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Factors that affect the English language teaching-learning
process in Ecuadorian public high schools

Trabajo de fin de titulación.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated in first place to God who has given me the greatest gift of life, and also to my family for all their support and loving care.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This study could not have been done without the valuable collaboration of the high school administrators who gave their authorization to develop this research in their educative institutions, and without the teachers and students' acceptance to be the participants of this investigation. I express my gratitude to all of them.

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigated the main factors that affect the English teaching-learning process in Ecuadorian public high schools. For this purpose, a population sample composed by 15 teachers and 15 students was selected from six high schools located in Calceta, Canuto, and Tosagua cities in Manabí Province. The data was gathered by administering two questionnaires, one answered by the teachers and the other by the students, who answered about four main matters, namely, factors related to teachers, students, classrooms, and educative institutions. Additional information was obtained through class observations, as well as by interviewing the teachers. The data obtained from the Teachers' Questionnaire was quantitatively presented, described, and analysed by supporting as well as contrasting it with the information from the student's responses to their questionnaire, the observations, and the interviews. The results provide evidence that the English teaching-learning process in Ecuadorian public high schools is being affected by the large size of the classes, lack of educational and technological resources, unvaried or wrongly applied teaching methodology, low percentage of English usage in class, and lack of professional monitoring.

INTRODUCTION

It is widely known and commented that students from public high schools in Ecuador do not have a good English level; in fact the average score in this subject is 13 out of 20 points according to the National Secretariat for Higher Education, Science and Technology (Senescyt).

This constitutes a serious problem since being able to communicate in English is a necessity nowadays as it is considered a world language. Speaking English gives access to better educational and professional opportunities nationally and internationally.

For these reasons, it becomes a paramount task to investigate and analyse the factors that affect the English teaching-learning process in the Ecuadorian public high schools, which is the main purpose of the present study; the specific goals pursued consist in determining the classroom conditions in which English lessons take place, identifying the characteristics of in-service English teachers, and determining the teachers instructional competence.

Prior related literature has focused on different factors thought to affect the English as a foreign language instruction, while also studying this topic from different perspectives. Lei and Xiaoqing (2009) examined the factors that tertiary level students in China attribute to success and failure in EFL learning, noting that factors related to teachers are considered by students as the most vital to successful language learning.

In Yu-Jung and Shih (2009) the attention was directed to the characteristics that effective English teachers must have according to junior high school students in Tainan (Taiwan), who favoured teachers' personality and their relationship with the learners over instructional competence.

Another study investigating the elements in the EFL learning environment at a university in Taiwan and its connection with students' motivation, developed by Wen-chi and Pin-hsiang (2008), found that the respondents evaluated the relevance of the general environmental factors as higher than their real presence in their EFL environment; besides, a link between motivation and environment was identified.

Little attention has been given in the Ecuadorian educational context to the factors that obstacle the appropriate development of the English teaching-learning process in public high schools. The most relevant actions undertaken by the authorities on this respect have been the agreement between the Ecuadorian and British governments in July 1992 to start a project in order to improve the English teaching, named as Curriculum Reform and Development for the Learning of English (CRADLE), along with the official establishment in 1993 by the Ministry of Education of five class hours of English instruction per week for the secondary level (Ministerial Agreement N° 2511). In spite of this, the students' command of English is still very deficient and the factors causing it have not been properly investigated nor addressed.

By researching this issue, the Ecuadorian authorities are made aware of the real drawbacks faced in the process of English teaching and learning in public high schools and thus in the progress of this country, so that they start designing and carrying out intervention plans aimed at solving these problems. Moreover, this research represents a source of valuable information to school administrators, teachers, parents and students in order to help them find alternatives for dealing with this matter on their own as much as possible, as they all also share the responsibility of improving the quality of the English teaching-learning process in Ecuador.

Among the limitations found in the present study are the small population sample (15 teachers and 15 students); the few classes observed (one observation per teacher), the little thought that a few respondents seemed to give to their answers while filling out their questionnaires, and also the fact that a few teachers knew in advance when they were going to be observed, thus their classes might not have been fully representative of their typical performance; all of these restricts the interpretation of the results and does not allow for generalizations. In future investigations, authors should take the necessary actions in order to avoid as much as possible the previously mentioned drawbacks. Longitudinal investigations would be very helpful as they allow for investigating this matter over time, and thus get valuable information on how this issue develops.

METHOD

Setting and Participants

This study was carried out in six public high schools from Manabí province, specifically in Calceta, Canuto and Tosagua; five high schools were located in urban areas and one in a rural area.

The population sample consisted of 15 teachers (1 male and 14 female); there were four high schools in which three teachers were taken for the sample, one in which two teachers were taken, and in another just one teacher. Only in two institutions there were more than three English teachers; so, in the remaining four high schools all the teachers available were taken as participants of this study (no more than three teachers per school was allowed by the UTPL). The teaching experience of the participants ranged from one to thirty years working as teachers.

Moreover, 15 high school students (8 female and 7 male) were also selected as participants. The students were from all the grades: three students from the 8th grade (8vo Año de Educación General Básica [EGB]), two students from the 9th grade (9no Año de EGB), one student from 10th grade (10mo Año de EGB), three students from 11th grade (1er Año de Bachillerato), four students from 12th grade (2do Año de Bachillerato), and two students from 13th grade (3er Año de Bachillerato). The students' ages ranged from 11 to 18 years old.

Procedures

The first step for developing this study consisted in reviewing the literature related to its theme (Factors that affect the English teaching and learning) as well as five previous journal studies on correlated topics in order to get enough background information that would aid in the research process.

The instruments used for gathering the data comprised two questionnaires, an observation tally sheet, and an interview. The Teachers' Questionnaire consists of 20 questions which inquired teachers about four instructional areas, namely factors related to teachers (8 questions), factors linked to students (3 questions), factors associated to classrooms (7 questions), and factors connected to educational institutions (2 questions).

The Students' Questionnaire contains 14 items asking the learners their views about their attitude toward English, aspects of their teachers' classroom management and teaching style, and classroom conditions.

The Observation Sheet is made up of 11 items interrelated with those in the teachers questionnaire. The Interview, the last instrument, consists of 14 questions asking from basic personal information to teaching-related aspects; these questions becoming gradually one after the other more complex in structure and labelled according to that complexity as A1-A2-B1-B2-C1-and C2 which classifies the interviewer as Basic user (A1-A2), Independent user (B1-B2), and Proficient user (C1-C2), according to their understanding and answering to the questions. This proficiency labels have been developed by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

Once obtained the permission from the high school authorities to carry out the research the collection of information began. The 15 teachers were interviewed and placed in their corresponding proficiency level; they were also administered the teachers' questionnaire. One class per teacher was observed, being the relevant aspects recorded in the Observation Sheet; and finally one student from each one of the 15 observed classes was selected for responding to the Students' Questionnaire. All the participants -teachers and students- were appropriately explained about the

purpose of the study as well as about the confidentiality of the information supplied by them.

The approach utilized in this research is mainly quantitative and the research design aligned to the present study is the survey design as surveys are the type of instrument that has been used to gather the information. In order to present the results; the 15 teachers' responses to each question in the Teachers' Questionnaire were tabulated and statistically graphed. The information on the graphs was then described and analysed by getting it contrasted with the information obtained during the observations, the students' responses to their questionnaire, the teachers' comments during the interview and some extra conversations, besides of the support from the literature on this topic.

Among the aspects considered for the analysis of the results, besides of the information obtained from the different instruments and sources already mentioned, there were the general and specific objectives of the present study which signalled from beginning to end the way in which the analysis and interpretation of results was done.

DISCUSSION

Literature Review

The importance of learning English is nowadays an undeniable truth, which is clearly reflected on the spreading of this language all over the world. Ecuadorian education is not the exception, since 1993 the Ministry of Education established five class hours of English instruction per week for the secondary students (Ministerial Agreement N° 2511). For this purpose the Ecuadorian and British Governments joined for developing the CRADLE PROJECT for teaching English which made it clear the authorities' efforts in giving especial attention to this high school subject.

However, the English teaching-learning in Ecuador still faces several difficulties; for instance, the average score in this subject is 13 out of 20 points according to the Ministry of Education, while the proficiency level is quite low for a considerable percentage of teachers, on the word of the National Secretariat for Higher Education, Science and Technology (Senescyt). Even though everyone agrees that the English teaching learning calls for urgent improvement, there is not a grounded knowledge of the factors that hinder English teaching-learning in the Ecuadorian context.

An overview of the most relevant literature on this respect as reported by several international authors on EFL and ESL topics is what follows.

Teaching Approaches and Teaching Methods

According to Harmer (2001) an approach is a description of the language learning process as well as the general circumstances that aid its acquisition, while a method is the translation of an approach's assumptions into actual classroom

procedures. Here follows a brief description of some of the most common approaches.

The Natural approach is one which emphasizes reception instead of production. It seeks to put learners at ease by not worrying so much about speaking but on comprehending the input received, which is usually just over their proficiency level. It is up to the students the choice of the right moment to start speaking and it is the teacher's task to become the main but not the sole source of comprehensible input, to provide an inviting atmosphere for learning by reducing anxiety feelings and promoting friendship, and finally by introducing varied classroom activities and content to the lesson (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

A method that reflects the principles of the Natural Approach is the well-known James Asher's Total Physical Response; which is based on the assumption that second language acquisition is comparable to child first language acquisition. That is why this method makes use of commands and physical responses, hence at least at initial level the students are not required to verbally answer to the teacher's questions but just use their facial and body gestures; this kinaesthetic activity is considered by Asher as a good way for decreasing the tension experienced by learners (Harmer, 2001; Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

Another concept is that of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) which Richards and Rodgers (2001) consider to fit better under the heading of approach rather than method. CLT is based on two assumptions, one is that language is learned not by just studying its structure but more effectively by engaging in real communication, and the other is that language will be assimilated almost incidentally if students are exposed to it and motivated to use it (Harmer, 2007). In this approach the teacher acts not as the centre of the class but as the facilitator, the one who

engages students in communicative activities and lets them take more responsibility about their own learning (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

Task Based Learning is a descent method of CLT as stated by Harmer (2007). Here the emphasis is on communicative tasks performed by interacting with one another and by analysing the language only once the task has finished, so the tasks lead to language and not the other way around. As said by Larsen-Freeman (2000) meaning is stressed in task-based instruction.

A similarly meaning-focused method is that of Content Based Instruction (CBI). What characterizes it is that language is actually not taught but used as the medium to teach another subject matter or any other kind of contents. Two main principles underline Content-Based Instruction as suggested by Richards and Rodgers (2001); firstly that language is better acquired if used to get information, and secondly that this type of instruction better echoes the learners' reasons for studying a foreign language. The material employed normally here is authentic and determined by the content being transferred. Larsen-Freeman (2000) states that there must be separated objectives for the language as well as for the content learning while in contrast Richards and Rodgers (2001) claim that the language learning objectives in CBI are formulated as content learning goals, thus if content has been acquired so has language.

A different focus from that of the previous concepts is that of the Grammar Translation Method which gives especial attention to the language grammar rules and vocabulary items which are presented, memorized and then practiced in translation exercises. The main objectives that originally lead to the implementation of Grammar-Translation were enabling students to read the English literature and write about it. It has been considered that the main drawback of this method is that

students know about the language but not how to use it. In spite of this it is still used in modified versions and usually combined with other methods (Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Harmer, 2007; Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

Teaching Techniques

A technique is a particular step taken in the classroom towards a set goal (Anthony, 1963). The following are some of the most widely used techniques.

Brainstorming, Eliciting, and Prompting share the characteristic of leading the learners to provide most of the information by themselves. In the first case the teacher gives a topic and the students provide as many ideas as they can about it; in the second the teacher aids the student with follow up questions and in the third with more specific cues, for example sounds (Raimes, 1983; Spratt, Pulverness & Williams, 2005).

There are some techniques based on the use of pictures, for instance, Picture Description, Spot the Difference, and Jigsaw tasks. Other techniques rely on sharing stories, tales, and experiences just like those named Storytelling and Narrating (Mackey & Gass, 2005; Raimes, 1983).

Two techniques that lend themselves for group talk are Guided Discussion, in which students are provided with guidelines on a topic, and Consensus in which they must reach agreement on a controversial situation (Mackey & Gass, 2005; Raimes, 1983).

