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How the amount of students in class may affect English language learning

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1. Abstract

The study carried out deals with the importance of classroom management in English learning. Indeed, English teachers can actually notice the difference when giving classes to a big or small number of students so that means language learning may be affected in a positive or negative way. Experts (Bahanshal, 2013; Koenig, Gray, Lewis & Martin, 2015) state that there is still no absolute certainty whether small classes are better than large when learning English, being this the research gap of the study. The main goal of this research is to notice the advantages and disadvantages of giving or attending English classes depending on the number of students in class from students' and teachers' point of view. In order to achieve the goal, four different instruments would be administered to students and teachers, considered the main target of data collection, in order to collect opinions and experiences from teachers' and students' point of view. Due to Coronavirus lockdown, the recollection of data has not been fulfilled but important conclusions can be drawn from the literature review. In conclusion, the students' number in class may influence classroom feedback, oral production fluency and accuracy, individual learning and English teaching approaches.

1. Resumen

El estudio llevado a cabo plantea la importancia del manejo del aula en el aprendizaje del inglés. De hecho, los profesores de inglés pueden darse cuenta que la diferencia al dar clases en gran grupo o reducido implica que el aprendizaje del idioma pueda verse afectado de manera positiva o negativa. Los expertos (Bahanshal, 2013; Koenig, Gray, Lewis & Martin, 2015) afirman que todavía no hay certeza absoluta de que los pequeños grupos sean mejores que los grandes grupos a la hora de aprender inglés, siendo esta la brecha de investigación del estudio. El objetivo principal de esta investigación es observar las ventajas y desventajas de dar o asistir a clases de inglés dependiendo del número de estudiantes en clase desde el punto de vista de los estudiantes y los maestros. Para lograr el objetivo, se repartirían cuatro instrumentos diferentes a estudiantes y profesores, considerados el objetivo principal de la recopilación de datos, con el fin de obtener opiniones y experiencias desde la perspectiva de los profesores y los estudiantes. Debido a la situación excepcional del coronavirus, no se ha podido realizar la recolección de datos, pero se pueden sacar conclusiones importantes a partir de la revisión bibliográfica. En conclusión, el número

de estudiantes puede influir en la retroalimentación de los alumnos, la fluidez y precisión de la producción oral, el aprendizaje individual y los enfoques de enseñanza de inglés.

1. **Resum**

L'estudi dut a terme planteja la importància de la gestió de l'aula en l'aprenentatge de l'anglès. De fet, els professors d'anglès poden adonar-se de la diferència que implica donar classe a un gran o reduït nombre d'estudiants, el que significa que l'aprenentatge de l'idioma es pot veure afectat de manera positiva o negativa. Els experts (Bahanshal, 2013; Koenig, Gray, Lewis & Martin, 2015) afirmen que encara no hi ha certesa absoluta que els grans grups siguin millors que els petits a l'hora d'aprendre anglès, essent aquesta escletxa objecte d'investigació de l'estudi. L'objectiu principal d'aquesta investigació és observar els avantatges i desavantatges de donar o assistir a classes d'anglès depenent del nombre d'estudiants a classe des del punt de vista dels estudiants i els mestres. Per aconseguir l'objectiu, es repartirien quatre instruments diferents a estudiants i professors, considerats l'objectiu principal de la recopilació de dades, per tal d'obtenir opinions i experiències des de la perspectiva dels professors i els estudiants. A causa de la situació excepcional del coronavirus, no s'ha pogut realitzar la recollida de dades però es poden treure conclusions importants a partir de la revisió bibliogràfica. En conclusió, el nombre d'estudiants pot influir en la retroalimentació dels alumnes, la fluïdesa i precisió de la producció oral, l'aprenentatge individual i les metodologies d'ensenyament d'anglès.

2. Introduction

Throughout the course of the time, English teaching as a second language has been an imperative matter of development, research and study. When I started to study this master I realized about how big the change had been in teaching methodologies since I finished baccalaureate. During my personal experience giving classes of English as a second language teacher assistant to teenagers, I realized not only about the importance of teaching methodologies but also about the big change they had suffered since I attended secondary school classes. Indeed, when I began my internship in *Jesuites El Clot* school, I noticed that depending on the number of students teachers had in class and how the teacher managed the classroom, this could actually affect language learning in a positive or negative manner. Regarding the classroom management and the number of students, teachers may potentially perceive the advantages and disadvantages of teaching a language. In this case, English as the target language. Distractions that students can have as regards the number of students is an example which may lead to have a better or worst learning environment. The literature review done in this dissertation shows that there is not an agreement with the number of students preferred and to be successful in language teaching. Therefore, the more experiences and opinions we collect, the more we can improve when teaching a language.

After collecting data from many articles finding relevant researches from many experts (Hayes, 1997; Baciú, 2014, Pungi and Suwartono, 2019; Hasan, 2012 and Bahanshal, 2013) related to advantages and disadvantages of big and small classes management, it can be concluded that, there may not appear a final conclusion indicating that it is better one or the other. The intention of the project is not to be based on the methodology but focused on what does imply teaching English in a small or big class. The results obtained from this project can be useful for language teaching and how this may affect to classroom management. The aim of this case-study is to let students and teachers express themselves so that experts may realize how could the number of students in class affect language learning.

3. Objectives and questions

This study seeks to understand that the language learning may be affected by the number of students gathered in class. This qualitative research study research “usually start with the words, such as WHAT, or HOW” (Elkatawneh, 2016, p. 2). The main goal of this research is to notice the advantages and disadvantages of giving or attending English classes depending on the number of students in class from students’ and teachers’ point of view. The present study aims at exploring 4 research questions:

1. What are the main advantages and disadvantages from English teachers’ point of view when giving classes to a big number of students in class?
2. How classroom management may affect English language learning concerning students?
3. What are the main advantages and disadvantages that students may find in English learning in big or small classes?
4. How does affect providing feedback to students in small or big classes?

