

Teachers and students perspective on the effectiveness of small
classroom teaching (SCT) in Hong Kong English Secondary
classroom.

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Sheet of Declaration

I hereby declare that this work has not been submitted previously for examination to any tertiary institution.

Signature

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I. Abstract

This paper is a study regarding teachers' and students' perspectives on the effectiveness of small classroom teaching (SCT) in Hong Kong English Secondary classrooms. This research aims to collect and analyse opinions and experiences of teachers and students from a local secondary Hong Kong school and develop insights into what can make SCT effective as a pedagogy in the smaller English classrooms. Recently, the research done on SCT has proved to weigh more advantages than disadvantages teaching in a larger class at the primary level (EDB, 2009). Very limited research has been carried out in Hong Kong secondary classrooms, therefore, this study serves to collect opinions and experiences on SCT to ascertain whether SCT can be a better learning and teaching environment for both teachers and students in English classrooms. Students' opinions and experiences are collected through questionnaires, while teachers' are collected through in-depth interviews. The questions are set to explore nuances in teachers' and students' perspectives towards SCT in English classrooms. The findings reflected highly positive views and experiences of SCT in English classrooms from both students and teachers. Smaller classroom helped develop students' language skills and development towards the subject. More interaction, individualisation and higher grades were also reflected. Effective English SCT classrooms require more interactive, collaborative and fun tasks for the students to develop interest and language development for the subject making SCT an effective pedagogy. Nonetheless, students should take up the opportunity to use the resources and increased individualized attention to improve in the English language.

1. Title of Research

Teachers and students perspective on the effectiveness of small classroom teaching (SCT) in Hong Kong English Secondary classroom.

2. A statement of the problem/Introduction

Hong Kong is a small city for such a large population. There are hundreds of kindergartens, primary and secondary schools. According to EDB figures and statistics, in the past 6 years, the average classroom size for S1-S6 students have ranged from 27-29 students per classroom. Compared to the average size of each classroom, it is a small classroom with only one teacher handling up to 30 students. EDB started implementing SCT in primary 1 first starting from 2009/2010 school, then moving forward to the other grades up to Primary 6 by the school year 2014/2015. In 2019, EDB additionally asked local universities to organize workshops for the teachers to train them for the change in teaching strategies. Primary schools are taking a step forward, however, very little concern has been shown towards secondary schools. Reviewing SCT primary reports, teachers used challenging questions, had more group and pair tasks, and increased individual engagement with the students. Not only for teachers, but students have also had a breakthrough as they felt more relaxed and enthusiastic in smaller classes along with improved performance (EDB, 2009). The positive results spark an interest on whether similar results could reflect in secondary schools as well. There have been studies done in the past focusing on the class size, for example STAR (Student Teacher Achievement Ratios) project done by Finn & Achilles in 1990 Tennessee and Blatchford (2002) in England, they were focused entirely on the achievements of the students based on

their scores. It did claim that the students did better, however, it was unsure whether the pedagogy was effective for students and teachers. It has not been settled whether SCT is beneficial to students or not. Opinions and views from students and teachers are very crucial as they are the main people in class. Before putting the theory into action, this research focuses on collecting views and opinions from teachers and students on implementing small class teaching in English secondary classrooms in Hong Kong.

2.2 Objectives

1. To collect and analyze students and teachers views on Small Classroom Teaching (SCT) in English secondary classrooms.
2. To collect on previous experience on SCT and the effect on the teaching and learning environment.

2.3 Research Questions

1. What are the views from students and teachers regarding SCT in English secondary classrooms?
2. What can make SCT effective as a pedagogy in Hong Kong English secondary classrooms?



3. Literature Review

Small Class Teaching (SCT) has been a debate for decades now. Government agencies, policy makers and some educators (e.g., Slavin, 1989) are unwilling to acknowledge on the benefits of SCT (Blatchford, Goldstein, Mortimore, 1998). Minister of State for Education quoted “I do not believe there is any proven connection between class size and quality of Education” (Eric Forth, reported in the *Independent*, 3.3.93). One of the biggest reasons is funding to schools (Blatchford & Mortimore, 2006) the process can be too expensive (Slavin, 1990; Tomilson 1990). Weis (1990) estimated after seven years of Indiana’s Prime Time Programme, it costed \$82 million. Moreover, teachers experience in secondary schools on SCT has very little research and knowledge (Pedder, 2001; Blatchford, Basset and Brown, 2011). On the other hand, recently, parents, teachers, and governors of schools do believe that smaller classes have a more beneficial learning environment than larger classes (Bennett, 1996) and that secondary schools have harder intellectual activities that need further concentration and scaffolding from teachers and class size can be a concern (Pedder, 2006). Pedagogy is just not about the teacher enhancing one students’ learning, but the whole class at once so the class size should be bear in mind. Classroom interaction is important and a focal point for upper classes as it develops social and academic integration (Demaris & Kritsonis, 2008) and it is a two-way process between the learner and educator (Fassinger, 1995). This could help students with their critical thinking and higher order learning resulting in academic achievements and performance (McKeachie, 1990). Pedder (2001) found that SCT increased the pupil-teacher interaction in class. In language classrooms, social activity is considered crucial as they can develop courage and individuality as adequate language users (Luk & Lin, 2007). Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory further emphasises how social interactions can help develop the language skills needed. SCT can encourage more interactions within the

classroom as there are fewer people and teachers get to give more frequent feedbacks (Harfitt, G.J., 2010)

