plays, competitions, debates, games, etc. are used in class.

- VERY SATISFACTORY
- SATISFACTORY
- SOMEWHAT SATISFACTORY
- UNSATISFACTORY

16%
28%
33%
23%

Author: Pedro Pablo Pérez Capote
Source: Survey conducted at Unidad Educativa Tumbaco

This question is closely related to survey question number 4, but the findings here represent a strong contradiction compared to the previous ones. Most of the students surveyed manifested negative thoughts about the use of activities such as plays, competitions, debates, games, etc. In this case, 33% partially agreed and 23% disagreed with the statement. Contrary, only 16% of them totally agreed and 28% agreed.

The idea that interactive activities such as role-plays, contests, debates, and games are essential tools in an EFL class is a common assumption and conviction among language teachers. These activities provide the learners with lively moments of fruitful language exchange and cooperative work. Through such moments, teachers simulate real-world contexts to help the learners to be ready for future use of the language in a real context. Ultimately, that is the main purpose of learning a second language (Mailick and Stumpf, 1998). Additionally, these authors stress the importance of planning activities that require the learners to interact, move around the classroom, collect information, and reach decisions.

From these statements, it can be inferred that doing a variety of class activities are especially important in large classes, an idea that was already corroborated in the analysis of survey question 4. However, the survey results prove that competitions, debates, and games may not always take place in big groups. This may be due to several reasons, maybe the absence of a solid class plan, teachers with little or no willingness to be creative, and of course, their inability to cope with too many students. Likewise, large classes may force the teacher to adopt a comfortable position where the learners can be under his or her gaze (Mailick and Stumpf, 1998). Evidently, the activities stated in the survey question represent a threat to it.
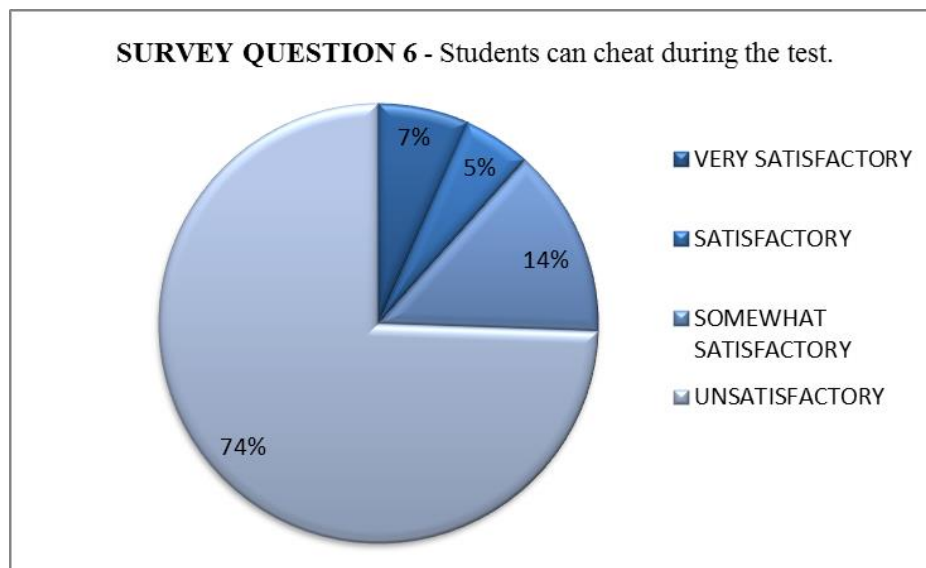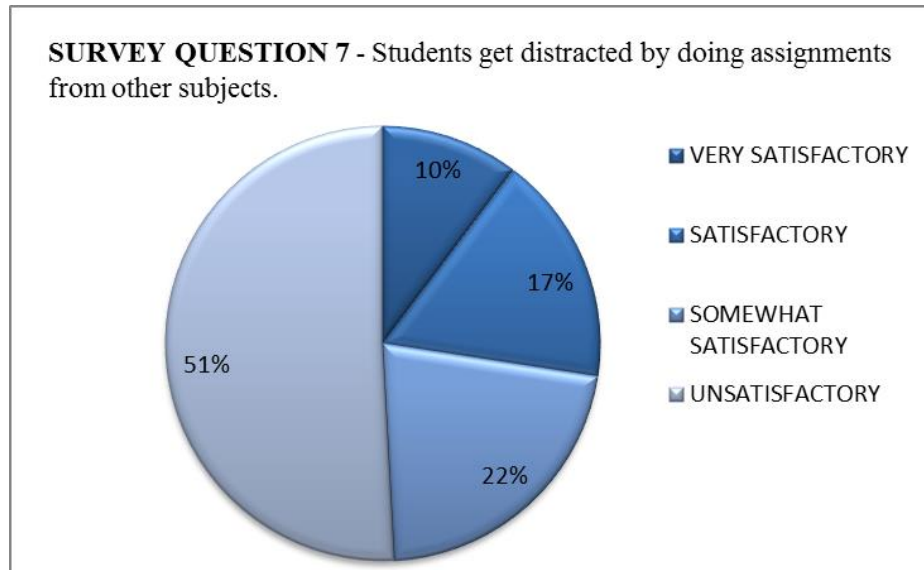

Author: Pedro Pablo Pérez Capote
Source: Survey conducted at Unidad Educativa Tumbaco

Question number six on the questionnaire asked the students if they had the chance to cheat during tests. The answers made it clear that cheating in exams is not an option for them. A high percentage of the participants (74%) affirmed that it does not happen in their classrooms, and 14% partially agreed, which is a negative answer as well. The survey also revealed that a small part of the learners cheat: 5% agreed with the question and 7% totally agreed.

In this regard, back in 1965, a comprehensive study ever made of cheating in the United States was published by the Bureau of Applied Research at Columbia University. In accordance with a magazine article entitled 'A startling survey on college cribbing', some surprising truths about cheating were found and revealed by that study. One of the conclusions asserted that "Cheating is more prevalent at large schools than at small schools and occurs more often in large classes than in small ones" (Bride, 1965, p. 84).

Things do not seem to have changed ever since. In terms of academic dishonesty, educational reality today is not distant from that of the 1960s. For obvious reasons, students in large classes are more likely, and have more chances to cheat than those in small ones. Some determinants may worsen this fact, for example, the inefficiency of proctors who supervise exams, and the ability of students to cheat on a test and get away with it. However, the findings of the survey – shown in chart 6 – demonstrated that cheating is not necessarily a common practice in all large classes. Schools that desire to eradicate this negative habit may take steps in the matter; for example, implementing a careful monitoring during exams, and above all, fostering awareness among students about the negative consequences of cheating in an exam. Additionally, establishing procedures such as different groupings and setups during examinations can be considered too. Precisely, those were the strategies adopted by the school in Tumbaco long before the survey was carried out. It is evident that this policy helped the school to fight against cheating. Today, it is not a common practice there anymore.

SURVEY QUESTION 7 - Students get distracted by doing assignments from other subjects.

