

CLAS SIZE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING  
PROCESS

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Submitted to the school of human sciences in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of B.A in

Linguistics and language department

English and French program

University of Nariño

August, 2010

## **NOTA DE RESPONSABILIDAD**

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**Nota de aceptación**

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**Firma del Jurado**

**San Juan de Pasto, Agosto de 2010**

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### **Resumen**

Este estudio comparativo intenta identificar cuales son las implicaciones de el tamaño de la clase en el proceso de enseñanza de las lenguas extranjeras por medio de observaciones de clase. Así, este estudio incluye la descripción de implicaciones positivas y negativas de clases numerosas y no numerosas, tomando en cuenta que este factor ha sido ignorado al desarrollar políticas educativas, a pesar de que esta claro que se ha vuelto uno de los principales obstáculos para desarrollar efectivamente el proceso de enseñanza. De esta manera, este trabajo se ha hecho describiendo el tema central, tamaño de la clase con sus características y aspectos positivos y negativos y otros temas relacionados con este, tales como el roles del profesor y manejo de la clase, con el propósito de dar algunas ideas acerca del tema, de modo que se pueda abordar este aspecto teniendo en cuenta la situación particular de enseñanza.

Palabras claves: Clases grandes, Clases pequeñas, Manejo de la clase y Roles del profesor.



**Abstract**

This comparative study tries to identify what the implications of class size in the foreign language teaching process are by means of classroom observation. Thus, this study involves the description of positive and negative implications of both small and large classes taking into consideration that the elements above mentioned had been taken for granted when developing educative policies. Although it seems clear that class size is one of the main obstacles to teach effectively. This study described the characteristics and positive and negative aspects of different class sizes and some other topics related to it such as teachers role and classroom management, with the aim of providing some insights that facilitate dealing with this issue according to particular teaching situations.

**Key words:** Large classes, Small classes, Classroom management and Teachers' roles.

### **Introduction**

For many years, class size has been an ongoing issue in education and a set of concerns related to class size has continually risen among the educative community in many countries all over the world. Thus, some specialists in foreign language education (Locastro, 2001; Renaud, Tannenbaun & Stantial, 2007; Xia, 2006; Li, 1993; Lewit & Schuurumann, 1997; Brown, 2001; Benwell, 2008) have focused their studies on class size to determine how it affects the process of teaching and learning and also to establish feasible solutions to deal with this situation.

In spite of the existence of those previous studies, they may not be fully applicable in our country because they come from different contexts. However, due to the fact that our country and also our department are closely related to the concerns of class size, it becomes imperative to carry out a research in our context. Therefore, our research will be carried out focusing on the exploration and observation in our classroom conditions in order to describe and analyze the implications of class size in the foreign language teaching process in our context. In addition, it will be taken into consideration the point of view of outstanding authors regarding some affective, managerial, and pedagogical factors which will be discussed throughout the project.

## CHAPTER I

### The Research Problem

This first chapter is presented in order to provide readers with all the relevant information about the problem description, the problem statement, the objectives, the research questions, the significance, and the situations that can limit this research.

### Problem Description

Nowadays, most language policies around the world point to students' development of Communicative Competence, so most language teachers are supposed to be familiarized with the outcomes of any methodology or approach that help accomplish that goal. However, in the English teaching process carried out in the institutions a set of concerns related to class size seem to rise among the educative community that are not strictly related to methodology, but to external aspects that can affect the outcomes of teaching. According to Lewit & Schuurman (1997), class size is an administrative measure usually defined as the number of students for whom a teacher is primarily responsible during a school year. That is why it can be said that this aspect has some implications in the process of teaching of English as a foreign language, since the classroom is the setting where this process takes place. Therefore, the importance of its management and the concern of some specialists in education are completely justified.

LoCastro (1989; cited in LoCastro, 2001) presents a set of problems related to class size and language learning. She states that teachers as much as learners have complained about and had to fight with class size troubles in many places all over the world, a situation that can also be found in Colombia. She organizes those problems into three categories. The first one is Pedagogical and it is related to difficulties to carry out speaking, reading and

writing tasks, to monitor work and give feedback, to do individual work, to set up communicative tasks and to develop demanding activities. The second one is Management –related, it is associated with difficulties to correct students work, to develop pair or group work, to control noise level, to attend all the students and to control discipline. The last one is Affective and it is related to difficulties to know students, to establish good rapport with them, to help weaker students, to avoid students get lost and to assess students' interest and moods. It can be said that those class size problems mentioned by LoCastro are also present in EFL settings like Pasto, and it can be suggested that in our setting the origins of these concerns mainly fall back to the Educative Policies, which do not consider the significance of factors such as class size to develop the processes of teaching properly. This paper aims at using these experiences found in current literature to analyze the reality of foreign language teaching in Pasto and provide some ideas that may help teachers face this issue.

### **Problem Statement**

What is the implication of class size in the foreign language teaching process?

### **Problem Delimitations**

#### **Conceptual Delimitations**

To facilitate readers the understanding of every aspect considered in this research, the following concepts have been defined:

**Communicative Competence** is a linguistic term which refers to a learner's ability to apply and use grammatical rules, and also to form correct utterances, and know how to use these utterances appropriately and effectively to communicate (Richards and Rodgers, 2001).

**Foreign Language** is a language not spoken in the native country of a person. A foreign language can be learned in classrooms and where the learner is exposed to it during controlled periods, since the daily social conditions does not require of its permanent use to communicate (Ministry of Education, 2006)

**Class Size** is an administrative measure typically defined as the number of students for whom a teacher is primarily responsible during a school year. (Lewit & Schuurmann, 1997).

*Large Class* is a class which has more than fifteen students per group and where it is difficult to give learners opportunities to practice the target language (LoCastro, 2001).

### **Objectives**

Through the development and posterior analysis of the outcomes of this research, it is expected to achieve the following objectives:

#### **General Objective**

To determine the implication of class size in the foreign language teaching process.

#### **Specific Objectives**

To describe the difference between a large class and a small class regarding the foreign language teaching process.

To provide alternatives to enhance class size management which may contribute to the foreign language teaching process.

To identify the potentialities and limitations of both large and small classes.

### **Research Questions**

What is the difference between large class size and small class size regarding the foreign language teaching process?

What alternatives can enhance class size management?

### **Justification**

As Richards (2008) states in his article “Growing Up with TESOL”, “nowadays English is not only seen as a second or foreign language, but English has become an International Language”. “English has turned in the language of globalization, international communication, commerce and trade, the media and pop culture” (p.3).

Learning English is a real necessity around the world. So, it is important to value and get acquainted with studies which can contribute to enhancing the teaching process by telling about successful and not so successful experiences in other contexts. This research is significant mainly because it provides an important review of literature on those experiences, a review that can inform teachers and student-teachers about the implications of class size and that may help them tackle some problems they may find when facing their learners. Also, this body of knowledge and the practical analysis of its results can contribute to identifying our own implications of class size in the teaching of English as a foreign language. Also since there are not studies focused on this topic at the University of Nariño, we consider this research is innovative and it will be significant for all kind of people involved in the teaching and learning process because the outcomes of this work can be a reference to future research, it can be replicated with different audiences or settings and it can be a tool to provide alternatives to solve possible problems. This study is also important because it addresses a topic that is commonly problematic for teachers, but that has not been extensively researched, and it might seem that novice and experienced teachers have to deal with it with the tools they have at hand. This study shows that

teachers do have some experiences to rely on and that the aspects of classroom management that are affected by class size are not impossible to handle.

### **Limitations**

It has been considered that in the development of this proposal, some problems might be found:

First, it may be difficult to collect information to support the literature review, considering that there is not a prior research about this topic we are aware of in the University of Nariño or in the Colombian context, as well as with the available time of the participants of this research.

It is considered that all the possible limitations mentioned above can be overcome, first of all, taking into account and respecting all the aspects related to ethical issues, with the careful organization of every process concerning the research and also taking as reference external researches about this topic.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

In this chapter readers are provided with the most relevant information related to the research topic such as: Teacher Roles, Classroom Management and Class size.

#### Teacher's Roles

Given that the immediate purpose of this research is to determine class size implications in the foreign language teaching process, it can be suggested the significance of describing the different roles teachers play in class, since they are one of the main participants in this process and their performance can be affected by the class size factor.

#### Teachers` Roles

As Harmer (2007) advocates, "Sometimes teachers are like actors because they feel as if they are always in the stage, orchestra conductors because they direct conversations and set the place and tone and gardeners because they plant the seeds and watch them grow" (p.107). As it is suggested, teachers inside the classroom, in contact with learners' needs and developing a variety of activities, not only take a one-dimensional role of input provider as people might erroneously think, but they play different ones.