When a focus on speaking is needed, Skits and Role Plays are suitable; here the students interpret an assigned character as actors do. On the other hand, if listening and writing requires practice Dictation and Note Taking are appropriate techniques (Raimes, 1983; Spratt et al., 2005).

Managing Learning

In order to manage the learning process teachers take into account the language they use and the instructions they give. Language must be adjusted to the proficiency level and age of the students, the function it serves and the level of formality required by the situation (Spratt et al., 2005). Similarly, clearly stated instructions are very important since if this is wrongly done they can affect the students' task performance.

Another aspect related to learning management is the correct assignment and control of the task timings and the appropriate transition of activities within the lesson, as well as engaging them in a post-evaluation of the activities involving a short talk of what has been achieved and how it fits with what comes next. Furthermore, feedback is essential for a good learning management since in this way teachers are able to really know their students' progress as well as help them to do so; some ways teachers employ to do this are among other things, highlighting good work, correcting mistakes, and talking to students either collectively or individually about their strengths and weaknesses in language learning (Gower, Phillips & Walters, 1995; Harmer, 2007).

Lesson Design

According to Spratt, Pulverness, and Williams (2005, p 91) a lesson plan is a document that aids teachers in organizing what to teach and how to do so, they compare a lesson plan to a "road map" or "a series of road signs". Teachers plan their lessons among other reasons to avoid hesitating during the class about the topic or activities, to give the students a sense of gradual evolution, and even to distinguish their particular way of teaching (Woodward, 2001).

The components most lesson plans ought to have are: aims or objectives (general and specific); procedure , which includes the method, lesson stages,

resources, timing, instruction and interaction patterns; a class description, and a note on potential difficulties and the remedial actions to take. It is advised neither over-plan nor under-plan but to find an intermediate point (Gower et al., 1995).

Class Size

There are classes so big that can even gather up to one hundred students (though a class of 30 is considered by many as a big one), and so small classes of just one student; the first are called large and the second one-to-one or very small classes. Teaching to large classes presents several difficulties, for instance, too much noise, lack of resources for all the learners, impossibility to make arrangement changes, the necessity of applying teacher-centred methodology which in turn prevents teachers from giving a personalized attention to the learners. On the other hand one-to-one classes are considered as Woodward (2001, p 220) says “a real luxury”, here the teachers find themselves in a circumstance that allows them to really attend their students’ requirements and have authentic conversations. However, this type of instruction may sometimes produce a kind of *on stage* feeling both to teachers and students (Woodward, 2001; Harmer, 2007; Richards & Renandya, 2002).

Classroom Space

The setting where teachers and students work exerts a significant influence on the teaching-learning experience in such aspects as learners’ attention to instruction behaviour and classroom transit. If this influence is to be positive “comfort, safety and order” are necessary according to Marzano R, Gaddy, Foseid M. C., Foseid M. P., and Marzano J (2005, p. 135). Additionally, providing students with enough space is a must in order to build a good environment; nonetheless, a considerable deal of teacher’s closeness is suggested if discipline is to be kept, which in turn

contributes to a more effective learning (McLeod, Fisher, & Hoover, 2003; Tauber, 2007).

It is also stated that the troubles caused by placing too many students in a reduced space, that is to say when there is no correspondence between the number of students and the size of the room, are quite known by teachers; MacLeod et. al, 2003 support this statement by calling on the results of a study by Weinstein (1979), which claims that these kind of congested classrooms do affect students' assertiveness, feelings of satisfaction, and behaviour, which in turn might negatively impact the appropriate development of the academic activities.

Seating Arrangement

There are different ways of placing the seats in a classroom which vary mainly according to the type of interaction taking place between the class members, the characteristics of the activities being carried out and the class size. For instance, orderly rows are used when there is *teacher to whole class* interaction or when the class is numerous. Rows have the advantage of allowing visual contact between the teacher and the students; still, it is considered a limiting arrangement.

Organizing the seats in circles and horseshoes is suitable for smaller classes; it promotes both *teachers to students* as well as *students to students'* interactions as everyone can easily face each other. Another arrangement type is that of separate tables or café style which fits to small groups work; nevertheless, it is claimed that it doesn't favour whole class interaction as students are usually too scattered around the classroom (Gower et al., 1995; Spratt et al., 2005; Harmer, 2007).

Classroom and/or Teaching Resources

The classroom and teaching resources can be defined as any material used for assisting the teachers in delivering the knowledge and the students in acquiring it.

Woodward (2001) presents among others, the dictionary in its different types (bilingual, monolingual); the board, which allows teachers to present content visually; the box of rods, which consists in a collection of differently sized and coloured sticks used for teaching actions, adjectives, prepositions, etc.; the picture pack, a gathering of images aimed at adding visual impact to the lesson by developing activities around them (e.g. inventing a story); the music tape, for playing background music and promoting a relaxed environment; and the coursebook in order to follow a revised content sequence.

Gower, Phillips, and Walters (1995) add to the list the overhead projector, for the presentation of previously prepared content; realia, that is real objects used for explaining meaning more quickly and effectively than with words; worksheets/work cards, for distributing to the class so that everyone works more comfortably; the tape recorder, for using in the listening activities; and the CALL Computer Assisted Learning.

Moreover, Spratt, Pulverness, and Williams (2005) offer a list of supplementary materials, those intended for substituting not appropriate syllabus material or just for adding practice and change to the lesson, among of them are: websites, games, magazine articles, and so forth.

Classroom Observation

Classroom observation carried out by principals either formally or informally is considered as the chief way for evaluating and understanding the teaching-learning dynamics taking place in the classroom. Observations benefit both teachers and principals if done in a supportive manner for both the instructional program as well as the instructors. For instance, teachers can enhance their teaching with the help of the principal's views and get the feeling that they can count with the principal's

support to remedy the troublesome aspects spotted. Similarly, principals are able to learn more about the complexities of teaching and how they are handled by teachers while also sharing with them strategies observed in other classes or arranging for a special aid if required (Zepeda, 2009).

Another kind of observation is that performed by a peer. It has the advantage of being non-evaluative in nature thus being more welcomed by teachers. Richards and Farrell (2005) state that peer observation gives the opportunity to learn from other teacher's practice, helps the observed teacher to realize of aspects of his teaching he could have not by himself and allows for reflecting on it.

However, observations present the limitation of just assessing what is observable such as timings, activities, classroom language, but not other aspects identified by conjectures or direct conversations like decision making, engagement, problems, and teaching principles. In the context of language teaching an instrument that is often used to carry out observations is the Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching (COLT) (Mackey & Gass, 2005).

Students Motivation

According to Woolfolk (2006) a widespread definition states that motivation is a condition that stimulates guides and preserves behaviour. Motivation has been classified in intrinsic and extrinsic, being the former a motivation based on the learners' own desire to and reasons for studying a language, the latter is the motivation built on the benefits or the bad consequences derived from learning or not learning the language.

Lightbown and Spada (2006) claim that even though the correlation between motivation and success in language learning has not been proved, it does relate to a person's desire to persevere on learning. Two factors are thought to influence

motivation: learners' communicative needs and their attitudes toward the speakers of the language.

It is stated by Spratt, Pulverness and Williams (2005) that learners' motivation differs from person to person, and it usually changes as influenced by such factors as age, instruction methodology, teachers' personality, and the like.

Learning Styles

Most literature defines learning styles as the preferred way for studying a person has, which is why Woolfolk (2006) states that learning styles should be called learning preferences instead. She also suggests that even though the studies on the relationship between learning styles and language acquisition lacks enough support, considering them in instruction can aid learners in assessing their own development and teachers in accommodating methodology as well as varying techniques to better fit the students' requirements.

Lightbown and Spada (2006) present a classification that divides learning styles in two categories: perceptually based styles, which include visual, aural and kinaesthetic learners; and cognitive styles, which include field-independent learners (those who separate information into its components) and field-dependant learners (those who see information as a whole). Learners do not belong to just one style or category but usually one of them is dominant; moreover, different cultures value some styles over others (Spratt et al., 2005).

Students' Intelligence or Aptitude to Learn English

Robinson (2002) states that the intelligence one needs for succeeding in life as well as in foreign language learning must encompass analytical, creative and practical aspects. However, as claimed by Lightbown and Spada (2006) IQ tests have usually addressed just metalinguistic abilities rather than communicative ones, thus

giving an incomplete judgement of learners' intelligence or aptitude to learn a foreign language.

In fact Harmer (2001) claims that low scores on IQ tests will affect the students' motivation by pushing them to failure while also promoting under or over-estimation of their abilities from the teacher's part. The current tendency is to view intelligence as made up of diverse skills as in Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences theory (as cited in Harmer, 2001), which comprises linguistic, logical-mathematical, bodily kinaesthetic, spatial, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic intelligences.

As people's abilities greatly differ they will enhance their learning if those differences are considered in class (Robinson, 2002).

Past literature contains several research works that have investigated the aspects thought to influence either positively or negatively the process of foreign or second language teaching and learning from different perspectives (factors related to teachers, students, and environment) in order to better understand its nature and thus enhance its practice. Here follows a summary of the most relevant points of five studies related to this matter.

Lei and Xiaoqing (2009) developed a study aimed at investigating the factors that students attribute to successful and unsuccessful English language achievement as well as the extent to which these factors do predict that language achievement. For doing so, the authors chose 949 Chinese students from classes 2004 and 2005 at the Huazhong University of Science and Technology to whom they applied two instruments, a questionnaire to examine their success and failure attributions and the college test Band 4(CET) to assess their achievement level; the second instrument, however, was only taken by the 2004 class students.

After having statistically analysed the data collected, the authors found that learners credited effort, teacher confidence, and practical language use as related to success in EFL learning whereas lack of effort, lack of confidence, test-oriented classes and lack of external help as related to failure in EFL learning.

The authors also concluded that in fact such factors as effort and teacher issues are vital to EFL success, but that what makes them predictors of that success is their conjunctive rather than isolated action.

Likewise to the previous authors, Ghassemi and Shahsavari (2011) have carried out a research that studies problems and concerns about English language learning from the students' standpoint. The sample population was constituted by 80 university students randomly selected from the Islamic Azad University in Hajarabad, Iran.

In order to gather the data the students were given a questionnaire that asked them among other things about their personal information, their experience in language learning, their evaluation of teachers' methodology and materials, their suggestions for improvement plus a self -assessment of their achievement. Once the answers were analysed the participants were divided into five feature-sharing groups. These groups then held focus group sessions where they talked over their difficulties and worries about their EFL learning.

After having qualitatively analysed the conversations, the authors found four key EFL teaching-learning concern areas, namely, problems related to the university (e.g. intensive schedules, short semesters, and insufficient English courses); problems related to junior high schools and high schools (e.g. excessive emphasis on metalinguistic, anxiety provoking classes, unethical teacher's behaviour, lack of administrators supervision to teachers); intrapersonal problems (e.g. studying just to

pass the course); and socio-cultural problems (e.g. lack of English practice out of class, lack of competent teachers and resources).

The authors arrived to the conclusion that some of the participants' most severe problems were in fact related to high school and not to the University context where the research was conducted.

Another study based on students' perceptions but in this case focused on just teachers' characteristics is the one developed by Yu-Jung and Shih-Chung (2009). This study was intended for identifying the features that students consider necessary if a language teacher is to be considered an effective one, and the way in which their standpoints vary as related to their age, gender and achievement level.

The authors randomly selected a sample of 198 (100 male, 98 female) students from a junior high school in Tainan. The participants from the first and second grades were classified into high, middle and low achievers as suggested by their school scores while students in the third grade were already separated into high and low achievers. The data collection involved the subjects in answering a questionnaire on teacher's characteristics as related to instructional competence, personality, and teacher-student relationship.

Once statistically analysed the data, the authors found that students favoured teachers' personality and teacher-student relationship characteristics over instructional competence ones; being this especially true of girls who selected more than boys in the questionnaire features such as enthusiasm in teaching, being friendly and having an open-mind as well as inspiring motivation and being knowledgeable of the English culture. On the contrary, respectful and ethical teacher's behaviour was paramount to male participants. In addition, the participants with high

achievement levels appreciated teacher-student relationship features more than the ones with lower achievement did.

The authors also resolved that the main characteristic of effective teachers according to the students is being enthusiastic in teaching along with the fact that gender and achievement level do influence the way students perceive teachers' competence.