The presented research questions lead us to the 6 objectives of this dissertation:

1. To realize about how the number of students in class may affect English language learning
2. To inquire into students’ opinions of the lessons received in order to notice how this may affect English learning.
3. To explore into teachers’ perceptions of English teaching concerning big or small classes.
4. To distinguish main differences of English learning regarding the number of students in class from students’ points of view.
5. To notice about the importance of teachers’ and students’ point of view when exploring English learning.
6. To perceive the relevance of classroom management concerning a big or a small number of students in class.

4. Theoretical framework

When the word “education” comes to people’s minds, they should always relate it to society. This could mean that if the society is in current transformation and evolving, the educational system and all different subsystems that are connected are constantly progressing too. Clearly, experts (Hayes, 1997) who have been investigating about the evolution of the system have realized that the educational system has suffered important and interesting improvements throughout last decade. Indeed, “our common educational experience demonstrates that education is building and rebuilding itself through a permanent adaptation to the societal changes, to the progress in various fields and to the educational needs and expectations of the educated” (Baciu, 2014, p. 280). Students are targeted as the subject of study for the enhancement of the educational system so that many aspects have to be taken into consideration for the evolution of the educational system.

4.1 Classroom management in language learning

Large and small classes can have a positive or negative impact when teaching English as a second language. The interest on this topic is due to the experience in teaching in large and small groups. However, throughout the literature review I have realized that depending on the country, the concept of large and small can differ. As regards Bahanshal’s (2013) opinion about class size:

there is no consensus definition in literature to what constitutes a large class as material developers, teachers and students in different parts of world have various perceptions of what frames large, small or ideal classes. [...] According to Hayes (1997) there is no numerical determination of what shape a large class as teachers’ perceptions of large classes differs from one context to another. Hess (2001) assumed that a class is considered large if it has 30 students or more. As regard to the Saudi context, a class of 45 students is considered to be large while in some Far East countries such as Japan, China, Pakistan and India a class of 80 students and more is deemed to be large (p. 51).

For this reason, we have to keep in mind that the concept of the educational system and all its subsystems included are connected to the society. However, in Spain, the average of total number of students per class is around 30 in high school. Bearing this number of students in class in mind, the process of learning English as a subject matter can be

affected in a positive or negative way. Bahanshal (2013) argues that “for effective teaching and learning in large classes, teachers have to consider the followings: the course objectives; the characteristics of their students; and their teaching styles” (p. 52). Some studies (Maged, 1997; Nakabugo, 2003 and O'Sullivan, 2006) argue that “it is not the class size that affects the learning process yet it is the teacher's quality and methodology that greatly counts” (Quoted by Bahanshal, 2013, p. 52). Actually, in order to be successful in English teaching as a foreign language, teachers have to take into account not only different points such as the motivation of the students, the level of students' learners or the methodology of teaching but also the management of the class. Taking the concept of managing a big or small class can influence the learning of English.

Teachers have a crucial role in classrooms as a leader of instruction. To fulfill that role, teachers should pay attention to students' social background, students' intellectual and classroom facilities, so their teachers can carry out their role appropriately. Besides that, teachers must be able to control and overcome if there are disruptions in the classroom” (Pungi and Suwartono. 2019, p. 3).

Consequently, some studies (Pungi and Suwartono, 2019) discuss about the importance of how teachers manage their own classes and “why the effectiveness of classroom management is required in teaching and learning process” (p. 3). As regards those previous evidences, experts believe that it is imperative for teachers to manage the class in order to be successful at teaching. Apart from the size of the class, the way the teacher interacts with students, how grammar, vocabulary and activities are explained or developed, the enthusiasm that teacher shows when teaching English and teachers' English proficiency are essential points to take into account (Cahyati & Madya, 2019, p. 398).

Djamarah and Zain (in Pungki and Suwartono, 2019) stated that “the most important role of teachers among the other roles is as a manager” (p. 3). Having the control of managing the class properly may potentially increase the results in classroom learning. It is important to notice that teachers must be aware of the fact that managing classes “well and provide conditions that enable students to learn” (p. 3) are imperative points to take into account when giving classes “in order to obtain the expected results” (p. 3).

Based on Pungki and Suwartono (2019), if teachers are not able to manage classrooms properly, teaching and learning process is not going to run effectively.

Teachers have a crucial role in classrooms as a leader of instruction. To fulfill that role, teachers should pay attention to the students' social background, students' intellectual and classroom facilities, so the teachers can carry out their role appropriately. Besides that, teachers must be able to control and overcome if there are disruptions in the classroom (p. 3).

4.2. The amount of students and its impact on the learning process

Having the control in class is related to classroom management and it can also affect the students' learning process and progression so that it can be concluded that "the most important thing in teaching and learning process is classroom management" (Pungki and Suwartono, 2019, p. 3).

Classroom management is one factor that contributes and determines students' learning outcomes. Students should feel comfortable with the situation of the class. Convenient classes are not only determined by how nice and neat the classroom is, but also about how teachers perform in the class. Mastering the classroom when teaching is necessary, because teachers who master classes well could make learners easily captured the material. It is the reason why the effectiveness of classroom management is required in teaching and learning process (Pungki. O et Suwartono, 2019, p. 3).