- VERY SATISFACTORY
- SATISFACTORY
- SOMEWHAT SATISFACTORY
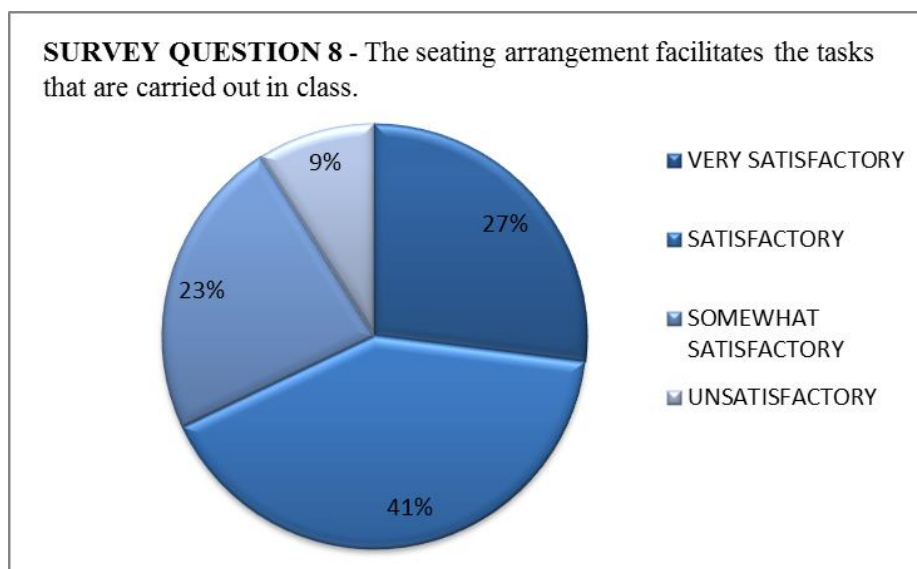- UNSATISFACTORY

10%
17%
22%
51%

Author: Pedro Pablo Pérez Capote
Source: Survey conducted at Unidad Educativa Tumbaco

According to the survey findings, up to 73% of the students (22% partially agreed and 51% disagreed) expressed that it is not possible to get distracted by doing assignments from other subjects. A minority of 10% of the participants totally agreed while 17% agreed with the statement. These results are contrary to the idea school populations have that in large classes, students are likely to do so, and indicate that the schools may face the problem effectively. Of course, such actions encompass well thought out lesson plans and behavioral control, among other strategies.

The fact that some students are inattentive or use lesson time for doing homework or tasks from other subjects, is a situation that might occur in any class, disregarding its size. Logically, in a large class there are some factors that may provide learners with the perfect scene for it to happen. Blatchford et al. (2006) asseverates that in big groups, some students may occasionally escape the teacher's gaze and freewheel. In other cases, teachers who do not plan lessons carefully, or those who purposely give their students some free time during instructional periods, may unconsciously foster this type of conduct as well. In this context, not all the students receive the same level of attention, therefore, those who are neglected may

be at risk of getting distracted. This moment represents the perfect window for students to do assignments from other subjects.

As this is likely to happen, teachers who are in charge of large classes must be very careful not to leave any students behind or let them lose interest. In that sense, a compendium of strategies can be mapped out to confront and resolve the problem. For instance, an adequate class plan, the incorporation of diverse activities in each lesson, and the constant monitoring of those activities can be thought out and done (Hull et al., 2006).

SURVEY QUESTION 8 - The seating arrangement facilitates the tasks that are carried out in class.

- VERY SATISFACTORY
- SATISFACTORY
- SOMEWHAT SATISFACTORY
- UNSATISFACTORY

27%
41%
23%
9%

Author: Pedro Pablo Pérez Capote
Source: Survey conducted at Unidad Educativa Tumbaco

Question number eight sets forth an important aspect teachers must look at and consider carefully: seating arrangement. As the pie chart above shows, a total of 27% of the participants think that the way seats are placed in their classrooms is very satisfactory and 41% satisfactory. Therefore, the majority of them have positive thoughts about the seating arrangement in their classrooms, while 23% chose partially agreed and 9% disagreed.

Concerning seating arrangement, Savage and Savage (2010) states: "Several aspects of the physical environment need to be considered. One of the most important aspects is the spatial dimension – the size, shape, and organization of objects within the space" (p. 67). According to these authors, an appropriate classroom organization of space equals an

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adequate behavioral setting. Behavioral setting is an important factor to consider, especially in a large class; it involves teaching and learning stations, student and teacher's desks, location of instructional material, classroom displays, and decorations. The authors also express that the way teachers arrange and embellish their classrooms may have a positive or negative impact on the learners, motivating them to be creative and spontaneous, or the opposite. In all types of classes, but especially in large ones, the physical environment must be considered by the teacher when planning a lesson. It must be changed two or three times during the school year (Savage & Savage, 2010).

As can be seen, in this case, the survey results and the researchers demonstrated that in large classes, a proper seating arrangement is not only favorable, it is indispensable too. Therefore, teachers should note that learners are able to notice and take advantage of its benefits.
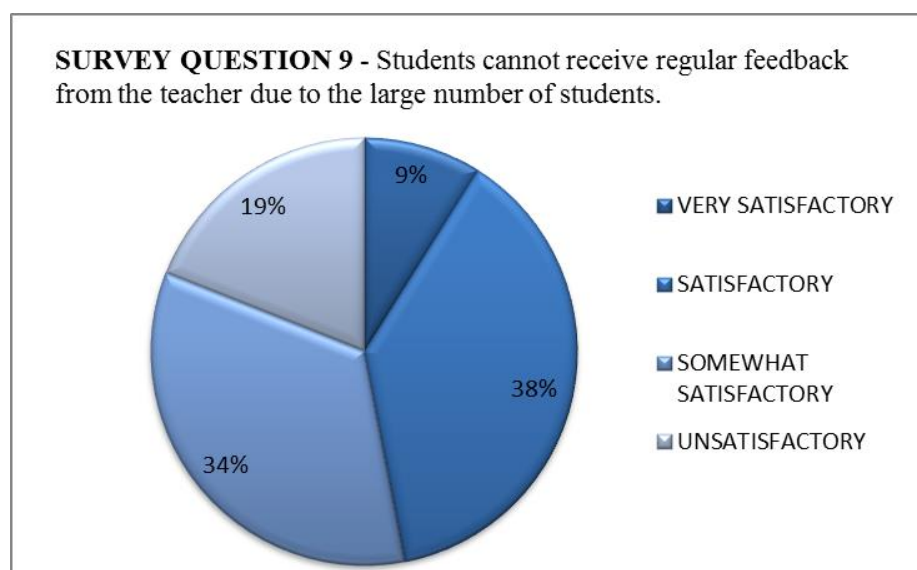
Author: Pedro Pablo Pérez Capote
Source: Survey conducted at Unidad Educativa Tumbaco

This question explored an essential part of the teaching-learning process that is included within the final stage of assessment: feedback. Although neglected in the past, feedback has become an important educational practice lately. All educators know that it aims not only at criticizing or evaluating the student's achievement, but also at showing them which way to go

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so as to improve their work. The survey indicates that the opinions in this question were divided, since 53% of the participants did not consider that the teachers give them appropriate feedback (34% partially agreed and 19% disagreed). A smaller group of 47% had a different opinion (38% finds feedback practices were satisfactory and 9% very satisfactory).

Before analyzing these results, some of the authors consulted for this research should be referred to, since they give us a hint about the difficulties to give feedback when working with big groups. Hess (2001) affirms that feedback may become a paramount task teachers have to cope with in large classes; it may even turn into a chimera that may not be done properly, ever. After conducting a research, Hess (2001) concluded that in large classes many teachers expressed to feel overwhelmed with grading. They also communicated that the enormous amount of paperwork to work through would sometimes be demotivating, and that, even before starting to do it, it seemed an impossible job.

Every teacher knows that giving feedback takes a lot of time and that it implies an enormous effort too. Feedback includes dealing with evaluation tools such as descriptors and rubrics, reading large amounts of student written productions and, on top of that, giving a mark. In that sense, Blatchford et al. (2006) states:

> Teachers see the necessity for regular interactions with each pupil, ideally on a daily basis. This becomes more difficult as the class gets bigger. Another manifestation of individual attention, more difficult in large classes, is being able to spot difficulties early and offer helpful feedback to pupils. Immediate feedback is easier with fewer children. Teachers try to treat all pupils equally, but find that in large classes some groups can miss out. (p. 147)

Although the survey results were somewhat divided, it is noticeable that a large number of students expressed that they are not given appropriate feedback. This fact coincides with

the authors opinions and is an important aspect to consider in large classes. Through this discussion, it has been demonstrated that feedback may become a gigantic headache for teachers who find it difficult to manage such a high number of students. Unfortunately, many learners may perceive their teachers' inability to do so – in this case, 53% of the participants who expressed their dissatisfaction on the survey – and the worst part is that they are probably not getting useful and relevant responses/observations on their class performance.