A similar study is the one directed by Iyyappan, Narayan and Rajasekaran (2008) which investigated the factors that affect English learning at the tertiary level in five Engineering colleges from Chennai, India, while also testing several hypotheses: if motivation, attitude, and anxiety affect language learning as well as if motivation is more present in women than men, and if women with low anxiety towards language studying learn better than men with high anxiety.

Random sampling was used in order to select 408 (138 female and 270 male) first year engineering students as the research subjects. The data collection consisted in administering questionnaires to the participants asking them about the aspects addressed by the hypotheses whose answers were shown in a five-point Likert scale.

The data quantitative analysis indicates that female students are usually more motivated for and have more positive attitudes about learning a language than male students. It was also found that some female students have less language anxiety which was correlated with a better performance in English proficiency tests.

Consequently, the authors concluded that high motivation, positive attitudes, low anxiety and exposure to the language improves the learning process.

On their part, Wen-Chi and Pin-hsiang (2008) developed a study meant for investigating the elements of EFL learning environment and its relationship with learner's motivation.

The research setting was the Chienkuo Technology University (CTU) in Taiwan, from which the authors selected 26 classes in order to randomly take 593 students as their sample population. The information was gathered by means of a questionnaire that asked the students both about their learning motivation and the characteristics of their EFL learning environment which comprised physical aspects, instrumental arrangements and social interaction.

The quantitative data analysis revealed low motivation in students as well as their having rated the importance of overall environmental factors as higher than their actual presence in their EFL environment. Further, physical and instruction environment factors were considered as more important than social ones. Moreover, a positive correlation between motivation and learning was found.

The main conclusion at which the authors arrived is that the overall EFL learning environment at Chienkuo Technology University was regarded by the students to be a drawback for their learning, and also the fact that the social aspect though not a learning facilitator was considered the least harmful one.

The recurrent pattern identified from the previously reviewed studies shows that high motivation, low levels of anxiety, a communicative emphasis within the classroom as well as opportunities for language practice outside it, a friendly yet ethical teacher-student relationship and class management, and having teachers that enjoy teaching along with helping their pupils are regarded as the chief elements in leading language teaching-learning to a good end whereas not so their counterparts (i.e. low motivation, high anxiety levels, and so on).

This information will serve as the basis from which to depart in studying the factors at interplay in the English teaching and learning process in Ecuadorian public education, a significant but still under-researched issue.

Description, Analysis, and Interpretation of Results

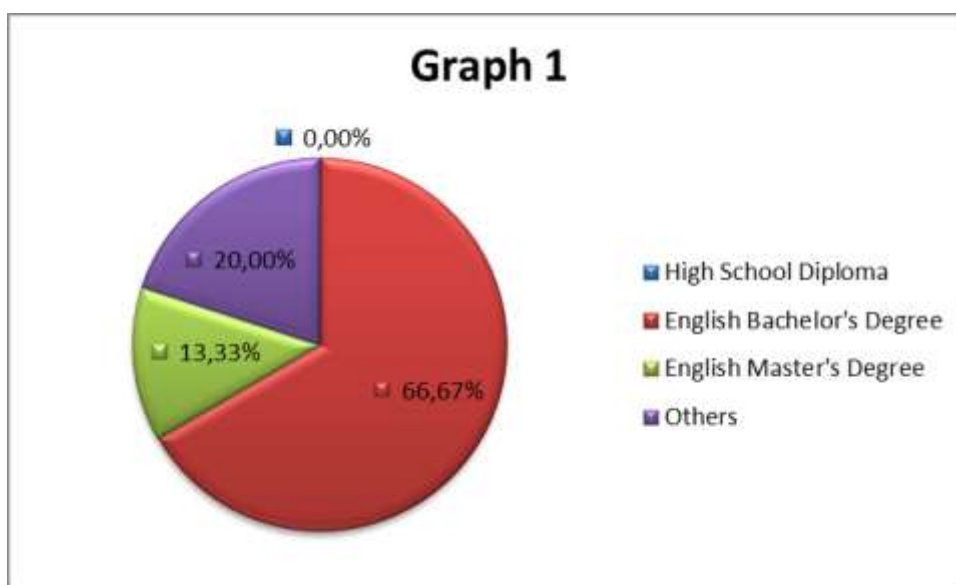
In this section of the study, the data gathered during the on-site investigation will be presented and analysed by following a quantitative approach.

In order to do this, the responses to each question in the teachers' questionnaire will be displayed in statistical graphs, to each of which will follow the corresponding analysis supported by and/or contrasted with the information from the students' questionnaire, teachers' interview and class observations.

Quantitative Analysis

Factors Concerning Teachers

Which level of education do teachers have?



Author: Jessenia María Zambrano Zambrano
Source: Teachers' Questionnaire

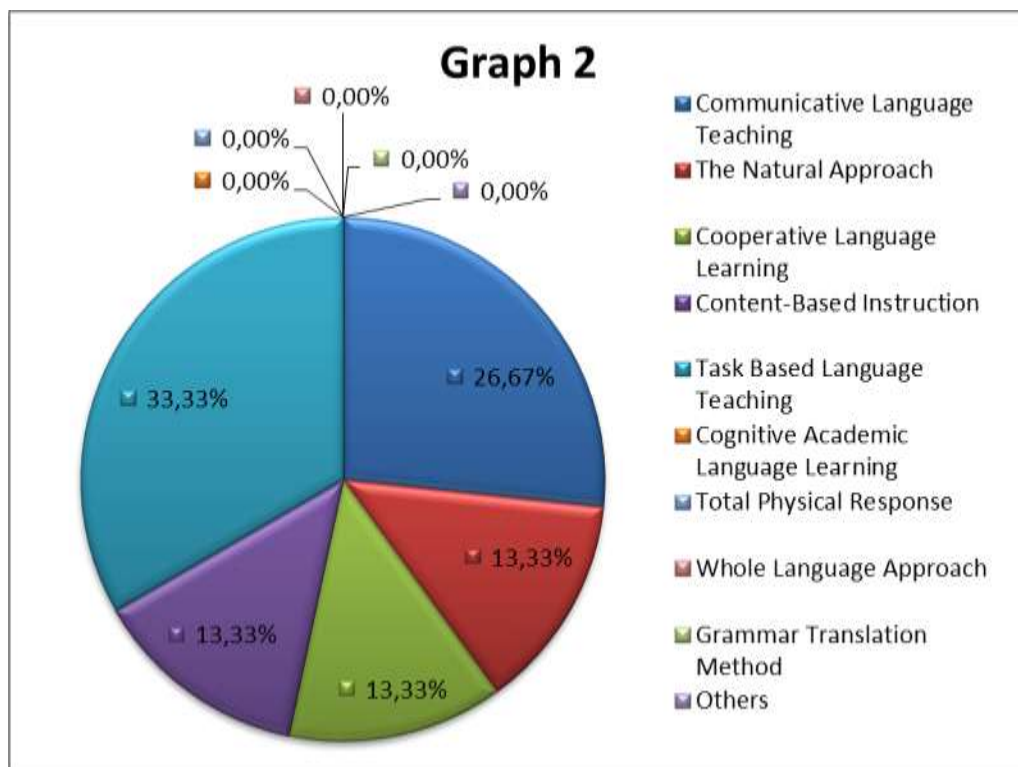
From the 15 teachers selected as the sample population for this study, ten have acquired an English Bachelor's degree, which represents the 66, 67% of the sample; two teachers have obtained an English Master's degree, which corresponds to the 13, 33% of the sample; three teachers belong to the category Others, which is the remaining 20% of the population sample; and there are not any teachers in the category of High School Diploma.

The fact that more than a half of the teachers from the sample belong to the level of English Bachelors and that a small but still significant percentage of teachers have an English Master's degree could be considered as an indicator of a probable emerging improvement in the public educational system. Even though the classes observed were not completely satisfactory, it is fair to acknowledge that the public high schools in the geographical area where the investigation was carried out (Calceta, Canuto and Tosagua) have better trained English teachers now than several years ago as could be inferred from the conversations held with the high school's administrators, teachers and students as well as from the author's own experience since the high school where she studied was among those visited and several English teachers and one Master were found, whereas six years ago when the author was still studying there, the ones in charge of teaching the subject were not English Bachelors but people with some knowledge of the language acquired by themselves or in courses.

Nonetheless, there was some percentage of cases in which people with other professional degrees were assigned to teach the English subject, which shows the lack of English teachers to take these job positions; for instance, one of the teachers interviewed was a Civil Engineer, and two others while having studied teaching careers had majored in other subjects, Social Studies and Chemistry respectively. Besides, there is the fact that even though most of the respondents have an English Bachelor's degree and two of them a Master's degree, only one teacher reached the level of *Proficient User (C1)*, thirteen teachers are in the level of *Independent User* ranging from B1 and B2, and one teacher is in the level of *Basic User (A2)* according to the standards established by the Common European Framework of Reference for

Languages (CEFR): Learning, Teaching, Assessment; the teachers were assigned to the mentioned levels by means of an interview carried out with them.

Which one of the following methods was used in the observed classes?



Author: Jessenia María Zambrano Zambrano

Source: Teachers' Questionnaire

According to the 15 surveyed teachers' own views about the teaching method they had employed while delivering their lessons, five said they used Task Based Language Teaching, which represents 33,33% of the sample; four said they used Communicative Language Teaching, which makes up 26,67% of the sample; two teachers said they used Content Based Instruction, which means 13,33%; other 13,33% said they applied Cooperative Language Learning; and another 13,33% said they employed the Natural Approach. No one indicated Whole Language Approach, Grammar Translation, Cognitive Academic Language Learning, or Total Physical Response as their used teaching method; and nobody ticked on the *others* option either.

Taking the observations performed as support for the views expressed here, it can be said that as the statistical graph shows, Task Based Language Teaching was the mostly used method but in a much higher degree than stated by the teachers, that is to say, even though five teachers said they used it, 12 actually applied it in their classes. Second in terms of frequency of usage was Grammar Translation; still nobody selected it as their used method, but which was in fact predominant in the way of teaching of three educators.

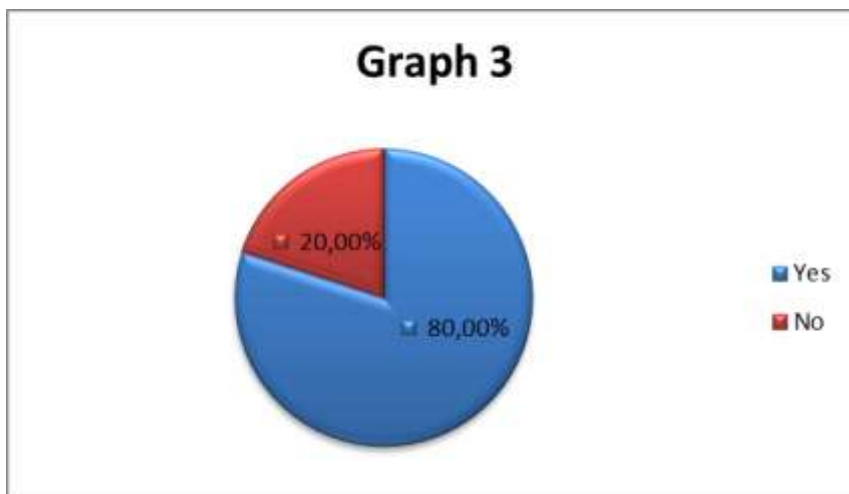
These two methods were identified during the observations by relying on the type of activities that took place in the classes, for instance Task Based Language Teaching comprises the use of real life tasks (e.g. using the telephone), or pedagogical tasks (e.g. information gap activities) (Richards & Rodgers, 2001); in these cases the former were not used but just the later type. Grammar Translation was identified by the use of overt explanations of grammatical structures and students' sentence writing.

Although Communicative Language Teaching was said to be used by four teachers, little in the way of real communication was observed, at least not in the target language. The same can be said about Cooperative Language Learning, which was selected by two respondents as their employed method; nonetheless, almost no group work or pair work was observed, and in the cases they existed, little interaction and cooperation happened, but just one student ended up doing the whole or most of the work. Cooperative Language Learning just as Communicative Language Teaching are learner-centred methods (Richards & Rodgers, 2001), and in contrast the observed classes were teacher-centred.