Among the number of roles teachers have to play in the classroom, the role of the teacher as a *controller* in traditional teacher-fronted lessons and the teacher as a facilitator in new student-centered approaches can be mainly identified. The teacher as a *controller* acts as an authority, a person who is in charge of everything, someone who determines what students do, when they should speak and what language forms they should use. Controller teachers are addicted to being the center of attention and they tend to use most of the talking time while students are demanded to give predicted responses. And the teacher



as a *facilitator* is someone who makes learning easier for students helping them to overcome obstacles, giving them shortcuts and negotiating learning. A facilitator takes into account the principles of intrinsic motivation by allowing students to discover language pragmatically, rather than by telling them about language. Some other roles teachers have to play are: the teacher as an *assessor* has to assess students work and see how well they are performing or how well they perform any activity or task. The teacher as an *organizer* has to give students clear directions about tasks, has to get an activity going and also organize feedback. The teacher as a *prompter* is someone who stimulates and encourages students to take part in learning or gives suggestions to proceed in any activity. The teacher as a *participant* takes part in students' activities as an equal to improve the atmosphere in the class and to give students opportunities to speak the language with someone who at least knows a little bit of what they know. The teacher as a *resource* must be ready to offer students help whenever they need it and can act as a resource center to cope with students' doubts. The teacher as an *investigator* looks for what is going on in the classroom, observing what works and does not work in class, implementing new activities and techniques and evaluating their suitability, in order to enhance language learning (Harmer, 1991-2007).

Richards & Rogers (2001) suggest some other roles teachers also play in the classroom. Those roles are: the teacher as a *needs analyst* assumes the responsibility to determining and responding to learners' learning needs as well as learning styles, learning assets and learning goals. The teacher as a *counselor* is expected to exemplify an effective communicator seeking to maximize the meshing of speaker intention and hearer interpretation, through the use of paraphrasing, confirmation and feedback and the teacher

as a *group process manager* is someone who organizes the classroom as a setting for communication and communicative activities. The problem here is, that with large classes, teachers may not have the freedom or the conditions to try on different roles, and this lack of flexibility can ultimately affect the outcomes of the teaching and learning process. The time available for teaching might be spent controlling the class and trying to control discipline, affecting the amount and quality of learning. This will be discussed next.

### **Classroom Management**

Another important aspect related to class size and closely related with teaching is classroom management. As Brown (2001) states, “classroom management includes plenty of factors ranging from physical arrangement of the classroom, to teaching “styles” and classroom energy” (p. 192). These aspects are more clearly described here:

#### **The Physical Environment of the Classroom**

This feature is associated with a set of elements such as: sight, sound and comfort.

In the implementation of language teaching principles, it is said that students are affected by what happens around them; that is, what they see, hear and feel in the classroom. Thus, it is expected that teachers or administrators can control some factors which could affect students in the classroom, such as cleanness and order, a clean blackboard, the arrangement of chairs, display of visual aids, isolating the classroom of external noises, having tolerable acoustic and suitable ventilation. Obviously, all the elements related to the physical environment are negatively affected by large classes and can, in turn affect other aspects such as concentration, student attention, teacher motivation, and, evidently, discipline.

**Setting Arrangements**

Some alternatives are considered to change the rigid and traditional pattern imposed in the classroom, so that it not only enhances students and teacher interaction, but also student-to-student interaction as members of a team, no matter how many students the teacher has. According to this, the arrangement of the setting considering the type of desks in semi-circles, U- shapes, concentric circles or one circle if the desks are movable, dispose two or four students at a table or allow a comfortable pattern of students' self-selection are recommended, instead of having learners sitting in rows that do not really guarantee interaction or discipline. These alternatives can be modified according to teaching conditions, activities and needs.

**Blackboard Use**

One element that teachers need to learn to work with is the board. First, because it is a material that will be found in almost every classroom, and because is easily visible even in large classrooms. Second, the board becomes a visual aid and a profitable input for illustrating content with words, pictures, graphs and charts. Thus, the significance of blackboard cleanness and order is stated, so that students do not become confused with the developed contents and the way it is presented.

**Equipment**

A large class can quickly become out of control. Then, it is recommended to check outlets, equipment, and machines previously so that they can be available at the moment of using them, since they can be a valuable visual or auditory stimulus and also they could be an obstacle for developing activities if they do not work.

**Voice and Body Language**

Materials are important in small and large classes, but we should not forget that the person who needs to be in charge of the class as a whole is the teacher and in order to create an environment conducive to learning and work we have to start with ourselves. When we talk, we not only communicate through words but also using our body. So it is relevant to talk with a natural flow, to articulate clearly, to use an appropriate tone of voice, to have a correct body posture, to be confident, optimistic, to move properly, not exaggerating hands and facial gestures and also considering some rules of proxemics. All these elements can contribute to prevent students from getting distracted and to enhance their understanding of the input being delivered by the teacher. Since students can decipher verbal language and meaning through the aspects previously mentioned they are paramount for presenting ourselves as true professionals and for letting students see that we know what we are doing and they can trust our decisions regarding teaching and classroom management.

**Unplanned Teaching: Midstream Lesson Changes**

When teaching under adverse conditions like the ones we find in Colombia, where we not only find large classes, but we have only one or two hours a week to teach and we do so with scarce materials, we have to be flexible and be ready for the unexpected. This aspect refers to those moments when students and teachers abandon the original plan, when unexpected questions come up, when something prevents any activity from being carried out; a student is troubled in class, the teacher is asked something s/he does not know or there is not enough time to finish an activity that has already started. Thus, teachers must be prepared to face unexpected aspects in a way that does not create discipline problems or

makes him or her look unprepared. When teachers do so, they must always show respect for students, display self- confidence and calm and also handle these situations quickly.

### **Teaching Styles**

Teachers need to be aware that every class is different and it is not adequate to teach every single one in the same way. Each teacher's style is a personal matter and it can vary from individual to individual, a style is an expression of what a teacher feels and it should be genuine. A variety of possibilities of teaching styles are considered such as shy, gregarious, formal, informal, reserved, open- transparent, understated, dramatic, rational, emotional, steady, moody, serious, humorous, restrictive and permissive, however the style should be consistent with teachers' personality to avoid being classified in a inflexible stereotype and at the same time neutral to avoid problems with students. The important thing here is to adapt to each class and adopt a style that ultimately helps students attain the goal of learning a foreign language.

### **Classroom Climate**

Brown defines this aspect that can evidently change according to class size as an imperceptible force in a classroom, identified through a "sixth sense". It is the atmosphere of creativity given by students and teachers interaction. At the beginning this energy is transmitted by teachers when they have leadership and give guidance to their students; but also having solid preparation, confidence in their ability to teach, a positive belief in students ability to learn and real love for their job, in that way they are going to transmit that positive energy in the classroom.

### **Factors Affecting Classroom Management**

Some other aspects that can affect class management of classes of any size are disruptive behavior and student groupings. It is said that teachers' control of disruptive behavior and implementation and organization of student groupings can be valuable opportunities to create a cooperative atmosphere in the class and maximize student practice and avoid ruining the classes (Harmer, 1991). One way of making student grouping a tool and not an obstacle is to use variations which are explained next:

#### **Lockstep**

In this way of student grouping, students become fixed in the same rhythm and pace and it is common to see the teacher playing the role of controller and assessor. Lockstep can have certain advantages and disadvantages, regarding the advantages it is possible to highlight group concentration and dynamism as well as appropriate teacher model. In contrast some of the disadvantages we can mention are: limited chance to practice or to talk at all, inadequate rhythm and pace for weaker or stronger students', lack of communicative work and autonomy. In spite of disadvantages these student groups can be performed in order to have the whole class involved at the same time, thus the teacher can assess their performance as a group. It can be point out that lockstep is one of the most common and used ways of grouping students, especially in large classes where it is erroneously considered the unique option for students to work and for getting results. However, it can be suggested that in fact, lockstep is one of the barriers for effective teaching and learning in classes of any size.

**Students' Pairwork**

It is considered as an option to get a great variety of work, including reading and writing. Here the teacher mainly acts as an assessor, prompter or resource for students. Some of advantages of this way of grouping are increasing the amount of student practice and students use of language. Pairwork also encourages student co-operation which can be a positive influence for classroom atmosphere and motivation and in the way it gives students the opportunity to learn with others (peers). At the same time, it displays some disadvantages such as concerns about noise and discipline and boredom on the part of students because of being in pairs for a long time. This student grouping is recommended as a useful means to familiarize students at the beginning of the course and to increase students' participation and language use. Although pairwork seems a good alternative for students to work, especially in classes with proper conditions (small classes), it does not mean that in large classes this is a useless option due to time, space and teacher workload. On the contrary, under conditions such as the previous one, it could be an alternative to promote interaction as well as for helping students become autonomous.