Within the Educational world, experts (Hayes 1997; Harmer 2000) have realized about the importance of the teacher as the main facilitator and knowledge provider but, other aspects that are related to their learning can have an impact on students' learning. As regards to the context and also including the complexity of learning a language, plenty of indicators may appear in order to make the learning better or worse. However, the present dissertation is going to deal with how the number of students in class can affect the learning of English. Therefore, "the size of the class is believed as a common challenge. The larger the class, the more difficulties the teachers find and it is hard to create learner-centered learning" (Cahyati & Madya, 2019, p. 398). Therefore, research suggests that the more students you have in class, the more difficult it gets to have the control of students and to pay attention to the individual needs.

However, even though we find clear evidences that teaching English in big classes jeopardizes students' English learning, some contrasts are also founded with evidences dealing with positive points of teaching in big classes. A study lead by Hasan (2012, p.3) indicates that “the teaching practice and experience of many who have ever been teaching in large classes show that it is not only possible to build up a good learning atmosphere in large classes, but also feasible to take advantage of the large class size” and summarizes some basic points to take profit of when teaching in big classes such as:

- a. The more students, the more ideas, and the more lively a class can be.
- b. The more students, the more interrelated and the more unified the class can be.
- c. The more students, the more competitive, and the more positively motivated the class can be. In the limited times of the students' being asked questions, only those few excellent students may always volunteer to answer them. However, these students set good examples to the other students.

Gathering all these ideas, it can be summarized that the more students, the more interaction and participation amongst themselves, it increases the opportunities of learning. However, as it is being uttered and explained throughout the theoretical framework, experts have found positive or negative evidences about teaching English in small or big classes. Nevertheless, it is founded that in order to practice oral skills in big classes is more difficult than in small ones. It is argued that “limited practice for the target language due to the large number of students hindered students from improving their level of oral English” (Bahanshal, 2013; p. 51). This quote can be related to the different evidences stated by Bahanshal (2013) which shows negative evidences of big classes when teaching English. “Classes with big number of students don't provide teachers with neither ample chances nor time to correct students either in their oral production or the written form” (p. 54). When teachers focus on speaking skills, they must be aware of assessing and giving proper feedback to students. In this case, it is concerned the fact that students should be provided necessary feedback to get improved in oral and written English. Apart from this, the author also bases his disagreements of teaching in big classes concerning that students “receive less individual attention than their peers in small classes and that leads to dissatisfaction among students especially weak ones who will feel marginalized” (Bahanshal, 2013; p. 55). The author states that, indeed, it is decreased the number of opportunities of individual attention when giving classes to a large number of students. It is been advised to teachers that, in order to be successful at teaching, teacher should pay more attention to the individual needs.

Moreover, related to the attention the students pay in class, the more students in class, the more distractions students can have. “Students in large classes seem to be demotivated as they show no interest in either the lesson explained or activities presented by the teacher and that is due to the limited or lack of teachers' support” (Bahanshal, 2013; p. 55). Having a large number of students in class, can affect to the individuals needs or questions that students may have. This impact can alter the number of replies to be answered in class by the teacher.

Such a conclusion also appeared in a study conducted by Harmer (2000) confirming that large classes bring difficulties to the teaching and learning process in general and to teachers and students in particular as with the big number, teachers find it difficult to organize effective and creative activities, pay attention or contact with all individuals especially those who tend to hide by sitting at the back. Another interesting conclusion found in Harmer's study is that large classes are troubling for experienced teachers but extremely daunting for the new teachers and that emphasize the need of good training and sufficient technical strategies to be employed in large English classes (Bahanshal, 2013; p.51)

The organization and management of class is one of the key points in classroom management. The class size is going to affect the organization and distribution of the class so that, when teaching to a big number of students, teachers should bear in mind that this can potentially alter the course of the class. The bigger the classes, the more distractions students can have because of the number of students so that teachers have to make sure that the distribution and the management of the class must be imperative to be successful. However, the students' opinion about preferring big or small classes must be taken into consideration because, at the end, they are considered the learning targets. Wulff et al. (1987 in Koenig *et al*, 2015; p.21), when asking students what they liked about large classes found that “participants appreciated the lack of pressure found in large classes, as well as the opportunity to encounter more students, to be more independent, and to skip classes more often”.

Concerning Hasan (2012), “teaching English in large classes is presently still not being preferred by most teachers. In other words, many teachers choose not to, but have to teach in large classes, because they take it for granted that many problems arise along with the increase in class size” (p. 9). It is important to notice that it is not been determined whether giving classes to a bigger number of students is more successful than a lesser.

A report published by British Council (2015) shows a number of challenges in teaching English in large classes. These are: a) It's difficult to keep good discipline going in a large class; b) You have to provide for more children of different ages and different abilities, wanting to learn different things at different speeds and in different ways; c) You can't easily give each child the individual attention they need; and d) You may not have enough books or teaching and learning aids. (Hadi & Arante, 2015; p. 2)

What is interesting from their point of view is the attention students can have from the teacher point of view. We understand that, in order to be successful in language teaching, students must be provided with individual attention so that they will be aware of their personal needs.