Quite a lot of research have been done regarding SCT, both positive and negative outcomes have been presented. The recent research regarding SCT has shown a great improvement and results compared to the past. Smith and Glass (1980) deduced that in “smaller classes attitude, academic achievement, teacher morale was appreciable” (Smith & Glass, 1980) and that the condition favoured secondary schools more than primary schools. Moreover, Bain & Achilles (1986) found out that in higher classes SCT made each other more appreciative and had the urge to assist each other. SCT can also deal with misbehaviour (Glass, Cahen, Smith & Filby, 1982) in addition with collaborative behaviour increasing (Blatchford, Russell, & Brown, 2009) so teachers spend less time on classroom management. In smaller classes, teachers can ask students questions directly and pick on their interests and abilities quicker giving them more individualised attention (Bandiera, 2010). Smaller groups in class can increase students desire to talk more as they can be uncomfortable speaking in a large classroom, this can help them build up their confidence and skills (Hess & Gatti, 2010). Project STAR (Student Teacher Achievement Ratio) (Finn & Achilles, 1990) had a positive outcome after a huge study on young students in SCT, it was found that students had better academic achievement. Teachers reported that they were able to give more individual attention and monitor their learning along with increased interaction letting them use various approaches to further improve the students’ performance (Pate-Bain, 1992). A follow up research done by Nye, Hedges & Konstantopoulos (1999) concluded that starting SCT in younger grades benefit the students till high school and that the effect did not disappear overtime. At the same time, SCT was criticised by educators analysing studies. Firstly, STAR focused on academic achievement only (G Harfitt, 2013) Focusing on the pedagogy, SCT reflected no change

regarding student affective measures. Likewise, STAR had no evidence of increase in students' self-esteem (Nye et al. 1992) providing no evidence on how SCT benefited the students in development, reasons on such change and most importantly comparing the process with the larger class (Blatchford & Mortimore, 1994). Secondly, STAR presented positive outcome, however the effect is not as expected in the theory with only median of 0.13 (Salvin, 1989) even though it did not have disappearing effect in the future, the main question is such a small outcome worth the change in curriculum. SAGE outcome increased slowly yearly showing good results, but at the same time with small effect (Molnar, 1999). Research done by Hoxby (1998,2000) also presented similar results "the effect of reducing class size is rather precisely estimated to be close to zero" (Hoxby, 2000, p. 1273). Blatchford, Bassett, and Brown's CSPAR (2001 – 2003) showed that literary classes had more progress in smaller classes in lower grades. There was more space to teach and learn, increase in grouping tasks and collaborative activities and discipline was much better. Teachers could cater to individual student needs, especially the special need students (Blatchford, P., Russell, A., Bassett, P., Brown, P., & Martin, C. (2007).

In traditional Chinese culture, teachers are given high respect (Chan & Chan, 2005), in a Taiwanese study, it was found that students are usually quiet and afraid to answer in class and do not challenge their teachers (Bond, 1991). However, in Hong Kong, especially primary schools have been adopting SCT, alongside, secondary schools have started with main subjects such as English, maths and Chinese (G Harfitt, 2013). Teachers who have never taught in a small class reported a sense of "professional comfort". This has opposed the past beliefs of whole class teaching (Biggs, 1998) and dominated teaching environment (Littlewood, 1999). Studies done abroad focus on academic achievements, however, in Hong Kong Ng (2006) found that students had a positive reaction towards small classroom

teaching; their ideas and attitude towards English language had improved. Moreover, the interactions between students and teachers were improved and created a closer relationship. Teachers called individual names more often and students' confidence and motivation increased at the same time. Harfitt, G.J. (2010) found that students had less anxiety in smaller settings and felt more attachment and association towards the class. He also observed that students did not only have better interaction with teachers, but also better relationship with their students. He argued that small classroom setting that might not be the only influence on students, but the increased interaction in class, scaffolding, more student participation and more individualised focus had create a positive impact on the students.

4. Methodology

4.1 Process

Mixed methods research will be carried out: questionnaires and in-depth interview. All the questions asked are made by the researcher and only related to SCT and research purposes after reviewing the literature. Students and teachers of the same school will be the participants. The research will be conducted in the researchers' field experience secondary school. It is a local band 3 CMI school located in Wong Tai Sin. The students are mainly Chinese. The students study English as a second language. They will be filling in a questionnaire regarding SCT. English teachers will be requested to take part for the in-depth interview about SCT.