**Groupwork**

This is an exciting and dynamic student grouping which generates a series of advantages such as the increasing of the amount of student talking time. In the same way, it offers students the opportunities to really use the language in communication with each other, it enhances co-operation and it gives students the opportunity to teach and learn. That is to say, students are given the opportunity to share what they know with the whole group and thus, they could show a degree of self-reliance to solve problems. In groupwork it can also be identified some disadvantages such as noise and indiscipline problems,

misguided selection of group members and group size, lack of group organization the same as mother tongue use, which is one of the biggest concerns when using pair and groupwork. It can be mentioned that an oral communicative activity in the mother tongue would have no purpose for learning a foreign language. Whatever the way, it is recommended to use this way of grouping in oral work or tasks, reading tasks, listening tasks, cooperative writing and also as a choice to allow different groups of students to work different tasks in the same classroom. Groupwork had been and would be the option for many teachers, but considering the class size and setting conditions, the strengths and weaknesses of this way of grouping may vary.

### **Individual Study**

It must be considered as an option to let students work at their own pace and rhythm, in activities like reading and writing, since students can be relaxed and confident in their own abilities. And, the teacher should make sure that self-study can be part of the class program, so students have their individual learning space. Moreover, in EFL settings it could be a way for students to put into practice the class content in a different environment (home, work,...), since sometimes due to factors such as class size it is not an option to be used in the classroom.

### **Disruptive Behavior**

This factor is related to students' behavior, that is, students who become noisy, unruly, unresponsive, and uncooperative. In addition, situations such as those in which students are in disagreement with the teacher or with their partners and try to trouble them. In any setting and conditions, teachers can often be faced with this disruptive behavior, turning in a difficult situation for them to control as well as for students to stand for.



Authors like Brown (2004) suggest that the teacher should establish rules of conduct and arrangement about students such as arriving late, interrupting other students when they speak, bringing food into the room, etc. and also about teachers behavior, this final point is considered as a valuable influence on discipline. It is also advised that teachers consider some essential issues such as preparation for class, being consistent with what they say, avoiding rising the voice to establish control, having preferences , implementing interesting classes, having a positive attitude towards teaching and learning and fulfilling the established rules. Disruptive behavior of any nature it is commonly found no matter the classroom size, meanwhile it seems to be more evident or more difficult to control in large groups; for instance teachers having knowledge of aspects such as the previously cited could be a good tool to overcome negative consequences of class size.

### **Teachers' Concerns about Classroom Management**

Most teachers have once concern about how to manage classroom learning to succeed. According to Lewis (2001) teachers concerns are classified in three broad categories: motivation, constraints and teachers roles.

#### **Motivation**

In creating a classroom climate for language learning, three levels of influence in students' motivation had been established. The first one is related to national and cultural influences on the target language, the educational system of the target language and the classroom environment. The second one is related to how school policies, textbooks and the national curriculum may have an influence on students' feelings about learning English in general and in particular and the last one is associated with teachers' management skills

which allow teachers to influence students and classroom environment (Williams and Burden, 1997: cited in Lewis, 2001).

As an answer to the concern of students motivation, it is stated that teachers could encourage language use through intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, the former involves showing students the importance and benefits of learning a particular language and the latter comes through rewards, that means, the teacher provides appealing materials or means to encourage and persuade students to speak English.

### **Constraints**

Usually in contexts where students learn English, they need to interact with others in speech or writing, so in order to give students opportunities to talk, some constraints such as large, multilevel classes with fixed furniture, examination-oriented curriculum, scarce resources and materials can arise, becoming a challenge for teachers. However, it is suggested that teachers display a creative thinking to decide which class activities can be appropriated to be done individually, in pairs or groups and for the whole class, so they must know how to organize students for any activity.

### **Teachers' Roles**

It is mentioned that teachers can manage a number of predictable or unpredictable situations, therefore they can have different roles at different times, for instance, a teacher becomes a controller when s/he lets students talk in turns, then a teacher becomes an organizer when s/he supplies the materials and rearrange the furniture for another activity. And finally, it is added that teachers' roles include relationships with colleagues, since an oral activity can produce annoying noise for other classes, so it is important to let other teachers know and understand the situation and in that way avoid misunderstandings.

All the concerns above mentioned by Lewis (2001) that teachers may have about classroom management, can also be found in settings such as the Colombian one and no matter the class size conditions as well. Thus, it is common to find in large and small groups students motivated for learning a foreign language, just because it is a compulsory subject and not because it is a possibility to travel abroad and study and maybe work there. In relation to constraints, above all the existing ones it is possible to highlight the target topic of this study; class size, in which the most common size is the large one. Finally, it can be stated that under these conditions, teacher roles are seriously affected. Then, no matter the circumstances, it forces teachers to fix to a specific one; which is the role of “controller”. But, it can be suggested that the teacher is one of the tools to change this situation and to enhance the teaching and learning conditions.

### **Class Size**

Within the number of factors teachers have to deal with related to classroom management it is possible to identify the class size factor that also points to two main alternatives ; large and small classes.

As Locastro (2001) suggests “class size is a part of a collection of essential sociocultural variables such as values, beliefs and expectations, which underline’ a culture educational system” (p.495) and according to Lewit and Schuurmann (1997), class size seems to be an administrative measure usually defined as the number of students for whom a teacher is primarily responsible during a school year.

Thus LoCastro (2001), after doing a study with teachers in 1989, found a set of problems related to class size. The first one is Pedagogical and it is related to difficulties to carry out speaking, reading and writing tasks, to monitor work and give feedback, to do

individual work, to set up communicative tasks and to develop demanding activities. The second one is Management –related, it is associated with difficulties in correcting students' work, in developing pair or group work, in controlling noise level, to attend all the students and to control discipline. The last one is Affective and it is related to difficulties to know students, to establish good rapport with them, to help weaker students, to avoid students getting lost and to assess students' interest and moods.

### **Large Classes**

Compared with small classes, a large class for most teachers seems to be more challenging and time consuming. However as Ur (1986) mentions the assumption of what a class size is will vary from place to place and that the exact number does not really matter, what matters is how the teacher sees the class size in his/her own specific situation. In addition LoCastro (2001) also comments that what a large class is or is not depends on individual teachers' perceptions and experience and that in their own teaching situation a class become large when it has more than fifteen students per group and when it is difficult to give learners opportunities to practice the target language. Renaud, Tannenbaum & Stantial (2007) from their own experience define a large class as having between 50 and 80 students and according to a study cited by Ur (1986) the average perception of a large class may be around fifteen students.

Although a large class can be seen as disadvantageous for teaching and learning, in the same way as small classes, large classes also have some positive aspects. For example since there is a big number of students to interact, a big variety of human sources can be found (Hess, 2001: cited in Renaud, Tannenbaum & Stantial, 2007) and participation since there will be always someone who is willing to say something even if it is just guessing. In

large classes students also become autonomous-learners since the teacher can not assist each student, so there are more opportunities to create an atmosphere of cooperation because advanced students can help weaker students (Renaud, Tannenbaum & Stantial, 2007).

In spite of the advantages of teaching large classes, also there are some challenges that teachers have to deal with at work with large groups. The major challenges the teachers have to face are: intimacy, this element has to do with, among other issues, the teacher's difficulty to remember the students' names. Next, we find anxiety, which refers to teacher's concerns about being outnumbered by the students and students' fears of asking questions or participating in a large class. Another teachers' challenge is student needs, which is related to the teacher's difficulty to cope with individual needs. We also find marking which deals with the amount of time the teacher spends on grading assignments. In the same way, noise level which is considered a teachers' challenge specifically when a teacher develops group work activities since students can lose their concentration and start talking of other things. Another element considered as a challenge for the teachers is monitoring students, which involves the teachers' difficulty to keep students on task as they monitor pair and group work. Finally, as another challenge is space which is considered unsuitable in a large group to develop some energetic activities such as role-playing and also lack of textbooks and resources available for all students (Benwell, 2008).

### **Small Classes**

Taking into account LoCastro's (2001) definition of large class size, it can be inferred that a small class means a group of less than fifteen students.

According to most researches, although teaching a small group may reflect some direct positive effects on student academic achievement or indirect effects on student study attitude, because teachers can give students a kind of personal assistance and also comply with students individual needs, teaching to small classes also represent a challenge for some educators.