After analyzing and discussing survey questions 1 to 9 on the questionnaire given to the students in Unidad Educativa Tumbaco, it can be ascertained that too many students in a classroom may have a significant impact on class practices, especially concerning instructional aspects. In this research, some unfavorable situations were encountered. The negative circumstances were discussed in questions 3, 5 and 9, where the results were not satisfactory. These questions considered aspects such as student attention in class, variety of class activities, and feedback. It was found that problems such as inattentiveness, the absence of interactive activities, and poor/inefficient feedback to academic progress are present in large classes. On the other hand, in questions 1, 2, 4, 5, 7 and 8, it was found that relevant aspects such as class activities, cheating, seating arrangement, and student performance, all received favorable responses. It should be remarked that the authors cited in each question see some of the inconveniences of teaching large classes; these drawbacks were thoroughly exposed and analyzed in this section. However, the survey results demonstrated that even though large classes may represent a problem for schools, the battle can be fought and won. There are strategies – also reviewed previously in this section – that can be designed and employed by teachers and school authorities in order to ameliorate the difficulties large classes bring along.

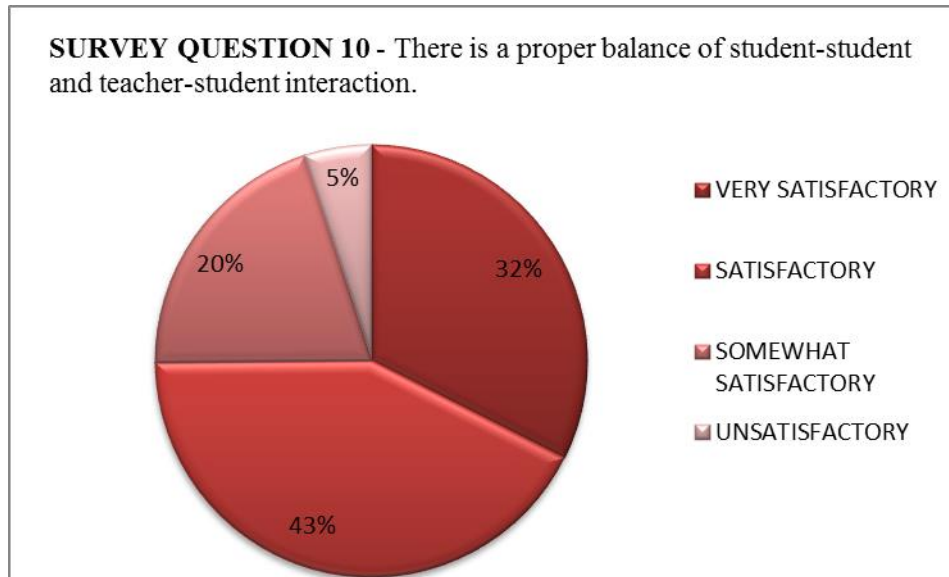**What social implications do large classes have on the teaching-learning process?**

		Totally agree		Agree		Partially agree		Disagree		TOTAL	
N°	**In classes with a large number of students:**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**
10.	There is a proper balance of student-student and teacher-student interaction.	**58**	32.4	**76**	42.5	**36**	20.1	**09**	5.0	**179**	99
11.	Students have the opportunity to build relationships with the classmates.	**60**	33.7	**79**	44.4	**34**	19.0	**05**	2.8	**178**	98.8
12.	The teacher has problems remembering all the students' names.	**34**	19.1	**47**	26.4	**57**	32.0	**40**	22.5	**178**	98.8
13.	The atmosphere is less stressful since the teacher does not ask several questions to the same student.	**22**	12.3	**67**	37.4	**66**	36.9	**24**	13.4	**179**	99
14.	It is easier for students to use the cell phone or any other mobile device without being seen by the teacher.	**18**	10.1	**20**	11.2	**31**	17.3	**110**	61.5	**179**	99

TABLE 2 - Survey applied to the students
Percentage Results from a sample of 180 people

Author: Pedro Pablo Pérez Capote
Source: Survey conducted at Unidad Educativa Tumbaco

Table 2 shows the data collected from the second section of the questionnaire given to 180 middle and high school students from Unidad Educativa Tumbaco. In this section, various social aspects about the participants' class environment are analyzed and explained. As will be seen, a classroom with too many students may also have social connotations, that is, not only instructional problems come into sight. The way students and different elements of the school life interact with each other is susceptible to changes due to diverse reasons. In this research, special attention was paid to the presence of stress in the classroom, as a predominant factor. In accordance, Lytras et al. (2008) emphasizes the importance of the

relationship between students and teachers in large classes, as well as other factors that inhibit student-student interactions, such as apprehension, and the single-speaker paradigm. Those aspects were carefully examined and discussed.

SURVEY QUESTION 10 - There is a proper balance of student-student and teacher-student interaction.

- VERY SATISFACTORY
- SATISFACTORY
- SOMEWHAT SATISFACTORY
- UNSATISFACTORY

Author: Pedro Pablo Pérez Capote
Source: Survey conducted at Unidad Educativa Tumbaco

The survey results for question 10 indicate that students bear positive thoughts about their interaction with the teachers and peers. Three quarters of the total of students polled (75%) agreed and totally agreed with the statement; only 25% had a different opinion. Such a reaction proves that positive teacher-student and student-student interactions may happen in large classes. These results may be due to some of the reasons uncovered below.

Hess (2001) suggests that more individuals in a room logically equals more interaction among them. The more people there are in one place, the more opportunities there will be to communicate and collaborate. So, if the school community is a large group, there will be more synergy and interplay. In a classroom, this can be translated into more reciprocal actions and reactions between students and teachers. As a result, in a large class, there is always a sufficient number of students for interaction (Hess, 2001).

Once again, the survey results and prior studies on large classes support the idea that big groups of students do have benefits and not only represent problems and challenges. There

are some advantages too. Large classes, far from limiting interaction, may foster

communication, cooperation, and reciprocity between students and teachers.
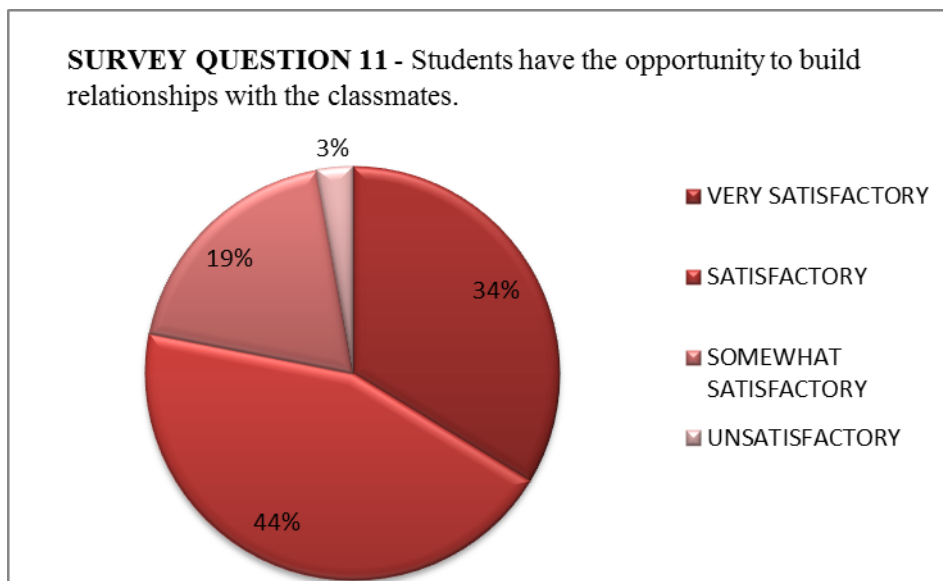
SURVEY QUESTION 11 - Students have the opportunity to build relationships with the classmates.

Author: Pedro Pablo Pérez Capote
Source: Survey conducted at Unidad Educativa Tumbaco

This question is somehow related to the previous one, as it deals with relationships. The

chart shows an astounding 78% of the learners who asseverated to have more opportunities to

build relationships with others. That number is the sum of 34% of the participants who totally

agreed and 44% who agreed. Only a few students partially agreed (19%) and disagreed (3%).