Other study conducted by Wang and Zang (2011) in China also investigated what Chinese English teachers experienced in large classes. Their study reveals a number of challenges that teachers faced when teaching in large classes. The Chinese teachers in their study found it difficult to: 1) discipline the class, especially for primary and middle school students who lack self-control; 2) to satisfy all the needs of students who have different interests, personalities and capabilities; 3) to organize efficient class activities due to the constraints of time and space; 4) to provide equal chances for the students to participate and practice; 5) to give timely and effective feedback and evaluation (Hadi & Arante, 2015; p. 2)

Major issues such as participation in class and feedback are also interesting for students to succeed in English learning. It is important to notice that the amount of individual feedback that students must be provided is essential for language learning. The relevance of feedback provided takes for granted that students will get better in English. The less students in class, the more individual feedback teachers can provide to their students. Therefore, with all these points taken into account, the number of students in class can alter and affect language learning, not in terms of learning methodology but regarding the attention that students can obtain from teachers. It is actually essential to include the importance of the amount of feedback and attention that students can receive so that giving classes to a smaller class will imply that students can have more chances to draw feedback in class. "Even though, teachers believe it is extremely important to decrease the number of students in classes, they confirm the significance of finding alternative teaching methodologies that are beneficial for elevating language learning in large classes" (Bahanshal, 2013; p. 52) However, noticing the different disadvantages that may come up when giving classes to a big number of students, therefore we may

also find advantages when giving classes to a smaller number of students. As regards Biddle & Berliner (2002), “research has consistently found that teachers do not significantly change their teaching practices when they move from larger to smaller classes” (p. 3). This may be in fact one of the major problems related to language teaching.

“Tennessee teachers reported that smaller classes increased their ability to monitor student behavior and learning, give more immediate and individualized re-teaching, offer more enrichment, achieve a better match between their instruction and each child’s ability, gain more detailed knowledge of each child’s needs as a learner, and use a variety of instructional approaches to meet learners’ needs. Professional development is essential for teachers if learning is to be maximized in smaller classes (Biddle & Berliner, 2002; p. 3)

4.3 Classroom size in English learning

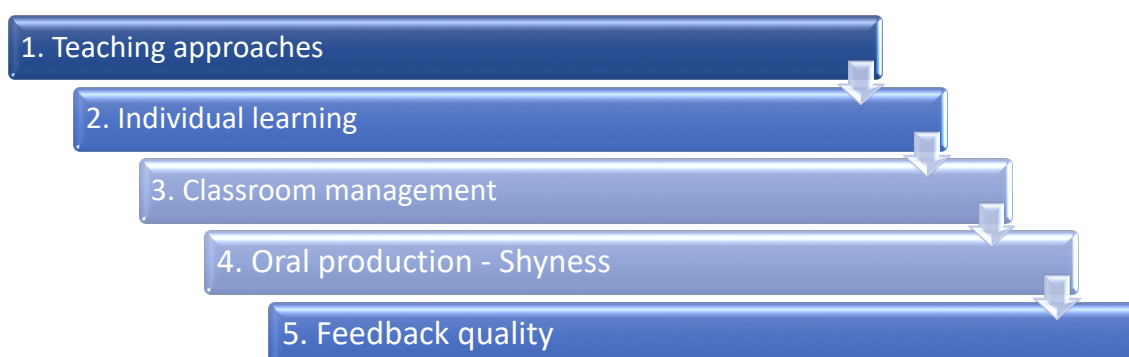
As it has been mentioned before, we can actually notice that the disadvantages founded when giving classes to a big class are therefore contrasted to the advantages detailed in small classes. The classroom management, discipline of students, the instruction the teacher can provide to students, the amount of feedback and attention that students can have are main key points that are contrasted between small and big classes.

“When students enter a classroom, they likely have a preconceived notion of how the size of the class will determine the learning environment” (Koenig, Gray, Lewis & Martin, 2015; p. 20). It is important for researchers to take into consideration students’ point of view and perspective when asked to attend big or small classes. Depending on the context, we find evidences in which students consider small classes more adequate for learners than big classes.

“Upper level students preferred large classes and lower level students preferred smaller classes. Another study suggested that students feel a sense of community in smaller classes and therefore feel more comfortable speaking out (Harfitt, 2012). Also, in one of the first studies conducted regarding class size, students most often mentioned having a personal relationship with the professor when asked why they would prefer a smaller class (Edmonson & Mulder, 1924). These studies suggested possible reasons that students may select smaller class sizes and the type of students that may have these particular preferences (Koenig et al, 2015; p. 21).

As regards this quote, the fact of speaking out is one of the skills to take into account when teaching English. Speaking has always been a trouble for teachers at school so that it is quite impossible to practice comfortably with no troubles. It is important to determine that, in order to practice a language, the language has to be spoken implying that the more students you have in class, the more difficult this can be in order to practice speaking skills. Indeed, students prefer to be gathered in smaller classes to improve in speaking so that the possibilities of speaking in English amongst their classmates are much higher than in a big class. However, the role of the teacher is actually imperative in order to manage the classroom and create a pleasant environment where students interact and speak with others. The speaking issue is also included in Koenig's article in which highlight the fact of attending classes "with lower student: teacher ratios, classroom discussions, and activities involving more students, compared to larger classes" (Koenig, 2015; p. 20). The discussions belong to the same context as the speaking part so that students not only feel more reliable and obtain more feedback from teacher's point of view but also are more engaged with speaking out loud.

Illustration 1



Note: Different lines to take into account when teaching English in big classes according to literature review.

After collecting data from many articles finding relevant researches from many experts dealing with the advantages and disadvantages of big and small classes management, it can be concluded that, there may not appear a final conclusion indicating that it is better one or the other.

“No one is absolutely certain whether small classes are inherently better than the large once in regard to the roles both classes play and their effectiveness on the process of English teaching and learning. Therefore, finding a definition to an idealistic class size which could be applicable in almost all teaching and learning

environment tends to be difficult. Interestingly enough, teachers in general and English teachers in particular always favor small classes and believe that students in small classes learn better than their counterparts in large classes as more practice and activities are employed” (Bahanshal, 2013; 49).