Some of the advantages of teaching small groups can be associated to comfort, considering that teachers and students can feel more comfortable when the class size is smaller since all students can participate in energetic activities and give their opinions without problems. For instance students' needs met, that is teachers can organize their lessons plans taking into consideration needs and interests of all of the class members and classroom practices can turn into student centered; so that students can have more opportunities to speak and use the target language to communicate. Another remarkable advantage is the one related to space because the teacher and students may have more facility to move around in the classroom, in the same way attendance can be enhanced due to students are going to avoid missing classes since the teacher can notice it and tasks competition may improve considering that the teacher possibly will have more opportunities to check students work and for that reason they are going to do homework. And, taking into consideration the previous aspects, it can be mention that preparation time may decrease, thus the teacher may spend less time preparing materials since they are available for each student and therefore, the teacher can provide students with a detailed feedback after doing assignments and tests, as well as give students a better sense of how they are improving, where they need to work harder and the teacher is also going to have more time to interact before, during, and after class ( No Author, Englishclub.com).

Among all the advantages previously revealed, small classes also display some challenges, which are related to timing, so it can be found that students finish an activity or a task quickly, consequently teachers may need to include more activities into their lessons plans. In the same way, teachers may find difficulties to handle with distractions; for example when implementing group work activities they can get distracted because of their classmates noise, the use of the mother tongue and so on. One more aspect to consider is attendance because teachers lesson plans may be affected when a student is missing, for example when a planed activity requires group work, thus boredom may appear as consequence of this and because students know everybody and they most of the time work with the same pairs or groupings. A last aspect to consider as a challenge bound up with unsuitable activities, for example if the teacher is following a textbook , it can be found that some of its activities may be impossible to carry out , so teacher must spend more time preparing extra activities ( No Author, Englishclub.com).

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **The Research Method**

In the previous chapter, the theoretical framework associated to the general topic was presented. In this chapter, readers are provided with all the information related to the research method such as the design, participants, sample, procedure, validation criteria and the instruments applied to collect the data.

### **Research Paradigm**

This study is associated with the qualitative research which involves data analysis that will be collected in the institutions to be studied by means of observation in their natural settings. In this observation process will be considered as main elements: the observer, what is being observed, the instruments used to observe and the theoretical and conceptual framework that guide it. As an elemental instrument in this observation process will be designed an observation guide, this instrument contains theoretical and conceptual aspects which are implied in the English teaching process in relation to the class size. This observation guide will be applied to two groups of students with some similar characteristics in order to develop a comparative study about the differences and similarities that we can find.

This observation process will be applied alternately in both groups where the happenings are developed. In this way, through this observation process will be obtained registers and detailed descriptions of events about the studied phenomena in order to do a subsequent interpretation. (Brumfit & Mitchell, 1990)



The qualitative research will be used, since it allows the analysis of all the factors involved in a subjective way and getting data which are not generalizable in order to identify the depth nature of the problem statement (Nunan, 1992).

Since the main purpose of this research is to determine class size implications in the foreign language teaching process. It has been considered that the research method that better applies and helps to the development of this study is the comparative since it involves the study of two objects or situations which are similar and differ in some respects; these differences precisely become the focus of examination. Thus, the goal is to discover why the cases are different, in order to reveal the general underlying structure which generates or allows such a variation for the entire group or population where the cases came from.

### **Population, Setting and Sample**

In this section the population involved in this research, the selected sample and the setting where the research took place are defined and specified.

#### **Population**

This research was performed with two groups of learners of sixth and seventh grade that belong to the Instituto Técnico Superior Industrial Municipal ITSIM. The first group was a normal English class and the second group was a reduced group of students that were participating in an academic collaboration project within that institution and the University of Nariño. The average age of both groups of students is 11 to 12 years old, both male and female that belong to a low and middle social class and also their English teachers whose age oscillate between 23 to 50 years old, who belong to a middle social class and who work on that Educative Institution.

**Setting**

The research took place in the Instituto Técnico Superior Industrial Municipal ITSIM. This is a mixed high school which belongs to a low and middle social class; it has morning and afternoon sessions and it is located near to Panamericana Avenue.

**Sample**

The sample selected to carry out this project was two groups of students. The first group was a class of around 45 students and the second was a group of 14 students. Also included are English teachers of both groups. This specific population was chosen since its characteristics (a large and a small group) are favorable to develop the study and to get the necessary data to support the project.

**Pilot Study**

The pilot study was performed with the purpose of developing, adapting, or checking the feasibility and reliability of the observation guide. Since the aim of this research is to make a comparative study of a small and a large class in order to determine the implications of class size in the foreign language teaching, for the pilot study we worked with one teacher who has a small class and who takes part in an academic collaboration project of the University of Nariño with a public school and another who has a large class and works in the same public school in order to apply the observation guide. To carry out this procedure the first step was to ask for permission to the participants of this study, and then, when they accepted to take part in this project, the next step was the application of the observation guide and the final step was the analysis of its results. The results of this process were positive but in order to make the data analysis more practical

some of the items on the observation guide were reorganized before applying this to the whole sample.

### **Procedure**

In order to carry out this research, the first steps followed were the ones related to ethical considerations. The researchers asked for permission to administrative personnel, teachers, and learners involved in this process. This was done in person and also by means of a letter. The second step was to meet the participants, in order to ask them for cooperation and also to explain them everything about the project. The third step was the application of the pilot study and the research technique (observation guide) to see if the data collection instrument worked or not and to do some changes if it was necessary. The fourth step was the analysis of the data collected and the last step will be the acknowledgments to the people entailed in the research in person, by means of a letter and also giving them a short report or conclusions about the process.

### **Data Analysis**

The qualitative data analysis method that was used in this project is the spiral method since the researcher starts from the general question of the topic and its sources or from a specific point, establishing relations among the data collected and sources such as articles so connecting practice and theory to try to answer the general and specific questions of the project.

### **Ethical Issues**

Some ethical aspects that were considered in the development of this research are: a permission request to the respective authorities and participants involved by means of letters and in person, also it let participants to know that their collaboration was a

voluntary agreement which did not have any negative implications; in this sense, all the personal information provided has been treated with complete confidentiality and finally, the findings related to the research study will be provided on a report in acknowledgment of their contribution. In the same way, the textual and non-textual ideas used to support the project, were acknowledged through the indication of the authors where those ideas were used.

In the first chapter the problem description, problem analysis, problem statement, problem delimitation, problem evaluation, objectives, justification and limitations were provided. Immediately on the second chapter relevant topics related to the research were provided as a way to guide the reader and also to support the whole project and finally in this third chapter some relevant aspects about the research method were provided such as the design, the participants, the setting, the sample, the procedure, the validation criteria and some ethical issues, thus it is the continuance of the two previous chapters and also provides useful bases for the next chapter related to the data analysis.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Data Analysis**

In this chapter the most relevant information gathered during the research process will be presented as a way to inform readers the outcomes of this proposal.

### **Procedure**

Data collection took place during March and April of 2010. The observation guide was applied to two groups of students displaying different class size. The first group was enrolled in sixth grade at the ITSIM School and the second one was a reduced group of students enrolled in an academic collaboration project within the same institution and the University of Nariño. Both groups were observed by the researchers in charge of this study. The observers carried out five observations considering the aspects included in the observation guide. For this study, “large” classes has been defined as those classes having more than fifteen students per group (LoCastro, 2001) and “small” classes are defined as those having less than fifteen students per group. Students in this study were not informed if they were in the large class or the small class. In the middle of April 2010, observation guides were gathered to do the respective analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

In order to facilitate the data analysis, all the eighteen items included in the observation guide were segmented into three broad categories that encompass the possible dimensions of a class and which were created taking as reference LoCastro’s, 1989 (cited in LoCastro, 2001) study about large classes as follows:

Pedagogical Factors:

1. Reading and Writing tasks are carried out effectively.

2. Teacher monitors students work.
3. Students work individually without difficulty.
4. Students develop communicative tasks.
5. Demanding activities are well performed.
6. Assessment is developed efficiently.
7. There is variety in terms of activities

Management- Related Factors:

8. The location is suitable for the amount of students.
9. The classroom is well organized in terms of chairs.
10. The teacher provides feedback.
11. Pair or group work is effectively developed.
12. Noise level is controlled by the teacher.
13. Discipline constraints are well managed.
14. There is a variety of teaching-learning materials used.

Affective Factors:

15. Students are called by their names.
16. There is good rapport among teacher and students.
17. Weaker students are encouraged by the teacher and advanced classmates.
18. Students are helped not to get lost.

**Classroom Observation**

After gathering the necessary data collected by means of the observation guide, all of the data analyzed revealed the following results:

### **Pedagogical Factors**

#### **Reading and Writing tasks are carried out effectively**

Regarding this statement, it was found that in the small class at least one of these skills was present every class as a result of the implementation of the communicative approach. Students were immersed in activities involving both reading and writing and it was also evident that the teacher managed this situation in an appropriate way, so that students did not get distracted and perform the task effectively. In the large class, on the contrary, it was noticed that the teacher was not able to implement activities related to reading or writing, since most of the time was devoted to speaking as a strategy to enhance oral skills. It can be mentioned that students were exposed in a certain way to writing in the form of note taking, but this situation was used by most of the students to do whatever they wanted (talk, yell, fight, and so on) but not to do what the teacher asked them to do.