It is important to note that it was evident at times, that some teachers did not really know or had just forgotten what some methods comprise; for instance the

teachers who said they used Content Based Instruction might have ticked it because they thought the word *content* (in the method's name) was related to the *world knowledge* present in the textbooks they use; nevertheless, this method really involves using English as the medium to teach other subject matter, for example teaching history in English (Richards & Rodgers, 2001), and this was not the case of these lessons. Similarly, those who said they used the Natural Approach applied some of its principles in their lessons, for instance miming, but not in such a way that could make their classes identifiable as a Natural Approach lesson.

Do teachers use whole-group activities to teach their lessons?



Author: Jessenia María Zambrano Zambrano
Source: Teachers' Questionnaire

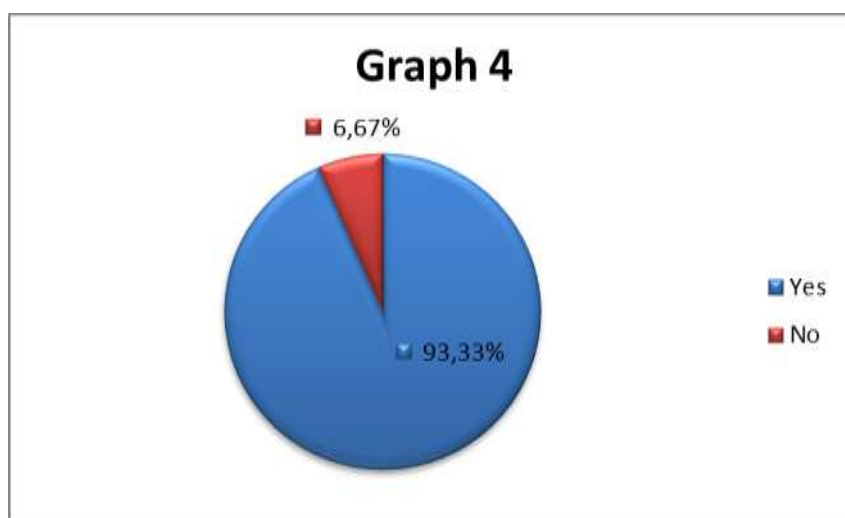
From the 15 teachers who answered the questionnaire, 12 said they use whole-group activities to teach their lessons, which constitute the 80% of the sample, while three stated that they do not use this type of activities, that is to say 20% of the sample.

All of the participant teachers observed, used whole group activities at some stage in their lessons though 20% of the sample said they do not use this kind of activity in their teaching. Indeed, *not* using whole group activities seems just impractical and impossible since it is necessary in order to present the lesson topic,

give instructions, teach specific language aspects, and provide post-tasks feedback especially in numerous classes where it might be complicated to do it individually, for example. Thus there are times when whole-group interaction is the most appropriate option (Harmer, 2007).

Here, again it seemed the teachers who answered negatively to this question did not have a clear idea of what whole-group activities actually involve.

Do teachers use individual activities to teach their lessons?



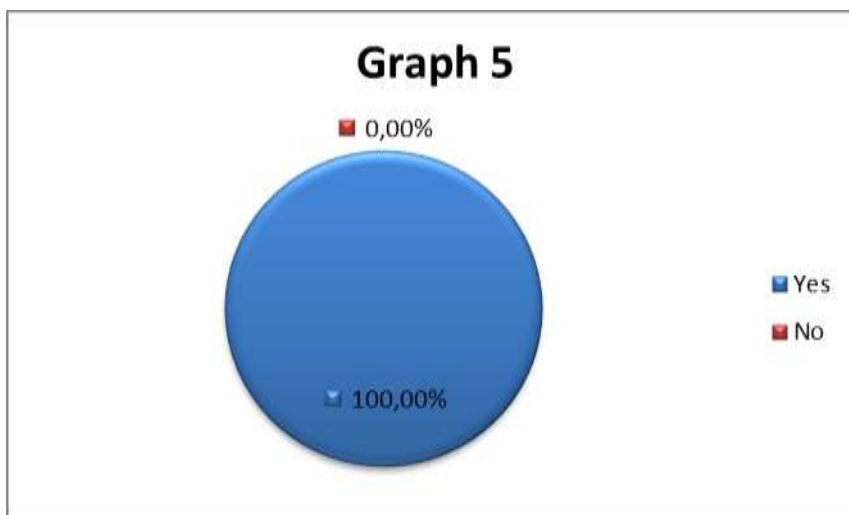
Author: Jessenia María Zambrano Zambrano
Source: Teachers' Questionnaire

From the 15 teachers who answered the questionnaire, 14 said that they use individual activities in their classes, which means 93, 33% of the sample, while one of them responded negatively, that is to say 6, 67% of the participants.

In spite of one teacher saying he/she does not use individual activities, all of the 15 teachers used this type of activity during their lessons. This is easy to understand since, as Harmer (2007) states, the students need a time to work on their own, at their personal pace, paying more attention to their needs and pedagogical development, and to do so without the pressure they might experience when working with others. Moreover, there is the fact that teachers need to assess each student

progress separately, help them to overcome their learning difficulties (in the current Ecuadorian public education system, students with low academic performance have extra class tutorials), and score them individually.

Do teachers use group work activities to teach their lessons?



Author: Jessenia María Zambrano Zambrano

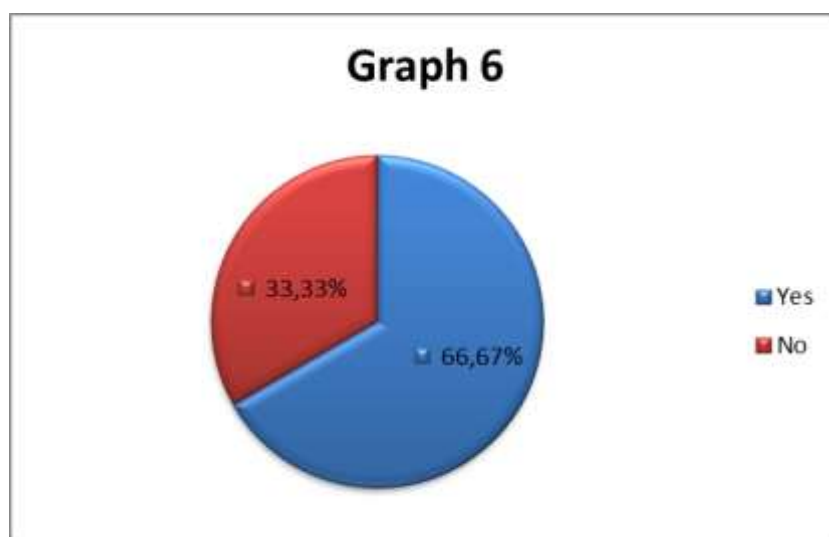
Source: Teachers' Questionnaire

All of the 15 teachers who answered the questionnaire stated that they use group work activities to teach their lessons; this corresponds to 100% of the sample population.

Only three teachers used group work during the observed lessons although the whole sample said they used this type of activity in their classes. This is a pity since group work as well as pair work allows “more chance to experiment with the language than is possible in a whole-class arrangement.” (Harmer, 2007 p.43) Furthermore, this is supposed to help shy students to speak the language in a less daunting environment than in front of the class, allows the teacher to help specific students while the others are working, increase students’ cooperation among them and independence from the teacher (Gower, Phillips & Walters, 2005).

In conversations held after class with some of the teachers, when asked about the reasons why they did not use group work, they replied that as they work with numerous classes, students get easily disruptive when gathered in groups -this problem has been identified and acknowledged by Harmer (2007)-; they also said that it is sometimes very hard to monitor if the learners are practicing English or just talking in Spanish about other things. Additionally, a teacher alleged that most students do not like to challenge themselves, “If the activity demands a considerable deal of creative thinking they will moan and in some cases just will not do it, or leave all the work to the ‘good’ ones.”

Do teachers use English most of the time in their classes?



Author: Jessenia María Zambrano Zambrano
Source: Teachers' Questionnaire

From the 15 teachers who answered the questionnaire, ten said that English was mostly used in their lessons, which means the 66, 67% of the respondents, whereas five teachers, the remaining 33, 33% of the sample, said this was not true of their classes.

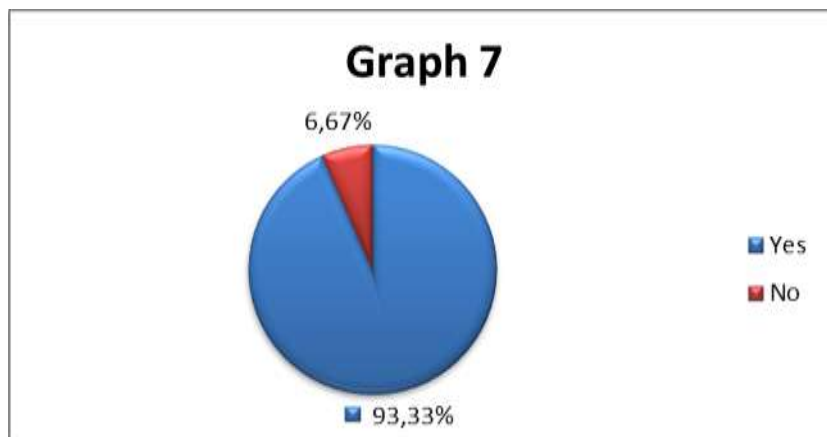
Even though more than a half of the surveyed teachers said they use English most of the time during their lessons and that 13 out of 15 students answered the

same in an equivalent interrogation in the questionnaire given to them, the class observations showed that ten teachers, which is 66, 67% of the sample used English 50% of the time, while Spanish the remaining time; four teachers, that is to say 26, 67% of the sample used the target language 75% of the class time; and one teacher, i.e. 6, 67% of the sample used English just 25% of the lesson time. Thus, there has not been agreement between what the teachers say of themselves about the amount of English they produce during class, what the students think about it, and what has been witnessed in the class observations.

According to Harmer (2007), a place where English is being taught should be surrounded by English and it should be employed as the main medium of communication there. Because of this, he suggests that teachers favour the use of English most of the time, while reserving the students' first language -in monolingual classes, as in the Ecuadorian context- to those situations where using English would not be too helpful, or where it supposes an unnecessary waste of time; for instance, when giving too complex instructions which the students are not in the level to understand.

Consequently, if reflected against Harmer's views, the majority of the teachers from the observed lessons might not be producing sufficient English input for their students to effectively learn.

Do teachers plan their lessons?



Author: Jessenia María Zambrano Zambrano

Source: Teachers' Questionnaire

From the 15 teachers who answered the questionnaire, 14 said that they plan their lessons, which constitutes the 93, 33% of the sample population, and one respondent said he/she does not plan the classes, which corresponds to the 6, 67% of the sample.

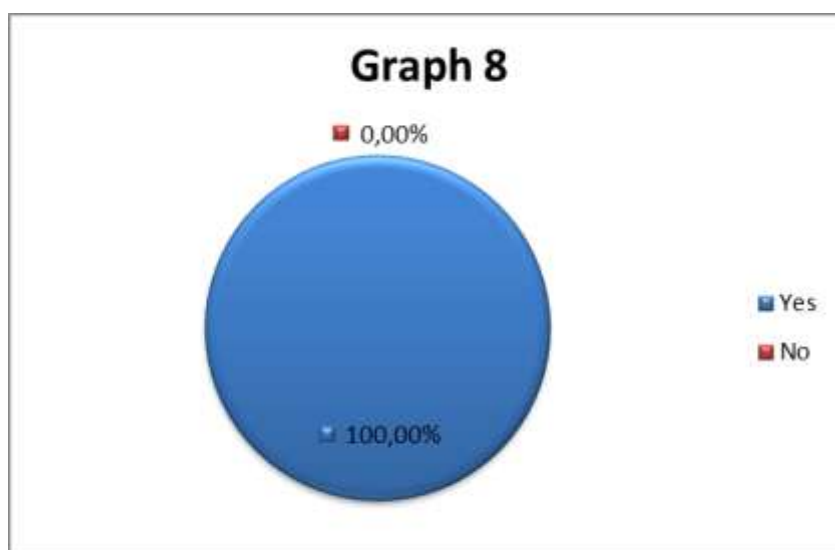
Despite the fact that 14 out of 15 teachers stated that they do plan their lessons, only five of the 15 lessons observed actually reflected a good planning which was made evident by those classes' good organization, control of timing, variety of interaction patterns, clear goals, post-activities feedback, and quick review of the contents covered at the end of the lessons. These aspects were not present in the same degree in all the five classes mentioned but certainly to an extent that makes it plausible to consider them as well-planned lessons. On the contrary, the other ten lessons cannot be considered as so since they lacked most of the previously mentioned aspects; for instance the goals of those lessons were not clear to the students, who looked a bit confused in a kind of purposeless lesson. It looks as if some teachers believed that just reading the title of a lesson is enough for the students to know what they are supposed to learn and be able to do by the end of the

class. However, as Gown, Phillips and Walters (2006) state, not only the teacher but also the learners must have a clear idea of the lesson's outcomes.