5. Method:

The method designed to carry out the present research is the Study-case method. Concerning the study-case, it can be determined that the investigation is qualitative. In this case the aim of this research “is to explore the meaning of the people’s experiences, the meaning of people’s culture, and how the people view a particular issue or case” (Elkatawneh, 2016; p. 2). Therefore, the main implication in this case-study is to figure out the experiences and the different views from teachers’ and students’ point of view concerning English language learning in big and small classes..

The different instruments that have been used in the Study-case are, firstly, the focus group technique which is going to involve small groups of 10 students. Secondly, teacher is going to hand in an open-ended survey questions and finally one-to-one interviews with the teacher. The researcher is going to make use of observation grids as well in order to notice the advantages and disadvantages in big or small group.

5.1 School contextualization

The present research was designed to be implemented in the school where I did my internship. The methodology of the studied school is innovating and new. They include cooperative work and students mostly work by means of projects cooperatively. It means that they are grouped in groups of 4 or 5 students all together in a class of 60 students. At the beginning of my attendance to classes, I realized that the fact of gathering that amount of students in class would be a bit messy for teachers as it was the first contact I had with working in projects with groups cooperatively. However, it makes lot of sense to work with this methodology because students feel more integrated in the learning process.

The students timetable was mainly started with 3 hours working on projects cooperatively in a row, followed by 30 minutes break and consequently split into three different groups of 20 students to deal with English, mathematics, Catalan and Spanish. The number of students was reduced in order to be more focused on the subject and provide another methodology of learning, indeed, to languages. Just the fact of decreasing the number of students when teaching languages made me think that the classroom size and management when teaching languages may be applied in a different

way. The process of learning a language may be alternative to other subject learnings. As students work with projects cooperatively, the decision of doing the research about classroom management is intended to look for how successful is to provide English lessons in big or small classes. In order to get the conclusions of the case-study, students and teachers were going to be tested in a qualitative manner by means of surveys which included questions asking about their experiences and preferences when learning English.

5.2 Description of the participants

The study was designed to be carried out with 60 students from 1st of ESO . In this case, they are studying at the same class. It means that they always work together and are contextualized within the same space under the same circumstances. These 60 students are going to be analyzed with a qualitative study including critical thinking and arguing amongst them. The students' age is comprehended between 12 and 13 years old. It can be considered a multilingual class; they can speak Spanish, Catalan, English, Chinese and Arabic. All of the participants are coursing 1st of ESO. A very few of them are repeating for a second time consecutively the first course of the secondary education. They are used to work cooperatively by means of projects because it is the school methodology that it has been applied since they started primary school. Most of them have always studied in *Jesuites El Clot* since they began elementary school. Just a few have joined the secondary school this year and were not used to this methodology. Their level of English is approximately an A2 but is widely varying between students. Some of them are rated a bit higher than the norm with a B1 in terms of grammar, vocabulary and writing but most of them show weaknesses as regards speaking skills.

Apart from students, a total number of 7 teachers are going to be participants of the research. Teachers' opinion are also important to be considered when analyzing qualitative data about classroom management. They are determined as the source of knowledge and also the leaders of running the class. Depending on how they manage the class, in terms of methodology, students' learning may be affected in a positive or negative way. The role of the teacher can be potentially influence students' learning. Bearing in mind that teachers are highly influential in the process of learning, they are going to join the investigation. Firstly, as the investigation is collecting just students of first of ESO, is important to notice that the more teachers are interviewed, the more

results are going to be provided with evidences. For this, as the whole school is taking the same methodology in secondary education, English teachers from different courses are going to be also interviewed as the same methods in language learning are settled in their classes. Throughout the different courses, students get to work with their classmates in project in a cooperative way. As far as I am concerned, teachers who will participate have several years of experience giving classes to their students. Regarding the situation of Covid-19 lockdown, the amount of teachers interviewed is not going to be displayed nor the age. However, it is important to state that, as commented before, the more teachers interviewed, the more data and conclusions it is possible to collect.

5.3 Instruments

In order to get better results, three different instruments are going to be implemented and delivered to students and teachers in order to recollect data. As the research is potentially qualitative, students and teachers will provide their answers to questions started mainly by questions started by ‘what’ or ‘how’. The main aim of the instruments delivered to participants is intended to collect different experiences they had during learning or teaching English in big or small classes and also their own views about attending and giving classes in English to big or small classes.

Notice that due to the Coronavirus outbreak, the instruments that are going to be presented were just designed and could not been tested because of the lockdown.

5.3.1 Focus group

To begin with, the first instrument that was going to be used for the investigation is called “Focus group”. “The focus group research method is a valuable way to increase knowledge and in-depth understanding of the topic being investigated” (Then, Rankin & Ali, 2014; p. 21). The role of the investigator, in this case, is barely observing “and not be a participating member of the group. The observer monitors the discussion to identify verbal and nonverbal cues, behavior, voice tone, eye contact, how individuals participate, and with whom they participate (Then et al, 2014; p. 20). The investigator is also going to take the role of moderator in order to ‘maintain clear direction” (Then et al, 2014; p. 21). The researcher was going to throw some questions opened to debate and students would be responding, debating, discussing and providing experiences

about the question suggested. The questions were designed to improve critical thinking so that students could take some time to discuss amongst themselves about the topic. The different questions that the researcher was going to provide to the participants would make them ponder and reflect about English learning. The type of questions are related to English classes experiences, the preference of working individually or in big groups, speaking out loud or in small groups and commenting and providing recommendations to teachers when giving classes. The template was going to be divided in different parts such as transition questions, designed to break the ice with students as introductory questions. They were going to be moved to the following questions related to key issues with the intention of collecting the key information of the study. Finally, the teacher would end the meeting with ending questions. It means that questions were not going to be directed to displayed answers such as ‘yes’ or ‘not’. Even if it was a simple question, the investigator had to make sure that simple questions must be widely explained and also fostering discussion. The data gathering was going to be produced within the class. In order to be productive collecting data, participants were going to be split in groups of 10. It means that they are going to be assembled within the classroom. They are going to be placed circularly so that everyone is looking to any of the participants and may direct the speech to their partners (see appendix 1 the focus group template that was designed). Note that the focus group template has been taken from a *focus group template* (American Indian studies, n.d.)