In relation to the afore mentioned description, it can be mentioned that it is evident that a small class has advantages in the development of reading and writing tasks. Those advantages are as follows: materials available for each student (copies, books, tape-recorders, TV set), and the available time that can be devoted to organizing, monitoring and giving feedback. In the same way, students' works can be checked by the teacher, all students can be given the opportunity to take part in reading and writing tasks and discipline constraints can be handled on time to avoid negative implications. Different to the small class, some of the reasons why teachers in large classes may fail to implement successfully activities where students produce oral or written output are: in first place the misconceptions that some teachers have regarding the Communicative approach, that is, to think that implementing this approach means carrying out just speaking tasks (Thompson,

1996). Secondly it can be cited that there is not enough time to check students attainment and to provide feedback considering the number of students, in the case of reading materials preparation and copy making can be very time consuming and finally it can be inferred that some teachers feel worried about developing these kinds of tasks because it is really difficult to keep students on task (Benwell, 2008) and because reading and writing in addition to course content will further increase their workloads (Brown, 2010).

### **Teacher monitors students work**

Considering the second item, in the small class it was noticed that the teacher was monitoring students almost all the time, for example asking them if the topic studied was clear, directing everyone in the development of a great variety of activities as well as in the management of different materials and aids. In the large class, although it was observed that the teacher devoted most of the class to lecturing students, there was the presence of monitoring on the part of the teacher, in the way he/she made sure if students were attentive and if they were taking notes. In conclusion that was the kind of assistance some students received, considering that there was not enough time to check all of them and to develop different tasks and that not all of them were paying attention.

As Benwell (2008) mentions, in a large class it is more difficult for the teacher to monitor students' work individually or checking each small group since this situation can be used by the rest of the students to do some other things such as creating discipline problems. In that way, students can stop paying attention because it is not possible for the teacher to have efficient contact with all of them. In the small class, the advantages of monitoring can be related to aspects such as time. It was observed that in the small class the available time for providing clarification, giving directions, and answering the questions



asked by learners was significantly longer than the time the teacher in the large class had. In the same manner the classroom organization in the small group was proper, thus, it was observed the organization of furniture in different ways (u-shape, semi-circle, circles) depending on the activities they were working and therefore, the facility for the teacher as well as students to move around and to have visual contact with the board and materials used was evident (Brown, 2001; No author, Englishclub.com). In this respect, Ur (1996) explains that when the teacher is less able to attend to every individual, the students must develop strategies for helping themselves and their classmates through peer-teaching and collaboration, thus fostering an atmosphere of cooperation. (Cited in; Renaud, Tannenbaum & Stantial, 2008)

### **Students work individually without difficulty**

On that score, in the small class it was seen that the teacher provided students with opportunities to work by themselves on different activities involving the four skills. Students developed the task efficiently and the teacher was aware of this situation when students demanded his/her assistance, as well as when the teacher corrected their works and provided feedback. Meanwhile, through all the observations it was perceived that in the large group the teacher did not implement or provide students with any specific task to be done individually, instead the teacher just explained the topic and asked students some questions. In a way, it can be considered that students were working individually when they were taking notes and answering the teacher's questions. However, that kind of individual work was inefficiently developed because these situations turned into a chaos, where students that were developing these tasks, were bothered by their classmates' discipline problems.

In relation to this statement Harmer (1991), states that teachers should let students work at their own pace, especially in activities like reading and writing since this has positive effects on their achievement. It can be relaxing for them and they might feel confident in their own abilities. Also, in a large group, considering that the teacher does not have the possibility of giving students personalized assistance; individual work can be an opportunity for them to become autonomous learners as well as to enhance peer teaching and collaboration (Renaud, Tannenbaum & Stantial, 2008).

### **Students develop communicative tasks**

Concerning the small class, it was noticed that the teacher was implementing in his/her lessons the communicative approach, thus the teacher provided students the opportunity to work on communicative tasks involving the four skills. Hence, students listened to a conversation and they had to work in pairs and develop a task based on this, which the teacher after reviewing it orally, he/she picked up to review writing skills. In the large group, it was also seen that the teacher was aiming to enhance students' communicative competence, but unfortunately, students just were exposed to speaking tasks in the way of lectures and teacher-students interaction through questions.

Richards and Rodgers (2001) define Communicative Competence as the learners' ability to apply and use grammatical rules, and also to form correct utterances, and know how to use these utterances appropriately and effectively to communicate. From this insight, it can be inferred that communicative tasks means activities in which learners are given the opportunities to use the theory and apply it in normal communication (listening, speaking, reading and writing) as well as to use a variety of language for a purpose while their attention is focused on the content (Li, 1993). Thus, in order to implement

communicative activities, the teacher must expose students to communicative tasks, on the contrary if students do not know what they are suppose to do, this situation is going to turn into a mess (Li, 1993). But, it is possible to develop communicative tasks in settings where students do not have an acceptable proficiency level, not other interest than getting a grade to be promoted and inappropriate conditions in terms of space, time, materials and so on, that is, in large classes. To this respect, the same author mentions that although there are not communicative materials and activities specifically designed for large classes, the existing ones can be exploited and adapted to meet the purposes of a large group.

### **Demanding activities are well performed**

Through the observations, it was identified that in the small group students were able to work in different activities. Those activities varied from topic to topic, from purposes and also from complexity level. Thus, it was observed that students developed most of the tasks without difficulty and when there was any difficulty, the teacher was ready to react to students' doubts. It can be said that this success was due to the clear and precise directions the teacher offered to the students and due to the fact that all the activities were relevant, interesting and meaningful for the students. Regarding the large group, as it has been mentioned previously, the teacher devoted most of the class to lecturing and checking content through questions. So far, it can be said that there were neither easy or difficult tasks, but answering the teacher's questions was a kind of demanding activity for students considering some of them were not listening the teacher or motivated to participate.

In this respect, it can be mentioned that it does not matter the task complexity itself, what really matters is the way the teacher presents students the task (directions,

attractiveness, relevance). Hence, what the teacher needs is to come up with engaging activities that keep all the students interested and participating with the goal of improving their communication skills and to present the content through different activities (Renaud, Tannenbaum & Stantial ,2008; No author, Englishclub.com), taking into consideration students' level to avoid abrupt lesson changes (Brown, 2001).

### **Assessment is developed efficiently**

On the one hand, it was viewed through the observation process that in the small class the teacher made use of informal, formal and peer assessment. When these processes occurred, it was seen that students were aware of this situation and in relation to the formal assessment students were informed of this in advance, the test was completely based on the content and practices from the classroom, the teacher provided clear directions and specified time. That is, the assessment process whether it was informal or formal was developed effectively. On the other hand, in the large group it was identified that the teacher made use of informal assessment through questions in an appropriate way but when the teacher was working on a formal test, everything was chaos. Before starting a formal test the teacher gave a review of the content been tested, then the teacher translated all the test, no time was specified and when students finally started the test everybody was talking to each other, yelling and finally after ten minutes the teacher asked students for the money and started to pick up the test.

Hearne (2004) mentions that assessment should be used as a tool for learning rather than simply act as a barometer of how well things are progressing. Thus, assessment should be a positive force that builds a climate of reflection about what is going on in classrooms and where not only teachers and students are involved but where administrator, parents and

so on, also participate. In this regard and taking into consideration the aspects previously mentioned, it can be pointed out that in order to carry out the assessment process in an efficient way, teachers should use assessment not only as a method for getting grades but to enhance learning. In that way teachers must take into account students and that test really reflect what students are learning. Although the advantages of supervising a small group rather than a large one are obvious since the teacher can have efficient visual contact with all the students, facility to move around and control, what is really important is to establish rules and in that way students are going to be aware of the moments in which they can talk freely or the moments they can not, such as formal tests (Xia, 2006)

#### **There is variety in terms of activities**

In this regard, it was found out that in the small class, the teacher got students involved in a great variety of activities. The class started with a warm up activity to check previous topics and to introduce the new ones, before and after the new topic presentation some other activities were included to help students attain the goals and to check comprehension and also at the end of the class to assess students' achievement in the studied topic. Those activities were represented in the form of games, listening, reading, writing, role plays and so on. Contrary to this, in the large group it was seen that the class was limited to give the lecture and ask students questions. So, there was no variety of activities because the teacher just was focused on this and finally the class concluded without assessment or an activity to check students' comprehension.