As discussed before, Hess (2001) expresses that large classes represent an advantage in

terms of more possibilities for students to interact and build up relationships. The survey

results seem to go in hand with this asseveration. Nevertheless, authors such as Blatchford

(2003) illustrates that difficulties and problems may arise in these cases. According to his

observations, large classes may entail a high risk for learners' interaction and the possibility to

forge and strengthen emotional bonds. This issue is clearly explained in the following portion

of a research carried out by this author. It compares two scenarios, a small and a large class:

> There was a very noticeable contrast with the situation in another
>
> school visited at about the same time by the observer, involving a
>
> teacher in a large class of over 30. While the teacher in the small class

spent little time on control, and there was little need to keep children

on-task, in the large class interactions with the children largely

involved a constant battle to keep children's attention on-task. As a

consequence, the teacher was severe, and the children subdued. (p. 2)

Blatchford (2003) also suggests that in large classes, some teachers may be forced to

impose harsh discipline measures, making the learners have minimal chances to interact.

The analysis of this point leads to the conclusion that some authors consider that large

classes give the students the chance to build relationships with their peers in a positive way;

others think that big groups represent an impediment to it. In this research, the survey results

definitely support the former opinion.
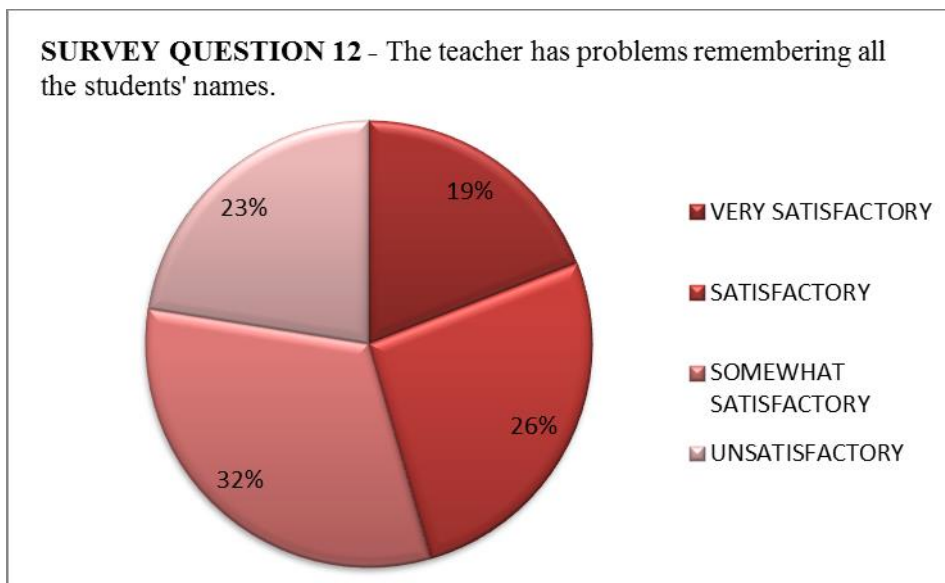
Author: Pedro Pablo Pérez Capote
Source: Survey conducted at Unidad Educativa Tumbaco

The pie chart above shows that, in the classes polled, there are divided opinions

concerning the issue presented by the question. Up to 32% of the students partially agreed and

23% disagreed. On the other hand, 19% totally agreed and 26% agreed. It can be observed

that a slight majority of the students disagreed with the statement, but those who agreed

represent an important number.

The fact that some teachers have difficulties to remember the students' names may not be the biggest issue schools have to deal with nowadays. This situation may even go unnoticed by school authorities and pupils. Nevertheless, for the sake of optimal academic results and an appropriate relationship between teachers and learners, such a problem should not be disregarded or neglected. A teacher forgetting names may be considered a trivial thing, yet, it may become a worrying situation with an uncertain end. It usually happens at the beginning of a term or school year, especially in large classes. This problem may be ignored by the students, but in some cases, it can erode the classroom environment and constitute a deterrent to it. If the problem persists for a long time, it may even end up in apathy and disrespect by the learners. It is crucial, therefore, that teachers know their students well, particularly if the class becomes larger and the school year moves forward (Barr & Parrett, 2008).

Barr & Parrett (2008) suggests several strategies educators can adopt to deal with this issue, for instance, using name tags, making notes, repeating names over and over, and using mind pictures. By doing this, teachers are likely to avoid future problems such as students' demotivation or resentment.

In short, it can be deducted from the survey results and previous studies that in large classes, teachers may forget their students' names or have difficulties to memorize them; this is a reality that has to be carefully handled.
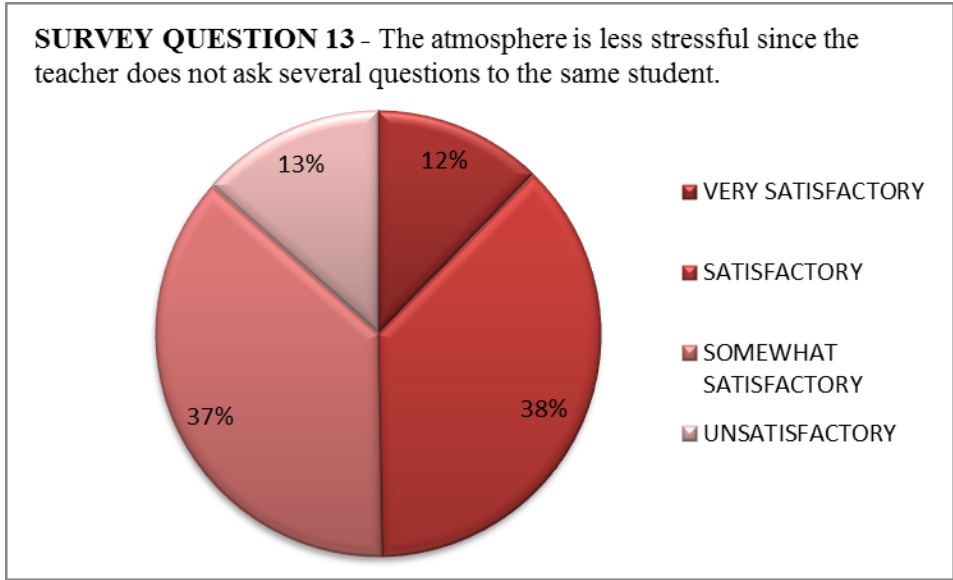
SURVEY QUESTION 13 - The atmosphere is less stressful since the teacher does not ask several questions to the same student.
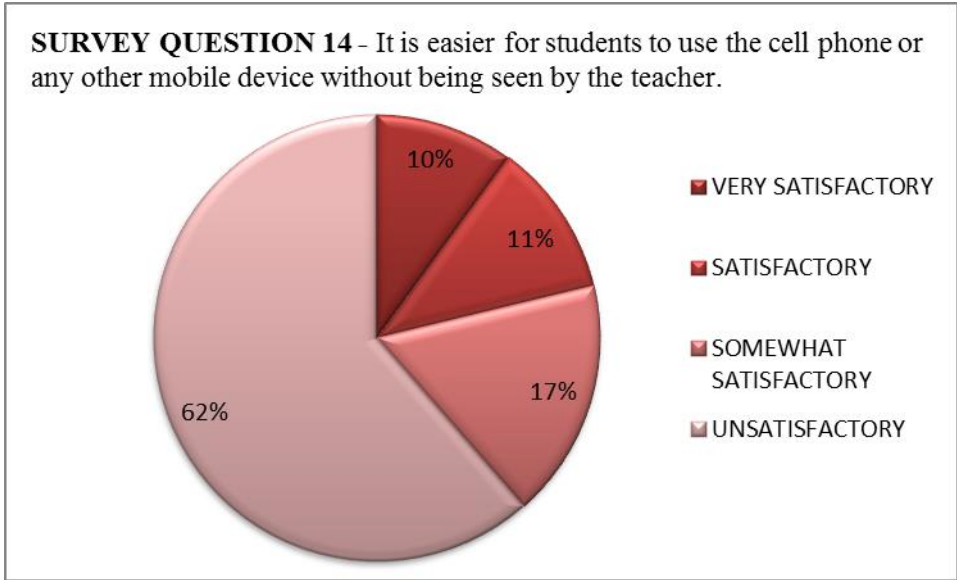
Author: Pedro Pablo Pérez Capote
Source: Survey conducted at Unidad Educativa Tumbaco

This question sought to find out how relaxed or stressful the environment may become in large classes, taking into consideration the fact that teachers do not call on the same students all the time. Evidently, the bigger the group, the more possibilities learners have to dodge nagging teachers. Thus, it can be assumed that students have fewer opportunities to be noticed by the teacher if there is a group of 35 or 40 to choose from. However, the opinions among the students surveyed were divided; half of the participants agreed (50%) and the other half disagreed.