Thus, in simple and practical not technical language, students need to be informed of the lesson's goal, so that the activities they perform have a direction. For instance instead of saying: *Today you will learn how to make interrogative, affirmative and negative statements using the conditional verb would*, you could better say, *Today you will learn how to make invitations in English, and how to accept or refuse them*.

These ten lessons also lacked among other things, variety of interaction patters, most of the class was taught using *teacher to whole-class* interaction; bad activities management, one activity was not completed and other was starting without a clear restatement of what was done and how it is related to what comes next; and poor use of resources, good textbook pictures not even considered as an aid to a particular explanation point during the class, for example.

Do teachers consider aspects such as discipline, timing, feedback, and instruction to teach their lessons?



Author: Jessenia María Zambrano Zambrano
Source: Teachers' Questionnaire

All of the 15 teachers who answered the questionnaire indicated that they consider all of the above mentioned aspects when delivering a class; this corresponds to 100% of the sample population.

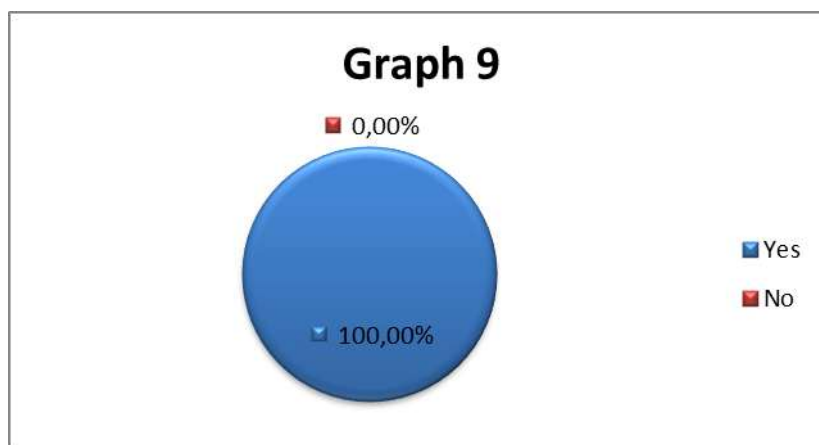
Even though the total sample said that discipline, feedback, and activities and instructional aspects are considered in their classes, not all of them were so in the same magnitude during the observed lessons. For instance, in only five lessons these four aspects were present, while in the other ten lessons the more predominant aspects were control of discipline and feedback on the students' requirements

On the other hand, activities monitoring and time management were the least considered aspects. It seemed that some teachers believe that as far as they teach something to their students, organizing and varying the activities, as well as assigning certain amount of time for their development is not so relevant. Several teachers say that this is difficult because the students do not work at the same pace, so even if they specified that time, some students would be inevitably left behind.

The above description corresponds to the inferences from what has been observed in the lessons, but which does not agree to what the students have answered in their questionnaire; indeed all of the 15 surveyed students said that their teachers do control the discipline, give them feedback (i.e. explain in what they failed, and also praise their good work), and give clear instructions, whereas just one student said their teacher did not assign a specific amount of time for each activity; thus, according to the students discipline, timing, feedback and instruction are overall being well handled by their teachers though this is undoubtedly not the case of all of them.

Factors Concerning Students

Do teachers consider students' needs to teach English successfully?



Author: Jessenia María Zambrano Zambrano
Source: Teachers' Questionnaire

All of the 15 teachers who answered the questionnaire, which constitutes 100% of the sample population, reported that they consider students' needs to teach English in a successful way.

However, this was hardly done by most of them during the observed lessons. For instance, from the needs considered in the present study (age- personality- attitude- aptitude- motivation- and learning styles) the mostly considered by the teachers was age, since no one of them brought in topics that were not related to their students' age or too difficult for them to understand; in this respect most of the teachers were aided by the textbooks they use, which as being developed by professionals, have their content quite properly selected and sequenced; nonetheless, some other teachers had developed their own syllabuses or modules, so they have been the ones who have selected the topics, materials, and activities according to the age range of their pupils.

On the other hand, very little was done to cater for such needs as motivation and attitude; for instance, especially in higher grades the students looked bored by

and uninterested in the subject, with a few exceptions. This might be happening due to the fact that the topics in some cases were not interesting enough, presented unattractively in others, and poorly exploited another times. According to one of the teachers, as the students get older it becomes more difficult to keep their interest awake, and that if she tries something new, they respond well just momentarily. She also said that this redesigning of their teaching is very time consuming and a considerable drawback.

Nevertheless, several teachers showed little enthusiasm and creativity in teaching, which certainly affected students' attitude toward English as well as their motivation. Indeed, this is a serious problem since positive attitude and motivation are highly related to the students' inclination to persevere studying the language (Lightbown & Spada, 2006).

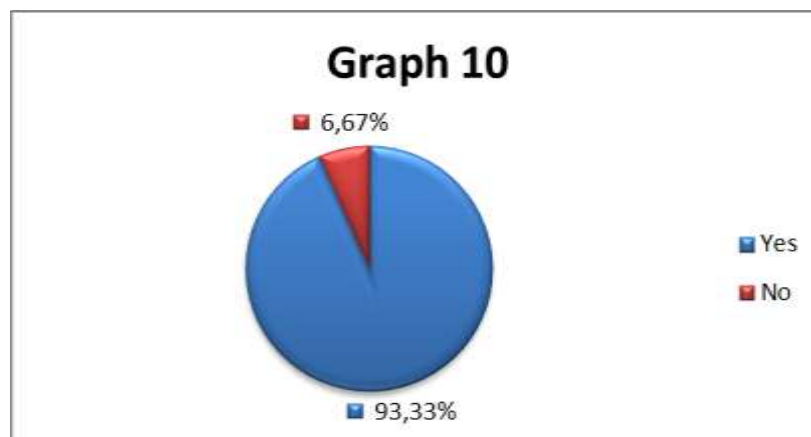
If it comes to learning styles, personality and aptitude, a similar situation was observed; for instance, there was not much variation of activities and techniques to address the different learning styles (e.g. visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, individual, group, reflective, impulsive, etc.), personal characteristics, and language skills so heterogeneous that the students possess.

Various teachers argued that is complicated for them to get to know their students' characteristic sufficiently and react to their findings accordingly as they work with lots of students per class.

After all, the truth is that the classes observed lacked in attention to these aspects, and these teachers must have in mind that even though not all has been said about the influence on language learning exerted by learning styles and attitude, students do need to be stimulated to use any strategy they feel is helpful to them, and that as teachers they ought to avoid thinking that all these students' requirements will

be addressed by employing just one method the whole time (Lightbown & Spada, 2006)

Do teachers consider students' level to teach English successfully?



Author: Jessenia María Zambrano Zambrano

Source: Teachers' Questionnaire

From the 15 teachers who answered the questionnaire, 14 said that they consider students' level when teaching English, which represents the 93, 33% of the sample population, while one teacher said that he/she does not consider this aspect when teaching, that is to say 6, 67% of the sample.

Almost all of the teachers stated that they take into account their student's proficiency level, which was *basic* for all of the students observed, for teaching their lessons accordingly. Nonetheless, a great deal of the teachers might be associating the basic student's level to making the class activities as simple as possible, and thus believing they are matching proficiency level with instruction. At least this is what could be perceived from the observations.

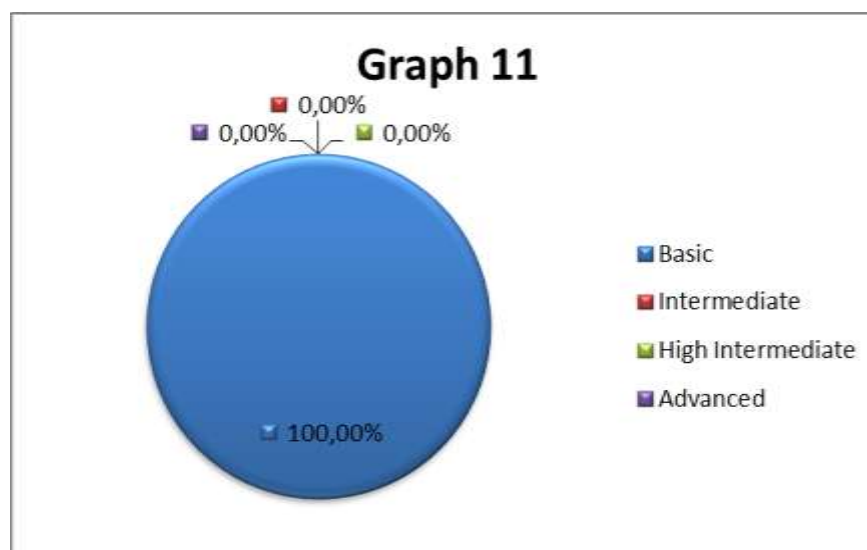
In conversations held with some teachers this was justified by claiming that a considerable number of students would just refuse to do harder tasks as they say that they neither understand nor like English; besides, these teachers also added that most of their students do not want to do anything that demands an effort on their part.

The students were inquired on their perceptions about the difficulty of the activities done in class, to which 14 out of 15 answered that the activities were *easy* whereas only one said they were *difficult*; the interesting thing here is that this student also said that he liked his teacher's way of teaching and praised her in a nice way which clearly showed his admiration and respect for her. This fact makes it clear that the students not only need but also wish to be challenged by the activities proposed to them even if they do not ask for it.

In fact, according to Vygotsky (as cited in Woolfolk, 2010) the tasks or problems proposed to the learners must lie on their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which is the area where the learners are able to understand and solve the tasks presented to them if provided enough support and assistance from the teacher. This zone is placed between the knowledge the students have already mastered and the knowledge that even if provided detailed explanations they would not understand yet.

Thus if all teachers taught within their students' ZPD, the learners will work with challenging, yet manageable activities, which would not make them feel frustrated by too much difficulty nor fed up with something they already know how to do (Woolfolk, 2010).

Which is the level of their students?



Author: Jessenia María Zambrano Zambrano
Source: Teachers' Questionnaire

All of the 15 teachers who answered the questionnaire indicated that their students were in a basic level of English proficiency; this corresponds to 100% of the sample population.

From what has been observed, the teachers are right when they say their students' level is overall basic. This reality was repeated across the six high schools and 15 classes visited (from 8vo año EGB to 3ero de Bachillerato).

Contrasting the observations with the scales from the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR): learning, teaching, assessment, the observed learners were effectively in the level A1 (Basic User); those at this proficiency stage are supposed to produce and understand common everyday expressions, talk about personal information, and communicate in an elemental basis given their interlocutors accommodate their speech to their level.

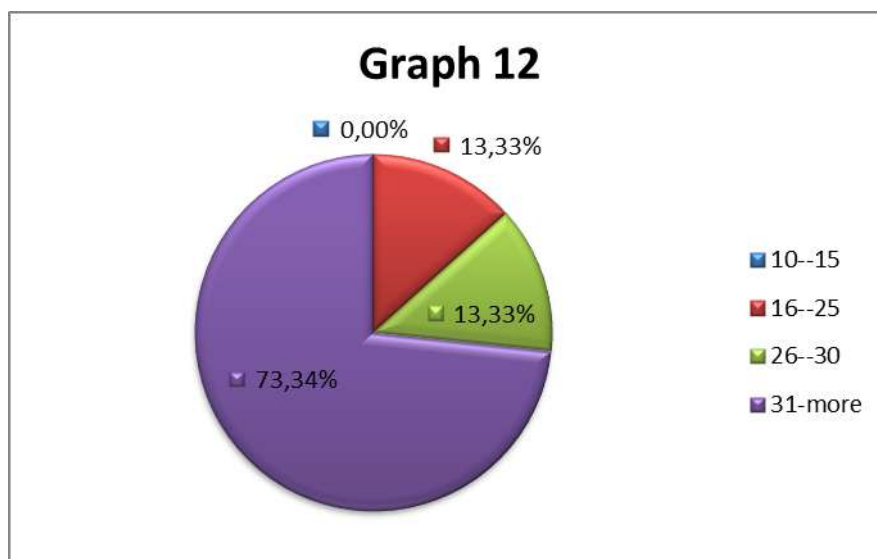
It was also witnessed on the one hand that some were even below this category as they had a lot of trouble in performing the basic tasks mentioned above, while on the other hand, there were very few exceptional students who seemed to

work a lot on their own or with the help of someone else outside school, such as the case of a 16 year old girl that could be placed in the A2 level (basic user), who said she practiced a lot at home with an uncle who speaks English very fluently as he lived more than ten years in the US. But certainly the description here has been made on a general basis, and definitely cases such as that of the girl just mentioned have the influence of external factors and thus cannot be considered as the result of high school instruction.