In this respect, it can be mentioned that in a the large group the conditions did not allow the development of various activities in an adequate way, but the main problem fell back on the fact that teachers in large groups tend to act as preachers: lecturing, writing

notes on the board for students to copy, and hoping that at least some of the students will learn something (Renaud, Tanebaun and Stantial, 2008) and nothing else because there is no time. Hence, implementing various activities can be an opportunity for the teacher to motivate, to keep students working, lessen discipline problems and get students actively involved in the class.

### **Management-related factors**

#### **The location is suitable for the amount of students**

In relation to this statement, in the small class, it was observed that there was enough physical space for 20 students, thus students and the teacher had an airy environment and sufficient space between chairs for their movement. In the same way, the teacher was heard clearly by all of the students and also the teacher was able to establish visual contact with them. On the other hand, the classroom in the large class was physically overcrowded and stifling since the space in the classroom was not enough for forty-seven students since the teacher could hardly walk between the rows. Thus, the classroom had limited space for students and the teacher's movement since there were six rows of chairs that were almost near to the board and narrow pathways between each row. Besides, the teacher scarcely had contact with students in the back part of the room since those students were almost out of the teacher's sight.

According to the observation, it can be considered that the location is not suitable for the amount of students of a large class; since the teacher cannot have proper displacement and cannot follow rightly the proxemics rules, and therefore the teacher cannot perform teaching accurately. Regarding those facts Brown (2001) considers that proper displacement, rules of proxemics and body language allow the teacher to

communicate with students and convey meaning; in this way the teacher can perform teaching accurately. In addition, it is considered that the exploitation of space and movement could enable the teacher to accelerate or restrain the thinking process and receipt of the message (Keidar, 2005).

### **The classroom is well organized in terms of chairs**

Through the observation process it was established that in the small class, the classroom was quite spacious in relation to the number of chairs. Thus, the teacher could suitably organize and rearrange chairs in a U- shape or a semi-circle when the teacher performed group or pair work with the students whereby the teacher could move easily among the individual or grouped chairs. Conversely, in the large class, the classroom was not spacious enough, since there were an excessive number of chairs in relation to the space of the classroom. Thus, chairs were so close that the teacher was always in the front part of the classroom because the teacher could hardly walk between the chairs while teaching the class. The teacher neither could check all of the students' work during testing, therefore the teacher could not avoid that students easily cheated since they were so close to each other.

Taking into consideration what was observed, it can be established that the arrangement of chairs is closely related to class size and teaching. This also involves classroom management which could affect students in the classroom. Since setting arrangements may be used by the teacher as an alternative to change the rigid and traditional pattern imposed in the classroom and at the same time this fact will enhance students and the teacher interaction and students' interaction as members of a team. (Brown, 2001)

**The teacher provides feedback**

With reference to the small group it was noticed that the teacher gave students feedback every time they were working on any task as well as when students were assessed formally or informally. For instance, the teacher pronounced again words that some students pronounced badly, the teacher also checked each student's written or oral activity to correct the errors or confirm the right answers. Thus, it can be said that giving feedback was for the small group a teacher alternative to help students realize their progress or to show them the way they could improve their learning process. In relation to the large group, it was observed that the teacher partially provided students with feedback, since the teacher just listened to the student who participated in class but the teacher did not tell him/her whether she/he had pronounced well or not. Thus, the teacher did not advise students about their strengths and weaknesses, for instance the teacher did not tell students how to pronounce well some word. And when the teacher did it, some student was corrected in an instantaneous and rough way, so the teacher told directly to the student about the bad pronunciation, therefore the student felt embarrassed before the rest of the students.

In relation to this, it can be established that feedback has been recognized as a means to enhance teaching and learning; in this way it provides relevant information which highlights strengths and achievements as well as areas for improvement (Ovando, 1994). Hence, it is really important that this process takes place in and outside the classrooms and it is also essential to use it in a proper way to avoid negative effects. In that way, feedback should be relevant, immediate, factful, helpful, confidential, respectful, tailored and encouraging.



**Pair or group work is effectively developed**

With regard to the small group, it was found that the teacher made students work in both ways; pairs and groups. Also, it was identified that students worked efficiently in the assigned task and it was also observed that the teacher had the control of all the groups, due to the fact that there were not enough groups, the teacher had visual contact with all of them, the teacher and students could move easily in the classroom and the teacher provided students clear directions to develop the task. Contrary to this, in the large class, it was seen that the teacher in any of the observations made students work neither in pairs or groups. But, it is possible to think that although the teacher would like to make students work in pairs or group it would be a chaos, because there was not enough space to move around and control students to keep them working.

Regarding this statement Harmer (1991) considers that pair work is a good method to get a great variety of work and to increase the amount of student practice and students use of language, it also fosters student co-operation which can be a positive influence on classroom atmosphere and motivation while students are given the opportunity to learn with others. The same author mentions that pair and groupwork help to enhance students' talking time, it offers students the opportunities to really use the language in communication with each other, it enhances co-operation, it gives students the opportunity to teach and learn and in that way show a degree of self-reliance which also facilitates problem solving. It is also considered that both working techniques provide students with energy, interaction and opportunities to keep personal contact with others and enable students to think talk and produce. It is equally considered that it has advantages for teachers (large class teachers) in the way that these techniques allow to have more personal contact with students while the

teacher is monitoring the small groups, that is the teacher can take care of students in a better way and meet their needs more easily (Li, 1993).

#### **Noise level is controlled by the teacher**

According to the observation process, in the small class, noise level was controlled in a satisfactory manner by the teacher since the teacher and students talked in turns in an orderly and controlled way and when some students talked at the same time the teacher was able to control the noise immediately. Conversely, in the large class, the teacher was not able to control noise level, since some students everywhere in the classroom talked in class and the teacher could hardly control the noise level and the teacher was not heard for all the students due to the increasing noise level produced by those students who talked in class.

In this regard, disruptive behavior is considered an aspect which can affect class management (Brown, 2001). Since teachers` control of disruptive behavior can be a valuable opportunity to create a cooperative atmosphere in the class, maximize student practice and avoid ruining the classes (Harmer, 1991). Therefore, the teacher dealing with disruptive behavior should establish rules of conduct and arrangement for students such as interrupting other students when they speak.

#### **Discipline constraints are well managed**

As revealed by observations, in the small class the teacher dealt with discipline constraints. Since the space of the classroom and the reduced number of students (14) allowed the teacher to move easily throughout the classroom therefore the teacher had close contact with each student. Thus, when some student was talking to another one, the teacher identified immediately this student and the teacher called the attention to that student by making a question about the topic or asking her/him to be quiet. Also, the

teacher was paid attention by all the students. Conversely, in the large class the number of students (47) and the narrow distance between rows made difficult for the teacher to keep control of the class and to provide individual attention. Hence, the teacher attracted the attention of the students in front but those at the back were talking to each other.

Consequently, the teacher scarcely could identify what students were talking to another one since the teacher was almost always in front of the classroom and the teacher was not paid attention by students at the back part which seemed to affect the students` behavior and attention.

In relation to the observed, it can be considered that the large numbers of students and the number of students per class are among others some of the factors that can affect discipline in class (Wadden & McGovern, 1991 cited in de Almeida, 2007 p.43). However, discipline or order in classrooms is also closely related to classroom management since the latter includes disciplinary issues, the management of learners, the planning of instruction, the process of decision-making by teachers, and the construction and maintenance of teacher-student relationships (Doyle, 1986; Fenwick, 1998; Jones & Vesilind, 1995 cited in Sakui, 2007 p.42). Thus, classroom management turns not only into a means to ensure “order” in classrooms (Doyle, 1990 cited in Sakui, 2007 p.42) but also to achieve effective instruction (Kagan, 1992 cited in Sakui, 2007 p.42).

### **There is a variety of teaching-learning materials used**

With reference to the small class, it was noticed that the teacher, apart from using the whiteboard and a marker, made use of a great variety of materials as a tool to facilitate learners` comprehension of a given topic. Some of the materials the teacher used through the classes observed were: the board, realia, flashcards, a computer, videos, records,

pictures, wall charts, worksheets and some others, depending on the topic the teacher was working on. Conversely, in the large group, it was observed that the teacher made use of a limited amount of materials during the class. For instance, most of the time the teacher used the board and a marker as only physical materials, so the teacher writes examples of sentences or different vocabulary related to the topic taught. In one particular class the teacher used pictures but they were too small and considering the amount of students, not all of them could have visual contact. The teacher could not use formal materials such as a textbook, considering the situation previously mentioned.

In relation to the observed, it can be established that materials help the teacher to inform learners about language, to provide exposure to the use of it and to simulate its use. So, the teacher motivates students to discover language use (Tomlinson, 2001). In the same way, resources can make teaching and learning easier, clearer and more interesting (Baker, 2000). In addition, the teacher can motivate students to enhance their learning by means of the resources since learning can be sometimes a difficult process.