According to Nash (2013) classroom stress/calmness is regulated by some conditions; some of them are fear, class size, and the teacher's attitudes and skills to interact with learners. This author suggests that a student may feel stressed if the teacher constantly calls on him or her. In this scenario, they may not feel confident or emotionally safe to take risks and participate. Obviously, the larger the group, the fewer the chances some pupils have to get involved in classwork, but as the survey revealed this does not happen in every case.

Without doubt, teachers should seek to establish a type of classroom environment that makes all the students want to take part in class activities equally, and feel safe at the same time (Nash, 2013).

SURVEY QUESTION 14 - It is easier for students to use the cell phone or any other mobile device without being seen by the teacher.

- VERY SATISFACTORY
- SATISFACTORY
- SOMEWHAT SATISFACTORY
- UNSATISFACTORY

10%
11%
17%
62%

Author: Pedro Pablo Pérez Capote
Source: Survey conducted at Unidad Educativa Tumbaco

The research results revealed that 62% of the participants disagreed with the statement, and 17% partially disagreed. On the other hand, a total of 11% agreed and 10% totally agreed.

These results suggest the implementation of school policies in this institution, where mobile devices are strictly prohibited. Breaking the rules there can lead to very harsh consequences, from notifications to parents, to even temporary or permanent expulsion from campus.

Thompson (2011) indicates that cellphones at school may invoke both, positive and negative responses on individuals, especially in institutions that deal with large classes. Many young educators consider that a cellphone can be used as a learning tool whereas, more traditional teachers reject its use, and may even ban it. On the negative side, some people think that mobile phones may cause distraction and disruptive behavior that may impact the learning environment negatively. In this sense, Thompson (2011) lists some of the misuses students can give to their phones, among them: bullying peers, texting, taking photographs of teachers and students, or incitement to fight/quarrel. On top of that, mobile phones can draw thieves' attention.

On the contrary, the same author mentions some of the advantages cellular phones have if used in a proper way, and states that these gadgets may become helpful teaching aids, especially in large classes. Cellphones not only save time, but also may help the teachers to keep up motivation during and after a lesson. In large classes, mobile phones offer potential benefits, for instance, the possibility to watch videos or listen to audio recordings individually, conduct surveys, and access the internet for class research. Additionally, using calculators, texting classmates about missed lessons, and photographing class notes to share with other peers, are also included by Thompson (2011). This author insists that cellphones themselves are not a problem; the problem is their potential to be misused. If the teacher has enough persistence and patience to teach the students about school policies and foster a positive and productive use of cellphones, these gadgets may become beneficial. That is why policies on the use of these and other mobile devices are changing in the educational context all around the world.

As seen, on the one hand, schools may opt for prohibiting cellular phones – as in the school where the research was conducted. On the other hand, there is a possibility to educate students to use them consciously and productively.

Up to now, the evidence collected dealing with social aspects of the teaching-learning process in large classes has been analyzed and discussed. The students who responded to the survey made clear that they are not concerned with the fact that they form part of a large class. Most of them have positive thoughts about their interaction patterns and the relationships they can establish with peers and teachers (questions 10 and 11). The survey also showed that students are not able to use their cellphones in class (question 14) and that their teachers have problems remembering names (question 12).
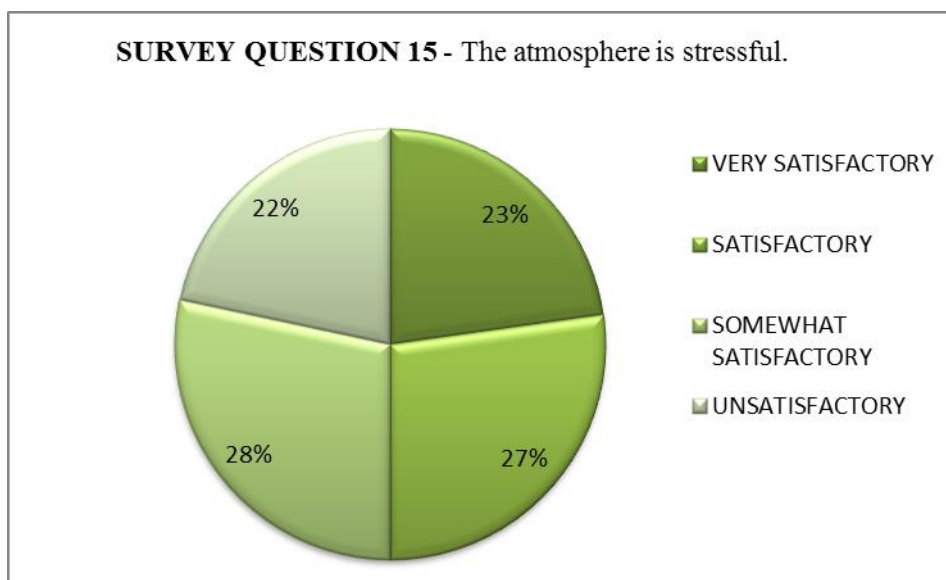
What psychological implications do large classes have on the teaching-learning process?

TABLE 3 - Survey applied to the students										
Percentage Results from a sample of 180 people										
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.	41	22.8	49	27.2	51	28.3	39	21.7	180	100
16.	Students feel inhibited when speaking in front of the rest.	35	19.4	62	34.4	53	29.4	30	16.7	180	100
17.	Students do not have the opportunity to express their opinions.	25	14.2	58	33.0	51	29.0	42	23.9	176	97
18.	Students do not like to participate because they feel afraid.	26	14.5	58	32.2	38	21.1	58	32.2	180	100
19.	The teacher does not pay equal attention to all his/her students.	32	18.2	34	19.3	49	27.8	61	34.7	176	97
20.	Students feel they can act competitively with other students.	55	31.3	71	40.3	34	19.3	16	9.1	176	97
21.	Students feel relaxed because they can go unnoticed.	33	18.3	43	23.9	66	36.7	38	21.1	180	100

Author: Pedro Pablo Pérez Capote
Source: Survey conducted at Unidad Educativa Tumbaco

As discussed previously, classes with too many students present various challenges and difficulties for both learners and teachers. However, some advantages have been mentioned as well. From now on, this inquiry focuses on psychological aspects of class life such as student shyness, communication, and needs. Table 3 above shows the participants' impressions and opinions on this topic. The results will be discussed now.

SURVEY QUESTION 15 - The atmosphere is stressful.