5.3.2 Open-ended survey questions

The second instrument that was going to be provided to the participants, it would involve every single student from the class. The instrument referred was the open-ended survey questions. By means of this survey, critical thinking was going to be fostered by students to make them determine their preferences when attending classes in small or big classes. An open-ended survey is understood as “an opportunity to provide a wide range of answers. Because some of these answers will be unexpected” (Hyman & Sierra, 2016; p. 3). The investigator was going to provide different questions in which participants would have to reflect on the class management. Questions were going to be totally opened and determine whether the participants prefer one way or the other. However, as questions were meant to be opened, they were not going to be interpreted such as displayed questions with “yes” or “no” answers. Questions would invite students to argue about the main topic. The extension of the answers could differ

meaning that some answers might be shorter or longer depending on the question provided. Note that using this open-ended survey questions may suggest “follow-up questions in person-to-person interviews” (Hyman & Sierra, 2016; p. 3) in order to clarify and verify some answers provided by students which could lead to confirmation. The kind of questions that were included within the survey were about collecting classroom experiences when working in small classes. The investigator would ask students whether shyness could affect English learning and oral fluency production and included some questions about advantages and disadvantages of attending classes in big or small classes. Questions were prepared to collect the opinions and experiences from students’ point of view. Surveys were going to be handled individually. The investigator would suggest participants not to share opinions and respond it in an individual way. Participants would try to make questions to the investigators if doubts might arise. As regards the survey, it was not going to be very costly, time consuming (see appendix 2 open-ended survey questions)

5.3.3 One-to-one interviews

Lastly, but not least, interviews to teachers were conducted to 7 different teachers from English department. Indeed, in qualitative research, these are considered as “flexible and useful methods of data collection and are especially appropriate for collecting information on participants’ experiences, beliefs and behaviors” (Frances, Coughlan and Cronin, 2009; p. 313). Teachers were going to be considered participants in this research so that they are considered to take an imperative role in classroom management. At the end, they are the ones who mainly lead classes, providing guidelines and monitoring and managing students within the classroom. The interviews were determined as “one-to-one”. This tool was going to be used individually. It means that the investigator was going to take every single teacher individually. This way of gathering data is actually time consuming. The teacher was going to provide a number of questions aiming for critical thinking. As mentioned before, this is a tool determined to collect experiences and beliefs about classroom management. Preferences in giving classes to small or big classes was the big issue to take into consideration and also to investigate. The type of questions that were going to be asked were related to experiences and background when giving class in big or small classes, providing positive and negative aspects depending on the number of students in class. The interviewer would also be focused in gathering opinions related to provide feedback to

students in big or small classes. This kind of data gathering was expected to be useful and effective because “one-to-one interviewing is more than a social interaction -it is a process that has a distinct purpose that is constructed to derive meaning from a particular situation” (Frances, Coughlan and Cronin, 2009; p. 313). In order to be successful with this data gathering tool, the researcher would record the different interviews and would try to get the different experiences they had managing the class in big or small classes. In fact, teachers who were giving classes *in the school* would be the desired participants for data gathering so that they would be used to teach in big and small classes. They are used to manage the class in so many different ways as they have to adapt their classes to the number of students in class (see appendix 3 one-to-one interviews questions).

5.3.4 Classroom observations

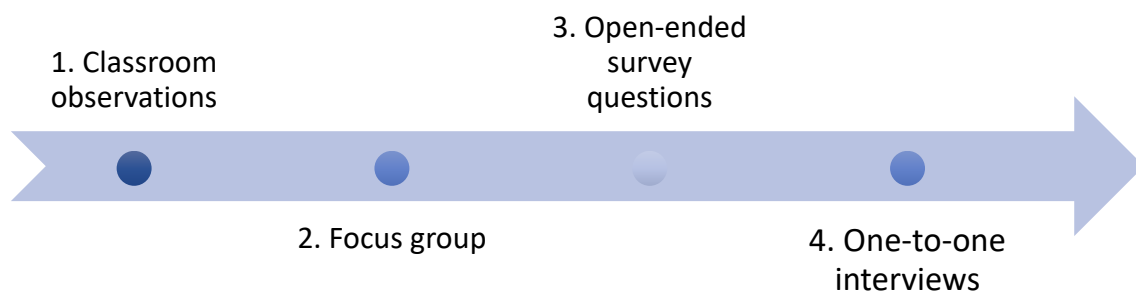
Apart from using focus group, surveys and interviews, the researcher would also make use of the observations in class. The investigator was going to contrast how the classroom was managed in big and small classrooms. In fact, the comparison and observation of management principles within the classroom context in big and small classes would lead and provide conclusions that the investigator might take into consideration when analyzing the results. Note then that, classroom observations could also be taken into account when exposing the different instruments that were going to be used within the investigation. These observations were going to be considered as general comments which were not going to be perceived as imperative for the investigation. Notice that other instruments implemented were meant to be more reliable and relevant with data collection rather than classroom observations. Most of the specific comments the investigator could get from participants were going to be taken from one-to-one interviews and open-ended survey questions. As mentioned before, it could be very useful from the investigator point of view to realize about the differences in classroom management when observing (see appendix 4 observation grid)