### **Affective factors**

#### **Students are called by their names**

During the observation process it was revealed that in the small class students were exposed to getting individual attention of the teacher since the reduced number of students allowed the teacher to give time to each one. Therefore, the teacher was able to identify students and call them by their names without difficulty. For instance, when the teacher wanted some student to answer a question or describe a partner orally, the teacher just addressed to the student by his/her name or when the teacher checked some student's activity, the teacher said "very good, Christian". And at the same time, the teacher was also

aware of individual progress, needs, strengths and weaknesses, so she took into account the student who did not participate and the teacher called his/her attention by using his/her name. Conversely, the teacher in charge of the large class seems to have difficulties remembering students' names and getting familiarized with them. So, it was common to hear the teacher referring to students as "you, boy or you girl" and when the teacher wanted students to participate in class or answer some question, the teacher had to use the list for doing so. It seems that the great amount of students made difficult for the teacher to remember all of the names. Therefore the teacher did not establish a good rapport with students and the teacher awareness about each student's needs and the overall progress was made difficult.

In relation to this, it can be considered that the difficulties in knowing students to establish good rapport with them and to assess students' interest and moods are some of the frequent problems related to a class size (LoCastro, 2001). Thus, name learning becomes important in the process of knowing students and their needs, since at referring to students by their names, the teacher provides them with confidence and this situation also helps the teacher to identify troublemakers (Nolasco & Arthur cited in Li, 1993 p. 96). Therefore, the teacher's cares about what the students are doing, help to contribute to a positive learning environment which is considered an important aspect related to class size and teaching which transmits a positive energy in the classroom (Brown, 2001)

### **There is good rapport among students and the teacher**

As was revealed in the previous observation, in the small class the teacher had a close relationship with students, so the teacher identified their names, individual progress, needs, strengths and weaknesses without difficulty. Besides, the teacher gave individual

attention to each student and encouraged them through feedback and cooperative practices such as group work and pair work whereby they interacted with each other. Those facts were evident when the teacher addressed to the students by their names so that some student answered a question or when the teacher motivated a student by telling “very good, Christian”. On the contrary, in the large class the teacher was scarcely familiarized with students` names and was not totally aware of each student`s strengths, weaknesses and progress. Thus, for example when the teacher wanted a student to answer a question, the teacher only pointed out the student by saying “you, please answer this question” or when the teacher wanted to know about a student`s performance, the teacher just checked the student`s grades in the list. In addition, the teacher only focused on general students` performance by placing more emphasis on stronger students and leaving behind weaker students, thus the teacher seemed was pleased that most of the students understood the topic taught to follow with the next topic.

In particular, it can be affirmed that the rapport is a process involving a series of steps a teacher takes and at the same time it is an outcome which emerges only when the appropriate components are present in teaching situations to lead to more effective teaching. Hence, the rapport can be an advantageous position which gives support to create a positive emotional classroom atmosphere and help students learn. Lastly, it can be established that teachers should take the steps to actively seek to build rapport or to unintentionally alienate students. The latter is particularly high in large classes because there seem to be just too many names, faces, and lives to get know ( Buskist, W & Saville, B, 2001).

**Weaker students are encouraged by the teacher and advanced classmates**

With reference to what was observed, in the small class the teacher could easily interact with each student and recognize students' weaknesses and strengths. Thus, the teacher remembered the student's name and the teacher already know what his/her performance was. Thus, the teacher gave individual attention to weaker students and encouraged them through visual or auditive reinforcement and as well as using their classmates. For instances, the teacher identified the student's difficulty on pronunciation or understanding and the teacher called the student's attention by using his/her name. Equally, the teacher regularly organized different types of activities in groups of two or three, so stronger students could support weaker students. Thus, when it was necessary, the teacher encouraged students by using examples to illustrate better the topic and the teacher also used as a model other students to explain it. In addition, according to the need, the teacher pronounced more slowly or the teacher implemented group or pair works. In contrast, in the large class the teacher was partially aware of all students' weaknesses and strengths since the teacher focused most attention on the major part of the students' strengths in order to follow the topics. In this way, the teacher had to use the list to know all of the students' performance. Also, the teacher did not organize group activities so stronger students could not support weaker students. Thus, stronger students had most of the teacher's attention and the teacher barely stopped to help weaker students because of time constraints. As a result, the teacher ignored weaker students who were often absent-minded in class considering they did not understand.

In particular, it can be mentioned that in small class there is lesser range of students mixed abilities, language learning skills, learning speeds, interests and levels of confidence

therefore the teacher can help weaker students and to keep the stronger students motivated so that all students succeed (Baker, 2000). Similarly, the teacher can give weaker students more time to help them understand and be successful; and at the same time the teacher can implement student-student interaction so that classmates help each other to discover their mistakes.

#### **Students are helped not to get lost**

As was revealed during the observation process, in the small class the teacher was more likely to give individual attention to students including the weaker students by encouraging them through some kind of reinforcement and by means of cooperative practices. For instances, the teacher was attentive by checking each student task while he/she was working in pairs or individually and the teacher also explained again some topic when some student did not understand it. Thus, the teacher and classmates` interaction supported each other not to get lost. On the other hand, in the large class the teacher listened to the seven or eight students who always took part in class and the teacher did not ask the rest of students whether they understand or not. Moreover, the teacher also checked the tasks of three or four students in class and the teacher asked students to work individually most of the time. Thus, the teacher focused most attention on general students` performance in order to follow the topics and the teacher certainly not provided students with opportunities to interact because of time constraints. As a result, most of the time some students did not understand and they got lost and confused.

In this respect, it can be established that in the small class the teacher increases the opportunities for language practice through the implementation of group work and peer interaction. And at the same time the teacher also enhances student talk quality, offers



opportunities to “individualize instruction”, encourages a “positive affective climate” and motivates learners (Long & Porter, 1985 cited in Farragher, 2003 p. 9). In this way, interaction can fulfill a meaningful role in promoting proficiency in the target language (Barnes, 1976; Long & Porter’s, 1985 cited in LoCastro, 2001 p.495)

## CONCLUSIONS

After the careful revision of literature related to this topic and posterior analysis of the gathered data it can be inferred, in the first place, that the notion of what a large and a small class is depends on the individual perceptions teachers have from their own experience. Authors such as Brown (2001) mention that in some cases teachers have to deal with 300 students, Renaud, Tannenbaum & Stantial (2007) from their own experience suggest that a class having between 50 and 80 can be categorized as a large one because under this circumstances students become a congregation rather than a class, Baker and Westrup (2000) cited in the same article state that “any number of students can be large, if the teacher feels there are too many of them to make progress”, Ur (1986) proposes that the average perception of a large class may be around fifty students and Nolasco & Arthur, 1998 (cited in Xia, 2006) agree that the size of a class may differ from one school to another and teachers who are used to groups of 15-20 students might find a group of 30 to be rather threatening. Teachers with a large group of 40 or 50 students may be relieved when they have only 30. In the Colombian context the average class has 45 students, thus it can be suggested that even when the number of students in a class is not as high as in other EFL settings, in this specific setting 45 can be too much to handle. From this, it can be concluded that the size is a burden for teachers to perform their job and get visible results from instruction.

Regarding the main purpose of this study that is to find the implications class size may have in the foreign language teaching process, it can be deduced that this implications also depend on those individual perceptions and the setting conditions in which the teacher is enrolled. Hence, a large or a small class for a teacher may have negative implications for

teaching but other may see the same as advantageous. Consequently, it can be mentioned that Class size does have any specific implications in the foreign language teaching process, but taking into consideration the observations done and our short experience, it can be said that in this specific context (Pasto / public High Schools) ; the larger the class size is, the lower the quality and quantity of teaching and learning tends to be. This situation was corroborated at observing, for example because in large groups the teacher is less able to attend to students needs and interests, the time devoted to the study of English do not allow the teacher to implement a great variety of activities to facilitate students attainment in a given domain and materials are not available for all students, materials used most of the time are just the ones the teacher provides.

As a matter of fact, it can be established that large classrooms can negatively affect two meaningful and interrelated aspects of teacher practice: instructional time and classroom management. In relation to the former, according to what was observed during this research, it can be established that large classes demand time availability from the teacher in order to give students individual attention. In the same way, large classes require the teacher's ability to manage time, therefore require more time to be devoted to instructions (i.e., how to complete an exercise rather than substantive instruction), task management and behavioral management, thus leaving less time for actual instruction (Wilson 2006; Holloway, 2002; Ehrenberg, et al., 2001). With regard to the latter, classroom management is one of the concerns teachers have in relation to class size (Lewis, 2001), since according to the observed in this research, it can be reported that large classes can have more noise level and discipline problems which usually interfere with the development of teacher classes. In consequence more time is needed for classroom

management at the expense of teaching since the teacher have to devote time in order to control some obstacles like discipline constraints.