- VERY SATISFACTORY
- SATISFACTORY
- SOMEWHAT SATISFACTORY
- UNSATISFACTORY

23%
22%
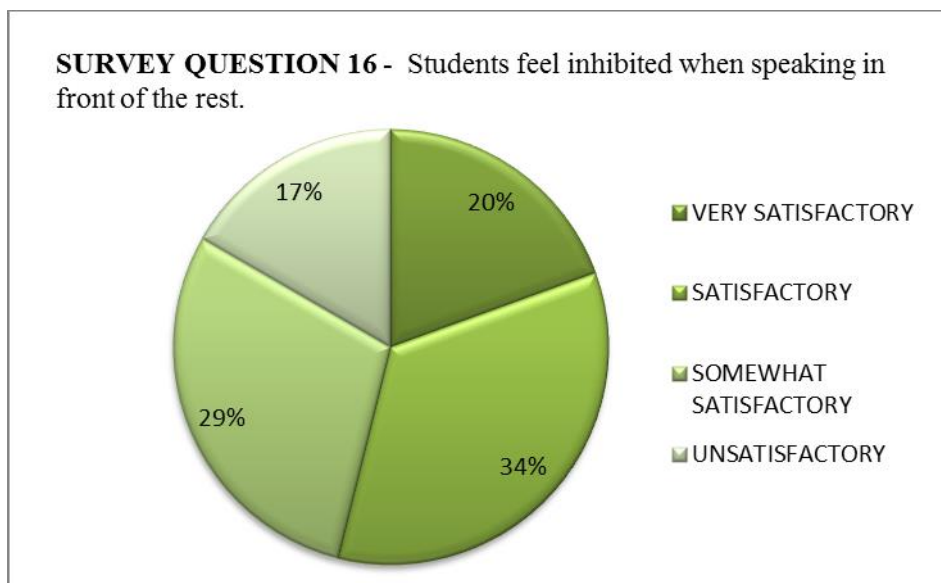28%
27%

Author: Pedro Pablo Pérez Capote
Source: Survey conducted at Unidad Educativa Tumbaco

The outcomes for this question are divided into two equal parts, 50% of the participants agreed/totally agreed while 50% disagreed/partially agreed. The information itself is not very helpful, but it reflects a large school population that holds negative thoughts about the issue. Thus, it is essential to analyze this point based on the literature consulted.

The term stress in this paper must be understood in the sense of mental, emotional or physical tension. In an educational context, stress is associated with uncountable problems, such as misbehavior, distress, anxiety, and bewilderment. Large classes may affect both, teachers and students, but teachers may take the worst part, especially when they have the sensation of being out of control. All these things represent a threat to a quality teaching-learning process (Gibbs & Jenkins, 2013).

For this reason, many educators who teach large classes tend to avoid stressful situations and usually change their lesson plans, evaluation tools, and even their teaching style. In that sense, instead of proposing interactive or communicative activities, they prefer whole class teaching, having the learners act like mere listeners in an audience type class. The focus is then shifted towards receptive skills – reading and listening (Blatchford et al., 2006).

Summing up, it can be asserted that too many learners in a room can create a stressful atmosphere which might affect the normal progress of a lesson. This context may force the teachers to change their lesson plans, prioritizing passive learning activities over active/interactive ones. Undeniably, the authors consulted and 50% of the students polled evidence this reality.

SURVEY QUESTION 16 - Students feel inhibited when speaking in front of the rest.

- 17%
- 20%
- 29%
- 34%

VERY SATISFACTORY
SATISFACTORY
SOMEWHAT SATISFACTORY
UNSATISFACTORY

Author: Pedro Pablo Pérez Capote
Source: Survey conducted at Unidad Educativa Tumbaco

The majority of the respondents expressed to be afraid to speak in front of the class (34% of the students agreed and 20% totally agreed) while 29% partially agreed and 17% disagreed. In this case, negative answers outnumber positive ones.
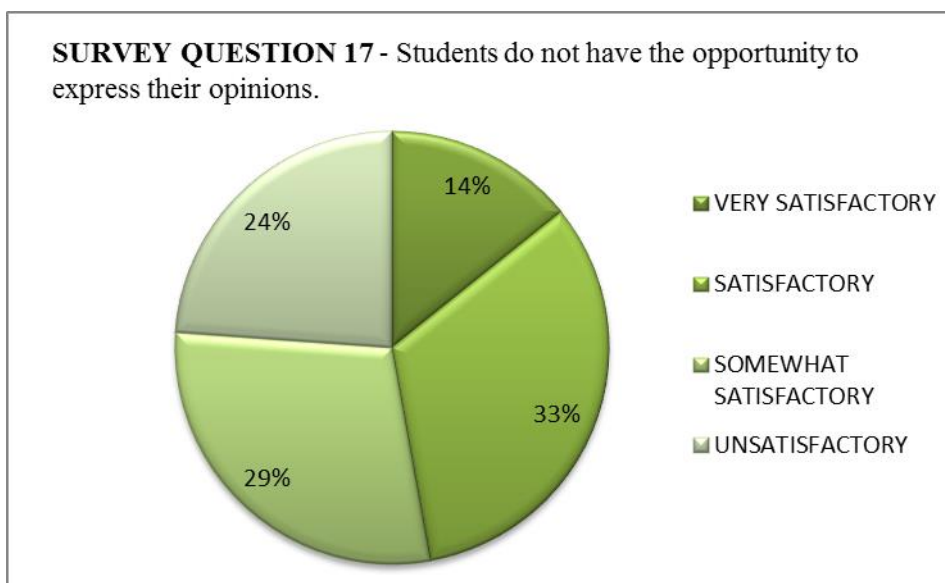
Although this question at first sight deals with class participation, there are many factors that must be considered when analyzing the situation here presented. Some determinants such as confidence, self-esteem, and of course, the skills to appropriately express ideas (in L2) are some of them. However, too many students in a class may also have an impact on whether a learner feels comfortable or not to speak in front of his/her peers. The authors consulted gives some hints to clarify and explain this idea.

Hull et al. (2006) agrees that in a small class, the learners will have less problems to express their thoughts than in a large one. All language educators will agree with this too.

It is not a secret that modern language education seeks to form individuals who can communicate effectively in different contexts. Confidence is, then, one of the most important ingredients to consider in this case. Hull et al. (2006) expresses that large classes may be places where noise, confusion, and discipline issues occur. Gibbs & Jenkins (2013) also states that big groups will not likely represent the perfect context where students can express themselves freely and confidently in a second language.

In order to cope with this situation, numerous techniques have been developed to help educators boost and revive students' confidence. Private turns, tutorials, and chats after class are some of the tools teachers have at hand to motivate their learners to be confident when participating in class (Scrivener, 2012). Nevertheless, these methods require the teachers to be very close to the students, monitoring and supporting them constantly. In a large class, such a practice may not be feasible due to the high demand for attention.

In a concise manner, after interpreting what the authors have to say about this issue and examining the survey results, it can be ascertained that in large groups, undoubtedly, students may feel inhibited to speak and participate in front of every one.

SURVEY QUESTION 17 - Students do not have the opportunity to express their opinions.

- 14% VERY SATISFACTORY
- 33% SATISFACTORY
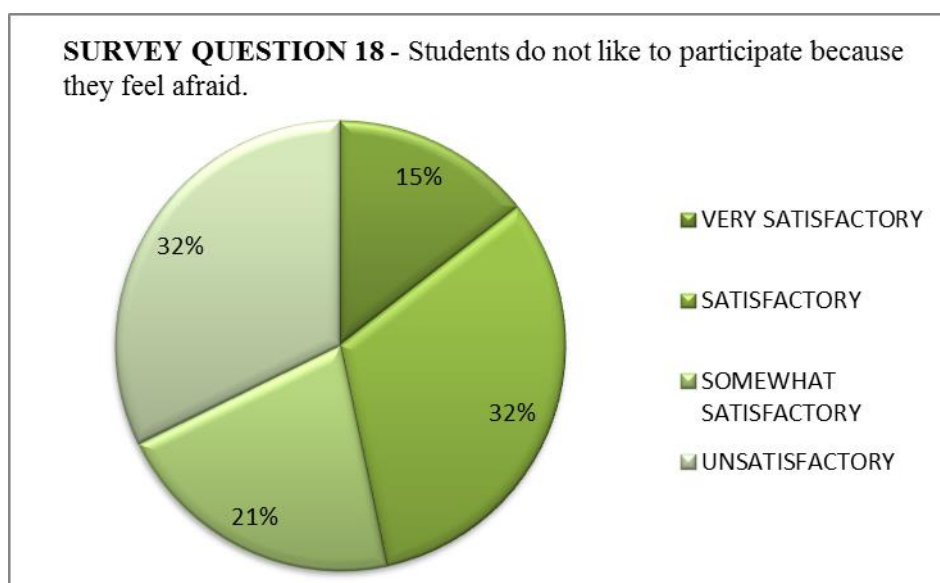- 29% SOMEWHAT SATISFACTORY
- 24% UNSATISFACTORY

Author: Pedro Pablo Pérez Capote
Source: Survey conducted at Unidad Educativa Tumbaco

An analysis of the survey numbers reveals that 14% of the students totally agreed and 33% agreed, while 29% partially agreed and 24% disagreed. It means that 53% agreed with the statement while 47% dissented (considering the question expressed in a positive way).