This situation reflects the great necessity of improvement that faces the English teaching in the Ecuadorian public education system; it would be unfair though to deny that there has been an increase in the students' level compared to the reality several years ago, at least now the students seemed to be getting more used to listening to English instructions; however much more is needed.

Factors Concerning Classrooms

How many students are there in the observed classes?



Author: Jessenia María Zambrano Zambrano
Source: Teachers' Questionnaire

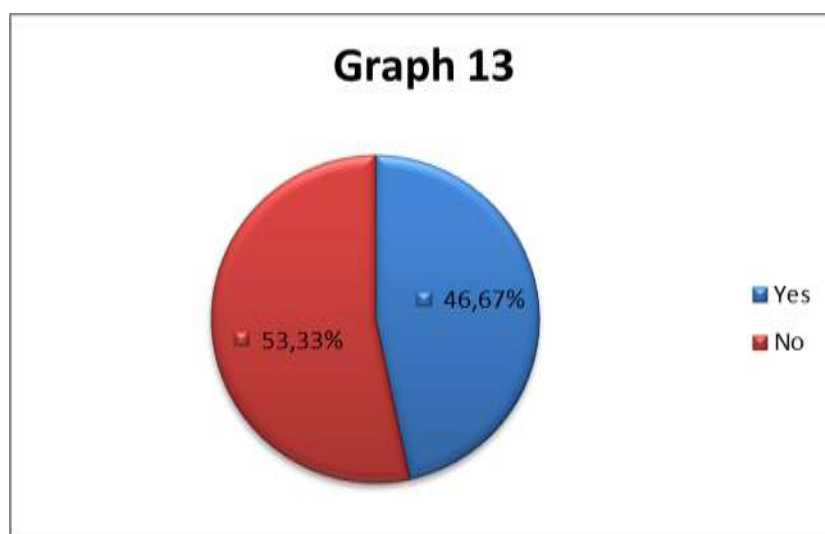
From the 15 teachers who answered the questionnaire, 11, that is 73,34% of the sample population, indicated that in the classes they work with there are 31 or

more students; two teachers, which makes up the 13, 33% indicated that in their classes there are 16 to 25 students; the remaining 13, 33% indicated they have classes of 26 to 30 students; and no one said to have classes of 10 to 15 learners.

As the statistics have shown there is a considerable percentage of classes that have many students (31 to more). Even though determining the limits between *big* or *small* classes is a subjective matter, a class with more than 31 students is considered by the surveyed teachers as a big one.

This number of students per class is the usual thing in Ecuadorian public education, there are classes that reach up to 50 learners and even more; this situation made it more difficult monitoring the activities, providing feedback, helping the learners in a personalized way, and the quality of instruction in general.

Do teachers feel comfortable with the number of students they are working with?



Author: Jessenia María Zambrano Zambrano

Source: Teachers' Questionnaire

From the 15 teachers who answered the questionnaire, seven said they were comfortable with the number of students they work with, which means 46, 67% of the sample population, while in contrast eight teachers said they do not felt that way; this represents 53, 33% of the sample.

Surprisingly, 73, 33% of the students (11 out of 15) answered in their questionnaire that the number of students in their classes do favour them to learn English, while 26, 67% of them (4 out of 15) said the opposite, even though 73, 34% of the classes had up to 31 students. So, there has not been an agreement between the students and teachers' perceptions on this respect.

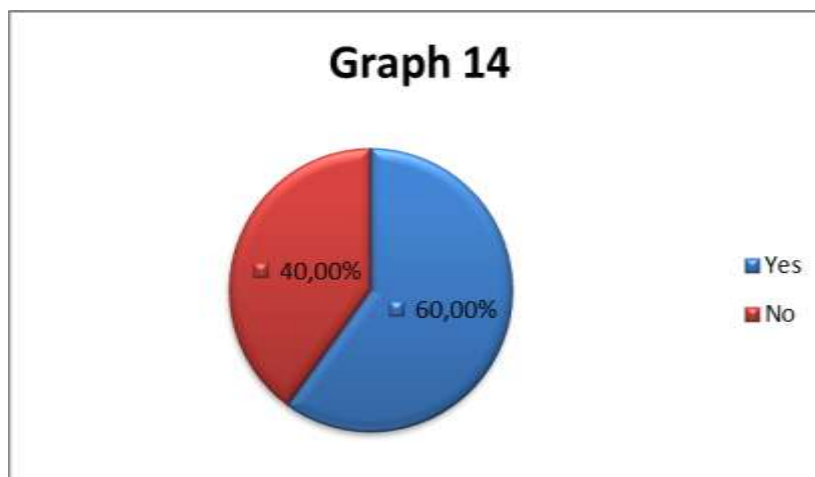
In fact, the large number of students negatively affected the teaching-learning process in the observed lessons in such a way that coincided to a considerable extent with the opinion of Richards and Renandya (2002), who say that this kind of circumstance usually forces teachers to adopt not very effective ways of teaching, such as teacher-centred interaction, which prevents them from paying adequate attention to their learners' particularities and reduces their participation.

Indeed, teacher-centred methodology was predominant in the classes observed, with the subsequent consequences mentioned in the paragraph above. Moreover, the classes with more than 31 students presented other drawbacks such as, poor group and pair work monitoring in the classes in which this type of activity was used, for instance, students ended up using more Spanish than English, thus leading to poor speaking practice as well.

In conversations with some of the teachers, they stated that having too many students per class makes them uncomfortable as they have the feeling that no matter their efforts, they will never get everyone, not even most of them to learn enough. They also pointed to the fact that with large classes they need to talk louder more often, and that even though in the classes observed the students showed a satisfactory behaviour, as they felt a bit inhibited by an outsider's presence, it is usually a hard task to maintain the discipline. Finally, others mentioned the difficulty in bringing

extra material as their students are numerous and they must invest their own money if they want to do so.

Do teachers have enough space to work with the group of students they have been assigned?



Author: Jessenia María Zambrano Zambrano

Source: Teachers' Questionnaire

From the 15 teachers who answered the questionnaire, nine said they have enough space to work with their students, which make up the 60% of the sample, while six teachers, indicated they do not have such space, which constitutes 40% of the sample.

The percentage of students who think they have enough space to work in their classrooms (86, 67 %), as showed by their responses to their questionnaire, is higher than that of the teachers who feel similarly (60%).

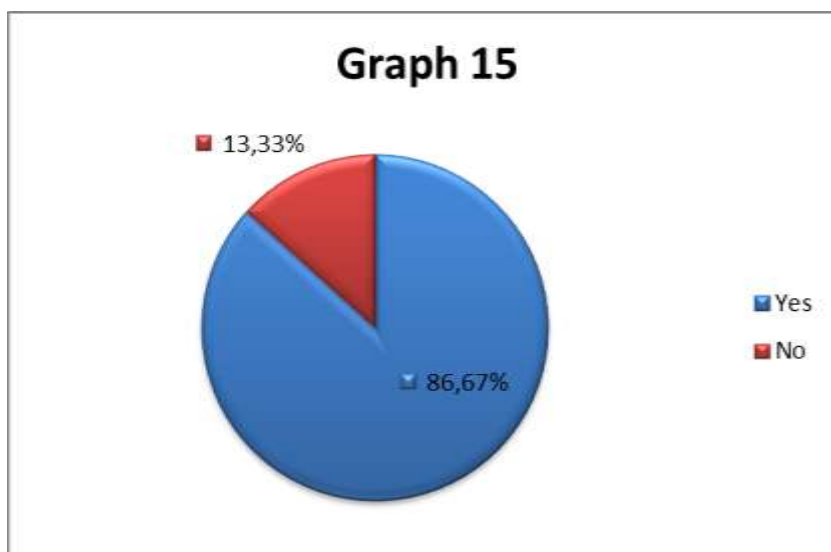
According to the observations, 8 out of the 15 classrooms visited, which represents 53, 33% of them had enough space for the students' movement and activities development, whereas seven classrooms, which makes up 46, 67% of them did not count with enough space to efficiently work. However, it seemed that the lack of space in these seven classes was not because the classrooms were of too small dimensions but because of the number of students housed in them. It is not meant by

this that the classrooms were very big either, but just a normal size; if there were less students in them they will work pleasantly.

Talking about other aspects related to space, namely the painting and the temperature, indeed, in one of the high schools visited the three classrooms where the observations took place were in very good conditions as they had been relatively recently constructed; they also had good natural lighting and two of them were located in a building where the classrooms have their floor constructed in the way of stair steps, so that the students visibility is not obstructed by the one in front of them. On the other hand, in one of the high schools where research was developed there was one very small, improvised classroom, which was even somewhat dark since it had only one little window; this was not a numerous class, but evidently this is not a good learning environment.

The rest of the classrooms were neither in bad conditions nor in very good ones but just in between. Some of the drawbacks identified in those classrooms were the old painting, which made the rooms unattractive, and the lack of fans or air conditioning since the weather turned at times very hot, thus affecting the students and teachers' mood. In fact, in the word of Legge and Harari (2000), it favours the students' performance if the classrooms in warm climates have air conditioning systems, and that students work better in temperatures a little lower than that they are used to.

Do teachers arrange students' seats in relation to the activities planned for their classes?



Author: Jessenia María Zambrano Zambrano

Source: Teachers' Questionnaire

From the 15 teachers who answered the questionnaire, 13 said they arrange the seats according to the activities planned for the lessons, which constitute 86, 67% of the sample population, while two teachers said they do not do this, which represent the 13, 33% of the sample.

The students also answered a question about their attitude towards the way in which their teachers arrange the seats for carrying out the different activities; in fact 14 out of 15, that is to say 93, 33% of the students said they like their teachers' seating arrangements.

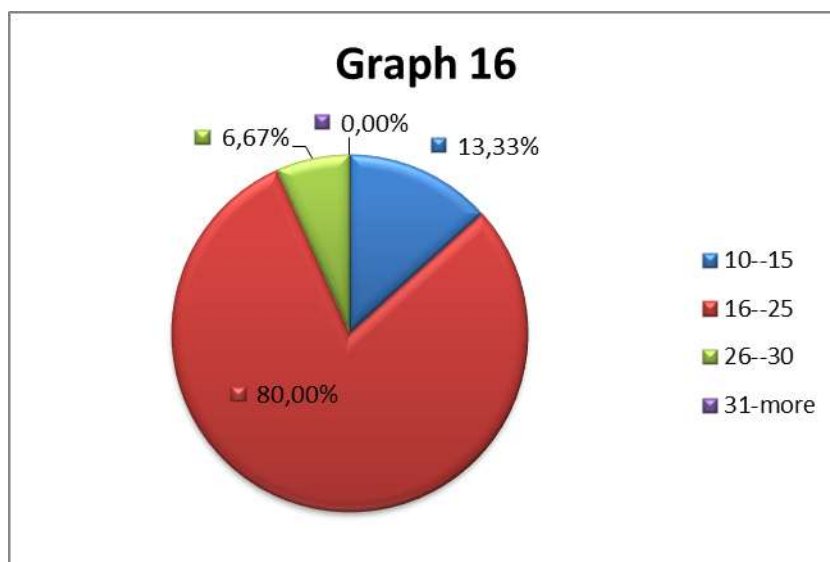
During the observations, though, the commonest arrangement was that of orderly rows, while only in one class were the students seated in a different type of arrangement, namely in the form of a horseshoe; it is important to note that this class had no more than 25 students, which made this organization suitable, whereas the other teachers might have chosen orderly rows due to the number of students, which in 73, 34% of the classes ranged from 31 to 50 students. According to Harmer

(2007), in those situations where there are many students in a classroom, the most practical or even unique option the teachers have is just arranging the seats in orderly rows.