5.4 Procedure, data coding and instrument administration:

The process of gathering and collecting data is supposed to be very time consuming. Bearing in mind the 4 different instruments that were going to be administered, firstly, the researcher was going to fill his own observation chart. As this is a case-study

research, the researcher was going to take the role of the observer when teachers were managing the classroom in big or small classes. This is when the researcher would take advantage of it and would try to collect as many impressions as possible. After the classroom observation, the investigator would move on to the focus group testing. The researcher would round participants up in groups of 10 in order to collect data by means of the “focus groups” instrument. The process of collecting data was pretended to be long because of the duration of every single testing. It would take approximately 20’ to discuss every 10 students. Getting to the third recollection of data, the researcher would provide students an open-ended survey questions. By means of these questions, the researcher would try to get more information as the opinion of the students had to be taken into consideration. Finally, and getting to the last instrument provided to participants, the one-to-one interviews are going to be recorded in order to get teacher’s point of view.

Illustration 2



Note: Instruments for data collection

Due to Coronavirus lockdown, the different questionnaires were going to be administered at the end of the second term of the academic year 2019-2020. The reason why the researcher decided to choose the end of second term is because had already covered my didactic unit of my practicum and the researcher would have much more free time administering the questionnaires to the participants and also I would be more focused on data collection. Even though questionnaires are carefully created with the intention of not having misunderstood, the researcher would try to provide as much help as needed in case that some questions could arise from participants. The researcher is going to provide the guidelines and explanations orally apart from written in the different questionnaires delivered. All the questionnaires and instruments are going to be provided in class and responded during class-time. The questionnaires are preferred to be delivered during “tutoria” time. The researcher is going to be in class during questionnaire fulfillment to notice students’ reactions. The questionnaires were totally

anonymous and they would not affect their foreign language marks. The observation grid was filled when giving classes to big and small classroom.

6 Conclusions:

Due to Coronavirus lockdown, it was not possible to carry out data collection for the present research. Although it was not possible to collect data to analyze, the study has been designed in a way that it can be implemented in other years and schools. Moreover, the analysis done of the literature review can be used for other studies on similar topics. First of all, from investigator's point of view, it is important to bear in mind that the fact of doing the internship in the school was totally useful to realize about the importance of working in big classes with approximately 60 students each of the courses with potentially modern and innovative learning and teaching approaches. In fact, as regards the theory given throughout this master's degree, it was interesting to observe how this theory was applied to this school in particular.

Students were working cooperatively by means of different projects. Roles were divided and the teaching-method was learner centered and activity-based teaching. As regards the reason of researching on this topic, it was simply to get in depth with the research topic, it is basically that the researcher noticed main differences between giving English classes to a big number of students (more than 20) and giving classes to a small number of students (less than 20) such as some of them were shy to speak out loud in big group so that the speaking skill was not properly practiced or the feedback that was supposedly to be given was not provided because of the big number of students in class. When students were working by means of projects that were mostly in English, some disadvantages could come up when teaching English to a big number of students. In fact, teachers and students were facing important difficulties in big classes. Contrasted to the theory learnt during this master, the researcher could recognize those difficulties and tried to provide answers for this matter.

Concerning the theoretical framework, literature review indicates that this kind of research may lead to language teaching and learning improvement which involves students and teachers opinions and experience who are actually the main target for this research. Taking into account their beliefs and views from advantages and disadvantages for language learning in small and big classes, teacher researchers bear an important role for language so that they can potentially improve language learning.

Researchers should always take into consideration as far as possible students' and teachers' point of view.

In relation to the objectives and questions proposed, it will not be possible to compare them with the results that I should have taken from the different questionnaires provided to participants in order to get response to those questions. However, I am going to provide some considerations and future researches that emerge from the literature review.

First, teacher should pay close attention to the individual needs and unfortunately, the more students you have in a class, the less attendance you can provide to students. Second, the more students we have in class, the more difficult it gets to have the control of students. Third, as regards teaching methodologies, it has to be taken into account the fact that the way the teacher gets on in class may affect to language learning. And last but not least, the fluency and accuracy of speaking English in class. In relation to this, students should get better in speaking and maybe gathering a big amount of students in class is not much appropriate. Nevertheless, these conclusions should be tested with the instruments supposedly delivered to participants.

6.1 Limitations and lines for future research

Keeping in mind that due to Coronavirus Lockdown this research has not provided the expected results and conclusions, it would be highly recommended to first get the results by means of the instruments. Afterwards, with the conclusions already drawn, experts should advance with the improvements in language learning. It would be interesting to consider to keep working on future research that deal with the opinions and experiences of teachers and students and targeting these participants because at the end, they are actually the ones who will be affected by working in big or small classes. However, it should be taken into account that these approaches that have been taken from other countries (especially from northern Europe) are adapted to their social context. As our social context is totally different to them, experts could take those approaches but try to adapt them to our context, our behavior, our way of learning. We are not raised as in Sweden, Norway, Denmark or other European countries. We are always getting other methodologies and settling them down in our educational system. Perhaps what we should consider is to take principles and apply them in a correct way depending on the educational context of our country.

In order to be able to generalize the results, it would be positive to implement this study in different schools to compare results in different contexts. Depending on the context, the results could be different. It would be highly recommended to compare the results collected from northern countries and try to compare the different opinions. Another study that is connected to this one that could be relevant to explore is the the impact of classroom distribution to learning.