Some studies asseverate that in large classes, there are fewer opportunities for students to collaborate and participate (DeKeyser, 2007; Hull et al., 2006). In a class of 35 to 40 pupils, only a few manage to interact efficiently with the teacher and other peers, thus, only a few of them will have the chance to express their opinions.
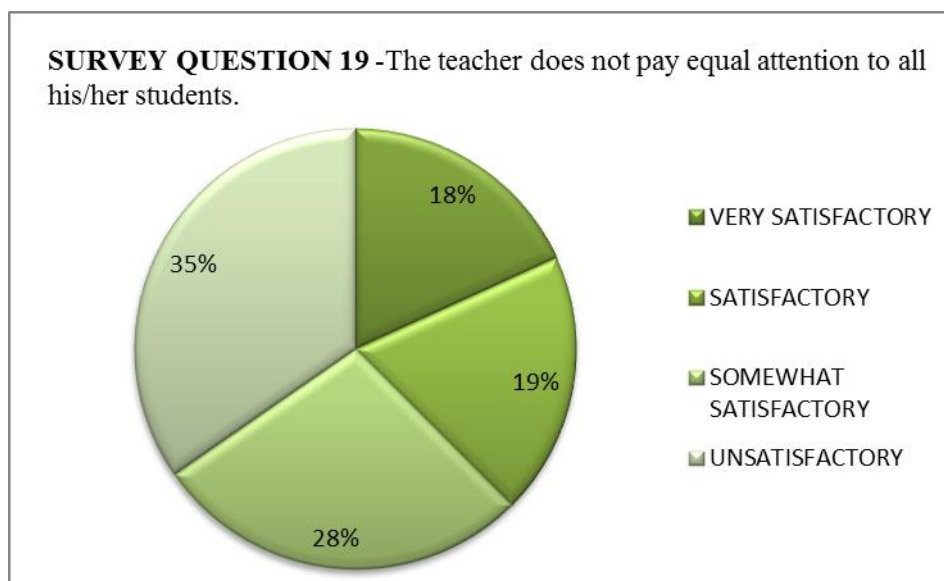
As discussed previously in this paper (survey question 7), in large classes, those learners sitting at the back of the room may be severely affected by noise, misbehavior, distance, etc. On top of that, teachers may tend to propose passive learning activities so as to avoid discipline issues (discussed in questions 4 and 5). Therefore, after analyzing what the researchers have to say about this particular point, and visualizing the survey results, it cannot be denied that in large classes, the problems described may interfere with the learners' opportunities to express themselves. Students are at risk of having fewer or no chances to do it, or be limited to do silent reading/writing. A window of potential opportunities to communicate shuts in front of them.

SURVEY QUESTION 18 - Students do not like to participate because they feel afraid.

15%
32%
32%
21%

- VERY SATISFACTORY
- SATISFACTORY
- SOMEWHAT SATISFACTORY
- UNSATISFACTORY

Author: Pedro Pablo Pérez Capote
Source: Survey conducted at Unidad Educativa Tumbaco

This question is similar to that of number 16; it deals with lack of confidence and the fear to participate in class. As the pie chart above shows, 15% of the participants totally agreed with the statement and 32% agreed. On the other hand, 21% partially agreed and 32% disagreed. Therefore, it can be said that opinions are divided here as well, although negative answers slightly exceed positive ones in quantity.

The problem of student shyness and lack of confidence in large classes has been repeatedly discussed along this document. Some teaching methods and aids to ameliorate it were also mentioned and described, and the fact that students need more opportunities to express themselves was emphasized. Zimbardo & Radl (1999) expresses that in a large class, all the students are not able to participate as frequently as they should; some of them feel afraid of interacting with others, restraining themselves to do it. These authors assert that even good and bright students can get lost among a sea of learners. Thus, it is important that teachers consider this problem when planning activities and strategies for their classes. If he or she notices that a learner is too shy and never participates, the need of a psychologist or school counselor may be contemplated (Zimbardo & Radl, 1999).

SURVEY QUESTION 19 - The teacher does not pay equal attention to all his/her students.

- VERY SATISFACTORY 18%
- SATISFACTORY 19%
- SOMEWHAT SATISFACTORY 28%
- UNSATISFACTORY 35%

Author: Pedro Pablo Pérez Capote
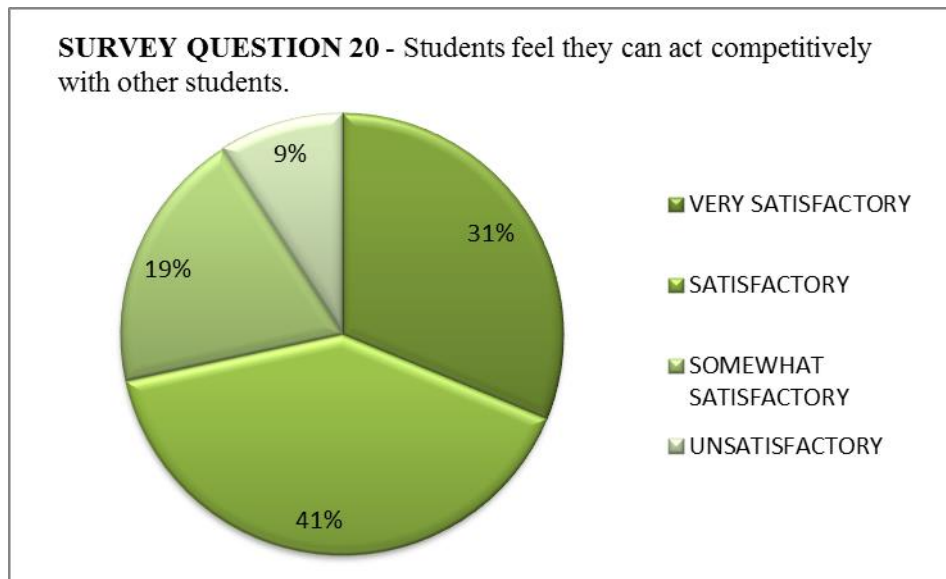Source: Survey conducted at Unidad Educativa Tumbaco

Most of the students who took part in this research expressed negative thoughts about the quality and quantity of attention they receive from their teachers. More than half of them, about 63% think so (35% disagreed and 28% partially agreed with the statement). A small part of the group agreed (19%) and totally agreed (18%). This may be due to the ability teachers have to watch and assist too many learners. That is a possibility.

We all know that the quality of learning and teaching processes depend on the teachers to a large degree. Ideally, every educator should have regular interaction with each pupil – on a daily basis – so as to meet their needs (Blatchford et al., 2006). After coming across these ideas, it must be stressed that in a healthy learning environment, a teacher pays equal attention to all the students. He or she should be able to notice learning problems in advance so as to offer opportune help to the learners. Logically, this is much easier with fewer students; in a large class, some groups can be left out. In these regards, Blatchford et al. (2006) indicates that teachers may even feel frustrated when teaching a large class:

> Failure to achieve the ideal of meeting every pupil's needs produces negative feelings towards their own work. The size of the class contributes to the severe criticism which some teachers express about their own teaching. In a sense, once the class size passes a certain point, the teachers are bound to fail because the demands on their time cannot be met: Increased stress as your time is shared out between too many pupils (35 pupils). (p. 159)

The same authors express that in large classes, teachers think they cannot give the same level of attention to the students. Also, there are fewer chances to interact with learners, and it is not possible to give feedback equally. Many learners are left behind and teachers do not always notice the problem, at least not in time. This may cause the students to lose interest

and consequently, fall behind the rest of the class. Fortunately, this is not the case of the classes surveyed in the school in Tumbaco.