In the very few lessons where there was group and pair work the students just worked with their nearest partners, in order to avoid making any changes as well as producing disturbing noise for the teachers working next to their classrooms, as stated by some teachers.

Definitely, these students are losing the benefits of more integrative arrangements such as circles, horseshoes, or separate tables (café style) due to the inconvenient size of the class; however, the teachers need to create as much opportunities as possible for valuable interaction in the benefit of the students' learning.

How many students do teachers think is the appropriate number to teach English?



Author: Jessenia María Zambrano Zambrano

Source: Teachers' Questionnaire

From the 15 teachers who answered the questionnaire, 12, which make up 80% of the sample population, said that the appropriate number of students to teach English is *16 to 25*; two teachers, which means 13, 33% of the sample favoured *10 to*

15 students as the appropriate number; one teacher, corresponding to 6, 67% said that 26 to 30 students was appropriate; and no one favoured 31 to more as an appropriate number for teaching English.

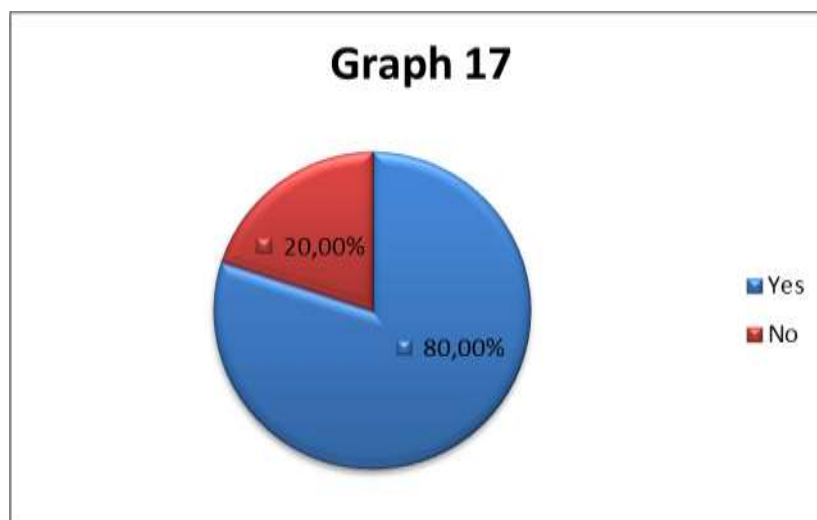
From the results graphed above, it is deducible that for all of the educators surveyed more than 30 students is too many for a teacher. However, the questionnaire results might suggest that most teachers do not favour smaller classes than 16 students either; nonetheless some teachers explained that they would have chosen the 10 to 15 option as their ideal number of students for teaching English but they consider it as non-realistic for public high schools, thus the 16 to 25 would be for them an appropriate number for this educational context.

There is not such a thing as the perfect class size nor is there agreement about how much beneficial class size reduction is, if it really boosts performance or not, as well as to what kind of learners is supposed to be the most benefited by smaller classes. For instance, according to Hanushek (1999), class size is unrelated to better academic achievement; whereas Mosteller (1995) in his so called *Tennessee* study claim that a reduced class size does contribute to better learning and that those benefits persist over time. Yet as stated by Blatchford (2003) the benefits of smaller class size is more experienced by students with lower achievement than those with higher achievement. It is important to be cautious as this literature describes general instruction, not with a focus on foreign or second language teaching and learning.

In spite of this debate, it is undeniable that smaller classes would help to prevent some common difficulties related to large classes; for instance, it would reduce noise, allow the teachers to better respond to the particular students' learning requirements, organize the seats in a more integrative and workable way, as well as increase the use of target language (Woodward, 2001). All of this would inevitably

lead to a learning improvement. Besides the teachers, who really live the reality of the classroom, feel that large classes more than advantages have disadvantages. Daily experience is praised by many people as the best research; thus something true must be in it.

Do teachers use teaching resources (TV, Tape/Cd recorder, Computer(s), Projector(s), Smartboard, and supplementary materials)?



Author: Jessenia María Zambrano Zambrano
Source: Teachers' Questionnaire

From the 15 teachers who answered the questionnaire, 12 said that they use some of the teaching resources mentioned above, which represents 80% of the sample population, while three said they do not use those resources, that means 20% of the teachers; the resources that the teachers actually mentioned as used by them were cd player, supplementary materials such as picture cards, and extra readings from books and magazines, and also computer which was mentioned by only one teacher.

As has been described, the majority of the teachers responded positively to the question above; on the other hand, more than a half of the students (66, 67%),

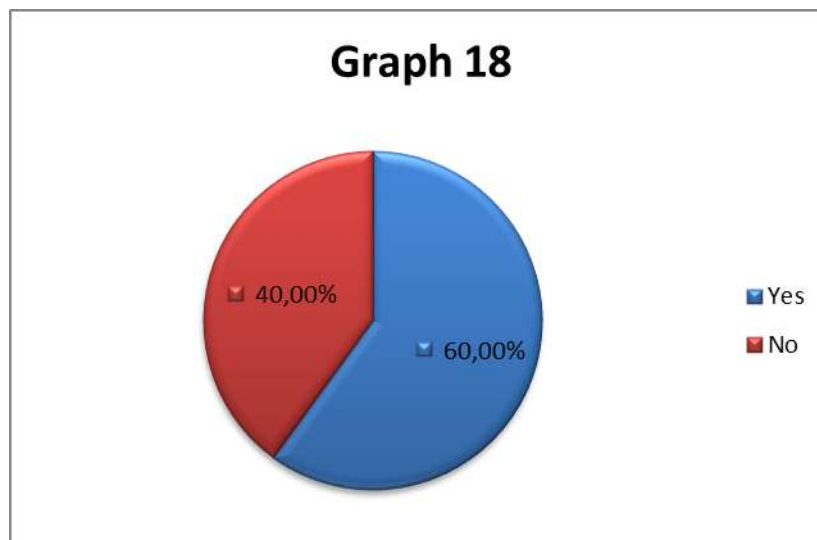
when asked if these resources were used in their classes, answered negatively, and 33, 33% of the learners responded in a positive fashion.

In the classes observed, the reality was more in line with the students' opinion than with the teachers' since not even a CD player was used in any of the classes though some teachers have indicated in the questionnaire that they use it; only some supplementary materials were present in a few classes, for instance one teacher had prepared in a big paper a grammar explanation using a conceptual map, other teacher used a trademark picture pack for teaching and eliciting vocabulary, and another had brought in extra reading material.

When talking with the teachers, some of them said that their high schools do not have CD players and that bringing one from their houses is just too difficult; others said that the CD player in their high schools is shared by several teachers even from other subjects not only English teachers, so they use it but not very often. There was even a teacher who explained that there are several classrooms without electrical inlets, thus making it impossible to use a CD player.

It was evidenced from the observations what has been described, and that all these 15 classes are lacking the novelty, variety, and chance for more native-like input that using diverse resources in well planned and purposeful ways can add to the lessons.

Do teachers consider appropriate the resources they have in class?



Author: Jessenia María Zambrano Zambrano
Source: Teachers' Questionnaire

From the 15 teachers who answered the questionnaire, nine said they consider appropriate the resources they have in their classrooms, which corresponds to the 60% of the sample population, while six said they do not considered them as so, which constitutes 40% of the sample.

Even though it was made evident from the previous graph analysis, that the resources in the observed classes were scarce, there is a considerable number of teachers (60% of the sample) who also said that those they have at hand are appropriate for the teaching process. This seems quite understandable as they were qualifying those they actually have and use, that is to say, the basic resources in existence such as textbook- not all classes-, markers, board, and homemade extra material. When explaining why they considered the resources in their classes appropriate, most of them indicated that it is because they are necessary, facilitate learning, and add interest to the class.

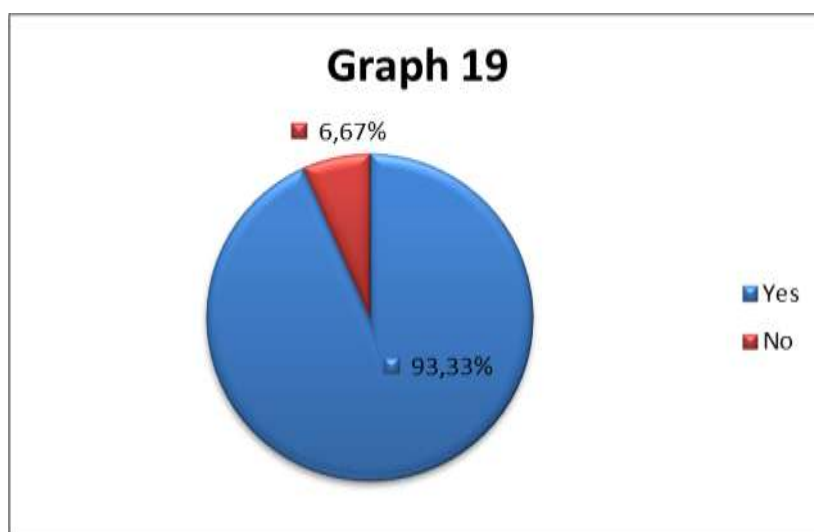
On the contrary, those teachers who said the resources they have in class are not appropriate, presented as reasons for their answer the fact that these basic

resources (textbook, board, markers, CD player-in some cases-) are not enough for delivering really effective English lessons, others stated that more technological devices as overhead projectors, computers, CD players are urgently needed, and another teacher said that she does not consider appropriate the resources as they are insufficient and because every time she wants to use those that exist she must go to other rooms and arrange in too much advance for not coinciding with other teachers using the computing lab or audio-visual room, and even doing so there are troubles sometimes.

As having observed the lessons, the position of those who said that the resources available are just not enough and thus not completely appropriate seems just right; almost anyone would agree with them. The boredom and lack of interest in the subject can be considered a signal of the students' calling for better equipped classrooms, and the requirement for increasing the budget from the Government to solve this problem of having under-resourced classes at the height of the twenty-first century.

Factors Concerning Educational Institutions

Does the institution review your lesson plans?



Author: Jessenia María Zambrano Zambrano

Source: Teachers' Questionnaire

From the 15 teachers who answered the questionnaire, 14, which represents 93, 33% of the sample population, said the institution review their lesson plans, whereas one of them, which corresponds to the remaining 6, 67% of teachers said the institution does not review his/her lesson plans.

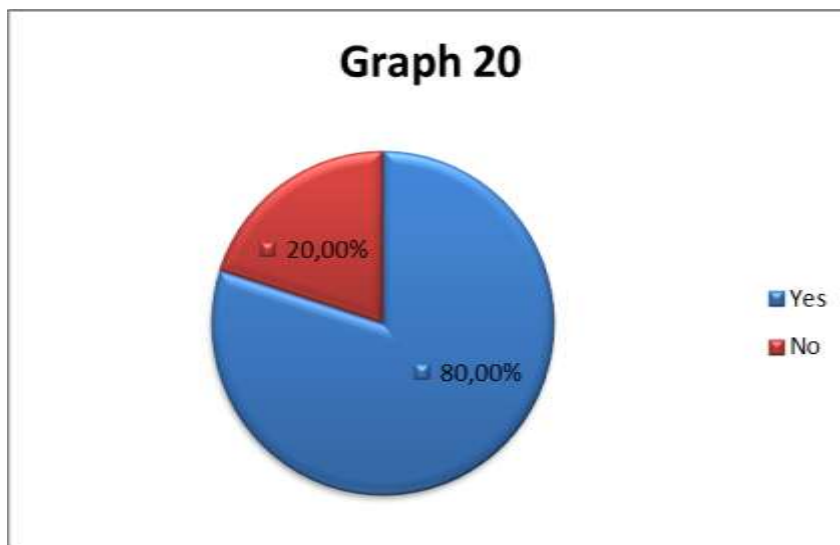
It seems that most high schools now regulate and monitor the teachers' planning to ensure that they do prepare their classes, thus organize the contents and avoid to some extent improvisation, which though not a bad thing, might create some problems if teachers rely too much on it.