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8. Appendix

8.1 Appendix 1 (Retrieved from *American Indian Studies*)



Assessment: Focus group Template

Purpose

You are invited to participate. The purpose of the study is to examine how does the number of students' in class may affect English language learning. Specifically, we want to understand the advantages and disadvantages that students and teachers may find when giving/attending big or small classes. We will use this information to find reliable evidences to support the matter of study (Assessment Toolkit: Focus group template (n.d.))

Procedures

If you participate in this study, you will be in a group of approximately seven to ten students. There will be a facilitator who will take the role of asking questions and facilitating the discussion. The facilitator will also take the role of writing down the ideas expressed within the group. If you volunteer to participate in this focus group, you will be asked some questions relating to your experience with English learning. These questions will help to better understand how the number of students in class may affect language learning (Assessment Toolkit: Focus group template; n.d.)

Your participation is voluntary. You may withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.

Confidentiality

Anonymous data from this study will be analyzed and may be reported to Blanquerna's University. No individual participant will be identified or linked to the results. Study records, including this consent form signed by you, may be inspected by the administrators. Your identity will not be disclosed. All information obtained in this study will be kept strictly confidential. All materials will be stored in a secure location and access to files will be restricted to paid professional staff (Assessment Toolkit: Focus group template; n.d.)

Consent

By signing this consent form, you are indicating that you fully understand the above information and agree to participate in this focus group.

Participant's signature: _____

Printed name: _____

Date: _____

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact Pere Balle Llabrés.

Focus Group Example

Note when is referred to big class it means more than 20 students.

Note when is referred to small class it means less than 20 students.

Break the Ice (Opening Question):

Please share with us your names and tell us what do you like the most about speaking English.

Transition Question:

What is your experience in English classes? What do you like the most?

Did anyone have a different experience?

Transition Question:

Do you prefer working individually, small groups or big groups in English classes?

If you have to be working in a grammar or writing exercise, do you like to work individually, small or big groups (more than 4)?

Key Question:

When speaking in English, do you prefer being listened by many people or not? Give some reasons why you like it or not. Do you feel motivated to be speaking in front of many people or do you feel shy?

Key Question:

How do you think it may affect being more than 20 people in English classes?

What advantages do you think you can have being more than 20 students in class? And what disadvantages?

Can you tell me any experience, good or bad, when attending English classes in big or small groups?

Key question:

Do you think that the way teacher tries to manage the class regardless the number of students in class may affect language learning? How?

Key question:

If you have to present a topic or explaining an idea, do you feel better explaining in small groups or big groups? Provide reasons to your answers.

Ending question:

What advice would you give to teachers when giving classes to a big number of students?

What advice would you give to teachers when giving classes to a small number of students?

8.2 Appendix 2

Guidelines:

You are invited to participate. The purpose of the study is to examine how does the number of students' in class may affect English language learning. Specifically, we want to understand the advantages and disadvantages that students and teachers may find when giving/attending big or small classes. We will use this information to find reliable evidences to support the matter of study.

Open-ended questions. You are going to be asked about different questions related to learning English in Big or Small classes.

- How do I feel when working in small classes (no more than 20 students in class). Provide examples.
- How do you think it may affect shyness when speaking in front of big class in English.
- How do you think about classroom management of more than 20 students in class. Do you think it's easier than in big classes?
- What advantages it can bring giving classes to a big number of students in class (more than 20)?
- What disadvantages do teachers have when giving classes to a big number of students (more than 20)?
- From you point of view, how do you take advantage in language learning in small or big groups? In terms of speaking, it may be much more difficult to you to express themselves in big groups.
- What do you like the most about being less number of students in class?
- What kind of feedback do you normally receive in small or big classes? Long or short explanations?

8.3 Appendix 3

Guidelines:

You are invited to participate. The purpose of the study is to examine how does the number of students' in class may affect English language learning. Specifically, we want to understand the advantages and disadvantages that students and teachers may find when giving/attending big or small classes. We will use this information to find reliable evidences to support the matter of study.

Interview questions: You are going to be asked about different questions related to learning English in Big or Small classes.

- How do you normally feel when giving classes to a class with more than 20 students? Please mention positive and negative aspects.
- How are students behaving in classes of a maximum of 20 students or more than 20?
- How do you normally try to manage the class in groups with more than 20 students?
- What are the advantages of giving classes to a group with more than 20 students? And disadvantages?
- Can you provide any negative or positive experience that you realized when giving classes to more than 20 students? Any Misunderstood? Classroom management?
- In terms of speaking, what are your experiences when asking students to speak out loud in big groups or small groups (more/less than 20)?
- How do you normally manage the class in small groups? Are you focused on speaking activities that lead to interaction amongst themselves?
- Do you think students learn English better in big or small classes?
- Do you notice any difference between giving feedback to small or big classes?

8.4 Appendix 4

Classroom observation grid

Big Classes:

Questions:	Yes	No
Is often interrupted the teacher when speaks out loud?		
Observations:		
Is there so much noise when the teacher tries to explain something?		
Observations:		
Is the teacher providing enough feedback when needed?		
Observations:		
Are students asking questions in general?		
Observations:		
Do students ask questions in case of doubt?		
Observations:		
More observations:		

Small classes:

Questions:	Yes	No
Is often interrupted the teacher when speaks out loud?		
Observations:		
Is there so much noise when the teacher tries to explain something?		
Observations:		
Is the teacher providing enough feedback when needed?		
Observations:		
Are students asking questions in general? (Long silent pauses) Do students ask questions in case of doubt?		
Observations:		
Is the teacher feeling comfortable explaining himself/herself in front of 20 kids? Do children understand him/her?		
Observations:		
More observations:		