Those aspects affected by class size can be improved through several methods that teachers can implement in order to effectively manage a large classroom. For instance, Paigna (1997) suggests setting rules or routines for group behavior such as taking turns, arranging how to work together, etc. Thus, if these tasks are performed efficiently then the teacher can spent more time on instruction and school assignments, rather than on managing disruptions. In addition, it can be suggested dividing the class into groups which can be an alternative to change the rigid and traditional pattern imposed in the classroom and at the same time this fact will enhance students and teacher interaction and students' interaction as members of a team. (Brown, 2001)

On the other side, another conclusion that it is possible to draw after the process of observation and data analysis is that some teachers seem illiterate about key aspects of their profession. In this case, it was found teachers lack of management strategies which is one of the main barriers to develop the process of teaching efficiently and therefore, to deal with problems such as class size and the ones resulting from this ( discipline problems, lack of attention and so on). Thereby, the first and most important option for enhancing this issue would be that teachers become aware of their profession requirements in terms of knowledge, so that the drawbacks found can be handled in a better way or solved to get better results. It is not possible to find solutions to a problem when there is not knowledge about it. As Brown (2001) mentions, classroom management not only involves students but also the teacher and the environment itself (classroom). For instance, changing the traditional teaching and learning practices in terms of setting arrangement (rows), teaching

styles (traditional) and others (Brown, 2001 and Lewis, 2001), can help to get better results not only the ones related to class size but also others closely associated with our context learning conditions.

Some strategies that can be applied in large class to avoid discipline problems are to establish concise rules for students' behavior and to use positive discipline techniques, on the one hand it is essential to establish concise rules which emphasize appropriate behavior in order that classrooms function effectively. Through these rules the teacher will make know students their limits and their rights about how to behave. In order to establish the classroom rules, the teacher could involve the students, so the teacher can ask students to identify what behaviors are acceptable and what behaviors are not acceptable because they violate the rights of others. In this way, students will be aware of carrying out these rights as well as penalties for violating the rules. (A Guide for Teachers and Teacher Educators, UNESCO, 2006)

On the other hand, despite the existence of rules, students will always misbehave or violate rules. So, an alternative to control this situation is to use positive discipline techniques rather than shouting or even using corporal punishment. Some alternatives of positive discipline techniques are to praise students when they are not seeking attention and misbehaving; other alternative is to ignore the behavior when possible, giving the student positive attention during pleasant times and another additional alternative is to target the student by name, identify the behavior to be stopped, tell the student what he is expected to do at that moment, let him make the decision about what he does next and its consequences

In the same way, it was also identified the importance of teachers becoming knowledgeable about the roles not the role (a dimensional one), they must play when

teaching (Harmer 2007, Richards & Rogers, 2001 and Lewis, 2001). Thus, it must be pointed out that teachers not only spend the class giving long lectures to finally get grades (Renaud, Tannenbaun and Stantial, 2008), but teachers must take into consideration all the roles the authors previously mentioned (Harmer, Richards & Rogers, Lewis) propose. So, it can be concluded that teachers must not get fixed to a specific role but considering the conditions in which they are developing the teaching process, they must be open to a variety of possibilities (assessors, facilitator, resource, needs analyst, prompter, assessor, organizer, counselor and so on) .

Taking into account the fact that our context mainly offers large groups, some of the roles teacher could consider at working under these circumstances could be: the role of *facilitator*, that is to make learning easier for students helping them to overcome obstacles, giving them shortcuts and negotiating learning, the role of *prompter* to stimulate and encourage students to get actively involved in learning, the role of *organizer* to give students clear directions about tasks and to get an activity going , the role of *needs analyst* to determining and responding to learners' learning needs as well as learning styles, learning assets and learning goals and the role of *investigator* that looks for what is going on in the classroom, observing what works and does not work in class, implementing new activities and techniques and evaluating their suitability, in order to enhance language learning (Harmer, 1991-2007; Richards & Rogers 2001).

Another conclusion that can be drawn from this research is that class size has implications on the integration of the four skills into the classroom. Therefore, it can be said that large classes for instance do affect the four ones owing to the fact that in large classes not all of them can be integrated. It affects listening because of the noise and

discipline problems large classes usually present, making difficult that students listen the teacher and vice versa. Speaking can be affected by this issue because most of the talking time it is used by the teacher to give students lectures, thus forcing their talking time to give predicted responses to some questions and also to the difficulty to carry out communicative activities such as a jigsaw since this can turn into a chaos. Reading can be affected because of the difficulty for the teacher to provide students with materials such as reading passages due to costs and students proficiency level and finally writing is affected in large classes, given that students are exposed to this skill just in the way of notes taking, short answers and no more. From this, it can be concluded that to integrate the four skills into the classroom is more difficult in large groups but not impossible to carry out when the teacher has the creativity to exploit the few available resources.

However, it turns meaningful that teachers discard the idea of taught the four skills separately so that they integrate the four skills. Thus teachers should adopt an integrated approach where listening, speaking, reading and writing are combined in a single task. For instance, the interesting topics associated with reading and writing lessons lend themselves well to speaking tasks. Thus, speaking can be added to reading and writing lessons to ensure that students receive essential practice in oral communication and at the same time it allows students to integrate the four skills since the listening skill is already a natural complement to any true speaking activity (Zhang, 2009).

In the same way, it turns crucial to adopt four-skill approach because of the interrelation between productive (speaking and writing) and receptive (reading and listening) skills. For instance, a student cannot write without reading and cannot keep a meaningful conversation without listening. Besides, as a result of integrating skills teachers

encompass the different students' strengths and provide students with interactive tasks by developing productive and receptive skills which facilitate students' acquisition of English. (Nan & Mingfang , 2009)

Another conclusion is that a variety of materials need to be included into large classes to enhance teaching practices as well as the learners' attainment and motivation. Consequently, regarding this issue in relation to large classes, the first step is to include a variety of materials in to the lesson plan to develop different activities because materials help the teacher to inform learners about language, to provide exposure to the use of it and to simulate its use (Tomlinson, 2001). In the same way, resources can make teaching and learning easier, clearer and more interesting (Baker, 2000), that is, materials can motivate students since learning can be sometimes a difficult process. However, in large classes, materials should be big enough so that all students have proper visual contact with them for example in the case of flashcards, wallcharts and so on, materials must reflect the content been studied and the conditions in which are used and there must be the presence of a formal one, for example a textbook.

Finally, it is pertinent to say that this factor; Class size, needs to be seriously considered when government or educative authorities create educative policies or design educative plans, especially in foreign language settings. It would be a good idea if teachers and researcher on the educative field, start giving this issue the importance it deserves. Possibly the way to do so, it is writing articles and doing research, so that the educative community get informed about topics like this and at the same time , that the concerns reach high instances such as those of policy makers. As a result from this research process, we could suggest as an alternative to teach a foreign language in an effective way that



normal groups (around 45 students) get divided into two groups and in that way although the time also have to be divided for the two groups, the teaching and learning is going to be more effective than teaching and learning in an overcrowded classroom more time. Some other drawbacks that can be enhanced with this plan are mobility, organization, variety in activities/materials and a more personalized assistance to students on the part of the teacher.

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**APPENDIX****Appendix A**

*UNIVERSITY OF NARIÑO*  
 “CLASS SIZE AND ITS IMPLICATION IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING PROCESS”  
 CLASSROOM OBSERVATION GUIDE  
 INSTITUTO TECNICO SUPERIOR INDUSTRIAL MUNICIPAL ITSIM

Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_ Course: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of students present: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Observer(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Observation number: \_\_\_\_\_

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. Reading and writing tasks are carried out effectively.                 | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Teacher monitors students` work.                                       | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Students work individually without difficulty.                         | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Students develop communicative tasks.                                  | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. Demanding activities are well performed.                               | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. Assessment is developed efficiently.                                   | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. There is variety in terms of activities.                               | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. The location is suitable for the amount of students                    | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. The classroom is well organized in terms of chairs                     | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10. The teacher provides feedback.  | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11. Pair or group work is effectively developed.                          | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 12. Noise level is controlled by the teacher.                             | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 13. Discipline constraints are well managed.                              | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 14. There is a variety of teaching-learning materials used.               | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 15. Students are called by their names.                                   | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 16. There is good rapport among students and teacher.                     | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 17. Weaker students are encouraged by the teacher and advanced classmates | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 18. Students are helped not to get lost.                                  | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> |

Adapted from LoCastro, V (1989) study about problems related to class size (LoCastro, 2001)