In spite of this, at times the poor quality of several of the lessons observed, looked as if this lesson review consisted in just taking a quick look at a pile of papers, and signing them for approval without any comment or advice, or it might be that the plans are perfect, but what is written there is actually not applied in class.

Talking about the frequency with which the institution review their lessons, from the 14 who answered positively on this question, two said their plans were reviewed *once a week*, ten said it happened *once a month*, and two selected the option *other* within which one of them said his/her plans were *sometimes* reviewed, and the other said it is *once in a while*.

In those cases where the plans are reviewed once a week and once a month, the teaching was more organized than in those where the lesson plans are not regularly revised. Hence, consistent and sound revision of teachers planning helps to increase teachers' commitment to accomplish the academic goals that have been set, as well as benefiting the students by receiving more organized instruction.

Does the institution monitor your teaching?



Author: Jessenia María Zambrano Zambrano
Source: Teachers' Questionnaire

From the 15 teachers who answered the questionnaire, 12 said the institution monitors their teaching, which constitute the 80% of the sample population, whereas three of them said that the institution does not monitor their teaching, which make up 20% of the sample.

Regarding the frequency in which this institutional monitoring occurs, the answers were varied; for instance, one teacher said it happens *once a week*, nobody selected the option *once a month*, and 11 selected the option *other* within which eight said they are monitored *sometimes*, one *each two months*, one *seldom*, and another one said that she is *always* monitored, thus the situation seems to be very dissimilar, not only across the high schools, but also within each one, as the frequency of institutional monitoring did not coincide even among teachers from the same high school.

Although there seems to be a considerable degree of institutional monitoring in the high schools visited, as suggested from the statistical graph above, in the conversations held with the teachers, they said that the kind of monitoring they

receive is not so overt or formal. As a matter of fact, it was informed by the teachers that the administrators just walk around and check visually if they are working, but they rarely enter to the classroom and sit to observe the lesson and offer feedback. They also stated that usually this supervision is done by people without knowledge about the subject, so they mainly focus on such aspects as discipline control but not in how the subject itself is being taught.

This a far from ideal situation as teachers are not receiving the help that comes from a supportive supervision from which the principals as well as the teachers can benefit since in that way they are able to spot troublesome aspects and find solutions together (Zepeda, 2009).

Conclusions

- ❖ The factors that have affected the observed classes the most have been the large size of the classes, lack of educative resources (books, projectors, computers, etc.), unvaried or wrongly applied teaching methods and techniques, low percentage of English usage in class, and lack of truly professional monitoring.
- ❖ The teachers in its majority have a Bachelor in English but their instructional competence and language proficiency continue to be, generally speaking, not satisfactory.
- ❖ The level of the students is overall basic for all of the students observed from the lower to higher grades, and there are even several cases in which they can hardly be categorized as basic in proficiency.
- ❖ The large size of most of the classes where the investigation took place makes them uncomfortable to more than a half of the surveyed teachers who would prefer a class size of no more than 25 students.
- ❖ The institutional plan reviewing and lesson monitoring in the majority of the observed classes takes the form of a mere formalism that little has to do with real educative improvement.
- ❖ Even though, there is on the whole more interest on the English subject, and the number of specialized teachers on the language is progressively increasing, English teaching in the Ecuadorian public education system continues to be far from good.

Recommendations

- ❖ Teachers should receive professional development more frequently delivered by good professionals on the subject in order to keep them in line with the current teaching developments.
- ❖ The teachers who do not have a good proficiency level should receive English lessons on the language itself before moving on or with more emphasis than teaching techniques and the like, since knowing the language is obviously the first requirement to teach it.
- ❖ The competent authorities should take the corresponding actions to progressively diminish the number of students per classroom, so that the size of the classes allows the teachers and students to work comfortably as well as making it possible for the educators to better address the particular learners' needs.
- ❖ There is an urgent need for more educational resources especially technological ones, thus the competent authorities should cater for this requirement as soon as possible in order to improve the conditions in which teachers and students work.

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ANNEXES



UNIVERSIDAD TÉCNICA PARTICULAR DE LOJA
La Universidad Católica de Loja
MODALIDA ABIERTA Y A DISTANCIA
CARRERA DE INGLES
TEACHER'S QUESTIONNAIRE

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION:	
DATE:	
YEAR:	

1. Which level of education do you have?

High school diploma ()	English Bachelor's Degree ()	English Master's degree ()
Others: _____		

2. Do you consider Students' needs to teach English successfully?

Students' Needs (<i>age, personality, attitude, aptitude, motivation, and learning styles</i>)	
YES ()	NO ()

3. Do you consider Students' level to teach English successfully?

Students' Level (<i>Basic, Intermediate, High Intermediate, and Advanced</i>)	
YES ()	NO ()

4. Which is the level of your students?

*Students' Level			
Basic ()	Intermediate ()	High Intermediate ()	Advanced ()

5. Which of the following methods was used in this class? (check only 1)

Communicative Language Teaching	()
The Natural Approach	()
Cooperative Language Learning	()
Content-Based Instruction	()
Task-Based Language Teaching	()
Cognitive Academic Language Learning	()
Total Physical Response	()
Whole Language Approach	()

Grammar Translation Method	()
Others _____	()

6. Do you use whole- group activities to teach your lessons?

YES ()	NO ()	
Why? _____		

7. Do you use individual activities to teach your lessons?

YES ()	NO ()	
Why? _____		

8. Do you use group work activities to teach your lessons?

YES ()	NO ()	
Why? _____		

9. Do you use English most of the time in your classes?

YES ()	NO ()
---------	--------

10. Do you plan your lessons?

YES ()	NO ()
---------	--------

11. Do you consider aspects such as discipline, timing, feedback, and instruction to teach your lessons?

YES ()	NO ()
---------	--------

12. How many students do you have in this class?

10 - 15 ()	16 - 25 ()	26 - 30 ()	31 - more ()
-------------	-------------	-------------	---------------

13. Do you feel comfortable working with this number of students?

YES ()	NO ()
---------	--------

14. Do you have enough space to work with this group of students?

YES ()	NO ()
---------	--------

15. Do you arrange students' seats in relation to the activities planned for your classes?

YES ()	NO ()
---------	--------

16. How many students do you think is the appropriate number to teach English?

(check only 1)

10 - 15 ()	16 - 25 ()	26 - 30 ()	31 - more ()
-------------	-------------	-------------	---------------

17. Do you use teaching resources (TV, Tape/Cd recorder, Computer(s), Projector(s), Smartboard, and supplementary materials)?

YES ()	NO ()
Which ones? _____	

18. Do you consider appropriate the resources you have in class?

YES ()	NO ()
Why? _____	

19. Does the institution review your lesson plans?

YES ()	NO ()	
If yes, how frequently?		
Once a week	Once a month	Other_____

20. Does the institution monitor your teaching?

YES ()	NO ()	
If yes, how frequently?		
Once a week	Once a month	Other_____

Thanks for your cooperation!!!!!!



UNIVERSIDAD TÉCNICA PARTICULAR DE LOJA
La Universidad Católica de Loja
MODALIDA ABIERTA Y A DISTANCIA
CARRERA DE INGLES
STUDENT'S QUESTIONNAIRE

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION:	
DATE:	
YEAR:	

1. ¿Te gusta aprender Inglés?

YES ()	NO ()
---------	--------

2. ¿Las actividades (juegos, trabajos en grupo y trabajos individuales) que se realizan en clase te motivan a aprender Inglés?

YES ()	NO ()
---------	--------

3. Consideras que las actividades realizadas en clase son:

Muy fáciles ()	Fáciles ()	Difíciles ()	Muy difíciles ()
-----------------	-------------	---------------	-------------------

4. ¿Te gusta la forma de enseñanza del idioma Inglés que usa tu profesor?

YES ()	NO ()
---------	--------

¿Por qué?

5. ¿Tu profesor realiza actividades variadas que te permiten interactuar con tus compañeros de clase?

YES ()	NO ()
---------	--------

6. ¿Tu profesor utiliza Inglés la mayor parte del tiempo en la clase?

YES ()	NO ()
---------	--------

7. ¿Tu profesor controla la disciplina en la clase?

YES ()	NO ()
---------	--------

8. ¿Tu profesor les asigna un tiempo determinado para el desarrollo de cada actividad?

YES ()	NO ()
---------	--------

9. ¿Luego de cada actividad realizada, tu profesor te explica en qué fallaste y en qué debes mejorar?

YES ()	NO ()
---------	--------

10. ¿Las instrucciones que da el profesor para realizar las actividades en clase y extra clase son claras?

YES ()	NO ()
---------	--------

11. ¿Consideras que el tamaño del salón de clase te permite trabajar de una manera cómoda?

YES ()	NO ()
---------	--------

12. ¿Consideras que el número de estudiantes te favorece para aprender de mejor manera el Inglés?

YES ()	NO ()
---------	--------

13. ¿Te gusta la forma en la que el profesor adecúa los pupitres para trabajar en los diferentes tipos de actividades?

YES ()	NO ()
---------	--------

14. ¿Se utilizan en clase recursos tales como televisión, grabadora, computadora, pizarras inteligentes, etc.?

YES ()	NO ()
---------	--------

GRACIAS!!!!!!



UNIVERSIDAD TÉCNICA PARTICULAR DE LOJA

La Universidad Católica de Loja

MODALIDA ABIERTA Y A DISTANCIA

CARRERA DE INGLES

OBSERVATION SHEET

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION:	
DATE:	
YEAR (desde 8vo básica a 3ro bachillerato):	

1. Does the teacher consider Students' needs to teach English?

***Students' Needs** (*age, personality, attitude, aptitude, motivation, and learning styles*)

YES () NO ()

* It can be recognized based on the variety of activities (visual, audio, audiovisual, realia, and on-line) applied, and students' reaction to them.

2. Which is the level of the students? (Check 1)

***Students' Level**

Basic ()	Intermediate ()	High Intermediate ()	Advanced ()
-----------	------------------	-----------------------	--------------

* It can be recognized based on the material they are using or placement done by the institution.

3. Which of the following methods are used?

Communicative Language Teaching	()
The Natural Approach	()
Cooperative Language Learning	()
Content-Based Instruction	()
Task-Based Language Teaching	()
Cognitive Academic Language Learning	()
Total Physical Response	()
Whole Language Approach	()
Grammar Translation Method	()
Others _____	()

4. Which of the following activities are used?

Whole-group activities	()
Individual activities	()
Group work activities	()

5. Which of the following aspects of the lesson plan were applied in the class?

Time	()
Lesson topic	()
Objectives	()
Warm-up activities	()
Introduction of the new topic	()
Guided or individual practice	()
Review/Assessment/Feedback	()
Materials and resources	()

6. Which of the following aspects have been considered by the teacher?

Discipline	()
Feedback	()
Activities management	()
Time management	()

7. How many students are there in the classroom?

10 - 15	()	16 - 25	()	26 - 30	()	31 - more	()
---------	-----	---------	-----	---------	-----	-----------	-----

8. Do students have enough space to move and participate in dynamic activities?

YES	()	NO	()
-----	-----	----	-----

9. Is the seating arrangement appropriate for the teaching-learning process?

YES	()	NO	()
-----	-----	----	-----

NOTES:

10. Which of the following resources are there in the classroom to facilitate teaching?

TV	()
Tape/Cd recorder	()
Computer(s)	()
Projector(s)	()
Smartboard	()
Supplementary materials	()
Others	()

11. In which percentage does the teacher use English in class?

25 %	()	50 %	()	75 %	()	100 %	()
------	-----	------	-----	------	-----	-------	-----

TEACHER'S INTERVIEW

A1	Where are you from? Where do you live?
A2	Where did you learn English? How long have you studied English? Which subject was the most difficult during your major?
B1	How long have you been teaching English? Which skill is easier for you to teach? Would you like to continue studying? Why?
B2	What are the advantages or disadvantages of teaching English in a "non-English speaking country"? What are the main problems a teacher faces when teaching English in Ecuador?
C1	What social benefits are derived from learning English? What is the most important reward of teaching English as a profession?
C2	What are the benefits that come from teachers staying more time in the educational institutions? What is the difference between teaching English as foreign language (EFL) and teaching English as a second language (ESL)?

TEACHER'S LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY:

C2	()	C1	()	B2	()	B1	()	A2	()	A1	()
----	-----	----	-----	----	-----	----	-----	----	-----	----	-----



Pictures taken during the class observations