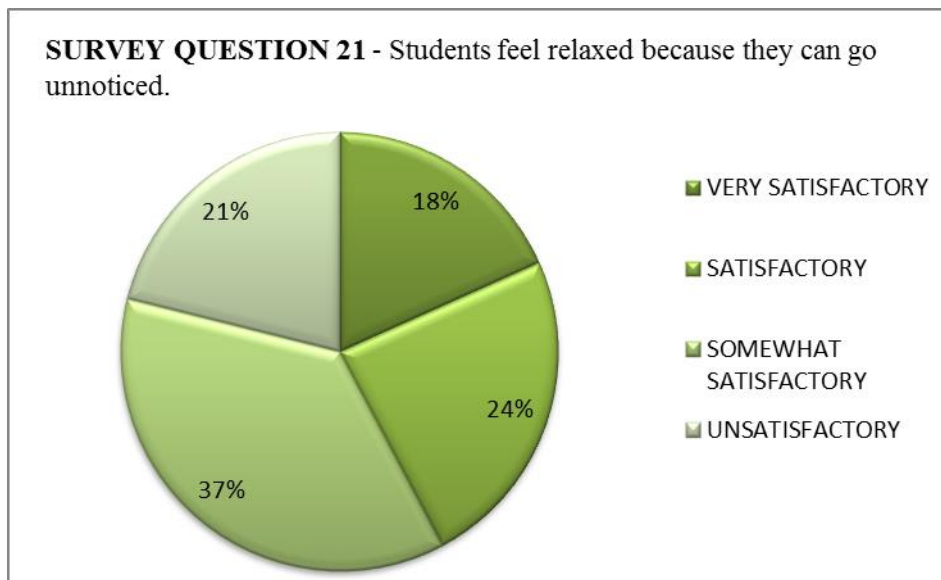SURVEY QUESTION 20 - Students feel they can act competitively with other students.

Author: Pedro Pablo Pérez Capote
Source: Survey conducted at Unidad Educativa Tumbaco

It can be said that most of the participants surveyed agreed with the statement posed by this survey question. An astounding 72% of the participants agreed and totally agreed, therefore, it can be concluded that they have the chance to emulate with their peers in a safe and constructive way. A small group of only 19% partially agreed while 9% disagreed. These results indicate that a positive and competitively environment may be created in large classes. This may be due to the improvement of school facilities and physical spaces, and also to the creation of a warm and friendly atmosphere conducive to learning.

In this regard, Arrighi and Maume (2007) proclaims that schools are expected to be places where a constructive educational environment takes place, thus, schools have the responsibility to provide with such conditions, disregarding how big or small their classes are. "Given that schools contribute to children's learning outcomes, it is important to understand how the classroom environment operates to enhance students' learning" (Arrighi & Maume, 2007, p. 30). If students feel that they can participate, compete, and develop their daily school life in a safe and constructive way, the school is surely right on track. Nonetheless, large

classes are likely to be places where educational conditions are not always the best, or the most favorable. Misbehavior, distress, exhaustion, shyness, among other problems, may affect the way students compete with their classmates (Gibbs & Jenkins, 2013). Once again, the survey results and the authors cited differ.

SURVEY QUESTION 21 - Students feel relaxed because they can go unnoticed.

- VERY SATISFACTORY
- SATISFACTORY
- SOMEWHAT SATISFACTORY
- UNSATISFACTORY

21%   18%   24%   37%

Author: Pedro Pablo Pérez Capote
Source: Survey conducted at Unidad Educativa Tumbaco

The survey results show that the majority of the participants (58%) expressed their disagreement about being unseen/unnoticed by the teachers. On the other hand, a total of 42% agreed or totally agreed.

Any school teacher would find these results odd or improbable, however, it can be concluded that in large classes, it is possible to avoid this problem. This may occur because of the teachers' good strategies to monitor the learners and enough care to not overlook anyone.

Good and Brophy (2007) states (in agreement with various authors already cited in this paper) that in a large class, some students may be left out by teachers and peers. In this context, those learners will underperform, becoming ghost students. Some other factors may aggravate the problem, for example, shyness, absenteeism, poor social abilities, discipline referrals, etc. This situation can get seriously worsened if not managed properly. Nevertheless, teachers can deal with this problem by putting into practice many of the

suggestions that were exposed along this entire analysis: proper class activities, constant

monitoring, careful class arrangement, tailored class plan, tightened discipline, effective

feedback, and positive classroom interactions. These suggestions are useful to combat most of

the problems large classes bring along (Scrivener, 2012; Hull et al., 2006; Barr & Parrett,

2008).

As was seen, in this part of the study, several components of the class processes were

revised, analyzed and discussed, especially those concerning psychological aspects. The

survey conducted in Unidad Educativa Tumbaco revealed that the students have mixed

feelings and divided opinions about the problems proposed on the questionnaire. Some

responses were positive, for example, in survey question 19, the students expressed that the

teachers pay equal attention to all of them, and in question 20, they manifested that they can

compete positively with others. Additionally, in question 21, the participants made clear that

they do not go unnoticed in spite of the large group their teachers have to monitor. On the

contrary, there is one aspect that needs work and supervision: the students' lack of confidence

to speak in front of the class (survey question 16). The answers to questions: 15, dealing with

stress; 17, expressing one's opinion; and 18, fear to participate, received both positive and

negative responses in an even proportion.

CONCLUSIONS

Important implications arise from large classes, both positive and negative. For instance, there is a variety of activities that work out in these classes, enabling students to apply what they learned. This research suggests that if students are allowed to work individually and in pairs, they can learn freely and fearlessly, and practice listening, speaking, reading and writing successfully.

Large classes provide students with more opportunities to collaborate and communicate with teachers and peers, helping them to build stronger relationships. Similarly, there is a proper balance of student-student, teacher-student interaction, therefore teachers can maintain contact with more individuals, and influence more lives in a beneficial way.

This research revealed that students sitting at the back of the classroom are likely to go off task more easily. Additionally, those students are inclined to go unnoticed, and are left out in activities such as plays, competitions, debates and games. These activities are not very effective in large classes due to the high number of students.

Little, inappropriate, or no feedback at all is a problem that arises in large groups of learners. Educators tend to feel overwhelmed by the enormous, tedious amount of work they have to get done when grading exams and revising homework, a fact that affects them negatively, and therefore, affects the feedback students get on their performance.

In large classes, teachers are likely to forget the students' names and may have trouble memorizing them. This can influence learners negatively as they may feel ignored or forgotten, affecting their self-esteem and character.

Large classes can lead to situations that create a stressful and strained atmosphere, making the students feel frightened and inhibited. This may prevent them from engaging in activities where they have to speak out loud and interact with the rest of the class.

Additionally, teachers avoid activities where the students interact and communicate in order to prevent misbehavior and stressful moments, fostering passive learning activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Teachers must consider an adequate class plan that contemplates various key factors, such as activities that allow the learners to practice all four skills individually and in small groups, and appropriate, regular feedback. Since teachers play an important role as instructors and facilitators, their teaching style must be inclusive in order to meet all the learners' instructional needs, including of those sitting farthest from them, e.g. at the back of the classroom.

Teachers should be allowed to participate in training sessions and workshops on strategies and techniques to manage large classes, especially those focused on managing time and discipline, revising and grading large amounts of student production, managing stressful moments, and creating inclusive environments conducive to learning.

Teachers should design and employ strategies to avoid forgetting learners' names, e.g., using name tags. Additionally, they ought to encourage the students to participate actively whenever possible, and keep an eye on those who might feel demotivated or afraid to take part in whole-class activities.

Further research must be done in order to document and analyze the advantages and disadvantages of large classes, especially from the teachers' perspective. More classes and more schools should be visited and interviews/surveys must be conducted in different places i.e. countries, continents, etc. to compare dissimilar contexts and look for similarities and differences.

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ANNEX

Estimado estudiante:

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

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

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

Datos Informativos:

Nombre de la Institución _____

Tipo de institución: Pública ( ) Privada ( )

Curso: 8vo ( ) 9no ( ) 10mo ( )

  1ro Bach. ( ) 2do Bach. ( ) 3ro Bach ( )

Ciudad: _____

Instrucción: Marque con una X según su criterio.

Criterio A: Aspectos Académicos

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

Criterio B: Aspectos Sociales

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

C. Aspectos psicológicos

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

¡Gracias por su colaboración!