First, the principal will receive an informed consent granting permission to carry out the research for the students and teachers. In this pandemic, students aged 16 or above will receive the questionnaire, aiming form 4-6. For the ages under, parental consent is also

needed, which is extremely difficult to obtain in this given pandemic. On the first page of questionnaire, the informed consent, and a box for the students to check whether they would like to take part or not. The expected responses are 100-150 questionnaires. They will be asked polar questions with explanations to express themselves better. Moreover, they will be sectioned into two parts as well, asking if they have ever experienced small class teaching before. If they have, they will be asked for their opinions; whether it increased their motivation, or if it was more effective than normal class and which setting they prefer more and the reason. For the students who have not experienced small class teaching can offer their view of their predictions and expectations on the change of classroom setting; whether it will be a positive change and increase their language and personal development towards the subject and improvement in academic results. Lastly, letting them add more comments or opinions they have regarding the matter. The questionnaire tends to be straightforward as it does not want the students to feel overwhelmed while filling it in. The questions are set on the discussions of the previous and stated literature review.

The English teachers in the same school will be requested to conduct a qualitative method using in-depth interviews to ask some questions regarding SCT. They will not be asked for any personal information and can choose to not answer the questions they feel uncomfortable with. The minimum expected interviews are 3. As teachers have years of experience with teaching students, they have a better understanding with various teaching methods, with their experience, they may have more views and explanation regarding SCT. This interview will be conducted on zoom as schools are conducted online. The recordings will be destroyed. It can go two ways; first teachers who have experienced teaching in a small class, they will share their observation of the students and compare it with the large classroom setting. And for the other teachers, who have not gone through with SCT will be able to share the opinions on

how it could be useful or not for the student and for themselves as a teacher. Moreover, all the teachers will be questioned about the advantages and disadvantages of a small classroom setting, finally ending with a challenging question regarding the reason of SCT effectiveness in classrooms. For the teachers who have experienced will be able to judge from their observations in the past. And for the other teachers, they can express their views on what they think will be better for the secondary students. All the questions are based on the reviewed literature.

4.2 Ethical Consideration

Participants will join the research voluntarily. The students aged 16 or above will be given consent forms in the first page of questionnaire. As for the interview, teachers will give a verbal consent before the interview starts. In all the consent forms, the purpose and the duration of the research, information about the researcher and the security and anonymity of personal information and data will be included. They will have the choice to participate or not. All the participants can drop out of the research at any time. There is no minimal risk in this research. The participants will not be harmed in any kind physically or mentally and sensitive questions will not be asked. No rewards will be given for completing the research. The researcher will put no pressure on the students and the relationship as a student and teacher will not affect the flow of the research. Similarly, the colleagues will also take part in the research willingly.

For the questionnaire, students will be asked to provide their and age for data collection purposes only. No other personal information will be required. For the interview, teachers will not be asked to provide any personal information at all. The information collected will be in

the researcher's private laptop password protected. All the data collected will be deleted permanently after half year of the research is done. The interviews will be recorded and kept for research purpose only.

4.3 Data Collection

The research was carried out at the field experiment school of the researcher. It is a local band 3 Chinese-medium school located in Wong Tai Sin. Due to the pandemic, the classes were held online and face-to-face activities were temporarily suspended. The principal was contacted through email to give consent to continue the research and was accepted. Form four to six students were reached out to as they are aged 16 or above and can give consent themselves. The questionnaires were sent out to them through their English teachers after sending them messages about the purpose and flow of the research. Students were also sent a mass email on their school account to be aware of the research. The interviewed English teachers were directly contacted through WhatsApp with the purpose of the interview.

The questions for the questionnaire and interview are formed on the reviewed literature and the study focus. The questions aim to find the perspectives of both students and teachers. Moreover, to observe what teaching methods are suitable for SCT English classrooms, respondents are asked on for their input on the matter. The questions are matched and categorised, for example, both students and teachers are asked about English SCT language development, grades, and opinions on SCT. Teachers are further asked about the difference in lesson planning, stress, and pressure. The set questions can help researcher conclude the perspectives and how it can be effective as a pedagogy in English SCT classrooms.

To make the findings simpler, most of the questions on questionnaires are scaled from 1 – 4, one - strongly disagree and 4 - strongly agree. There is no neutral as it would be difficult to make a conclusion. The scaling shows the percentage which reflects the students' answers and views on English SCT.

A total of 108 responses were received from the students; 47 from S4, and 61 from S5 - S6. 34 of them were aged 16, 54 of them 17-18 and 20 of them above 18. They agreed to participate in the research through a questionnaire on Google Form.

Teacher 1 (T1)

T1 has more than 10 years of experience teaching English, with 3 years of teaching in this school. T1 is the panel head of the English Department. T1 teaches 23 classes in a week for form 4 to 6.

Teacher 2 (T2)

T2 has more than 30 years of English teaching experience and has been in this school for 5 years. T2 teaches 35 classes a week and focuses on junior forms (S1-3) and one form 5 class.

Teacher 3 (T3)

T3 has 2 years of experience teaching English and has started with this school. T3 teaches 22 classes per week for form 2 - 3 and teaches senior speaking classes.

4.4 Data Analysis

The data on the questionnaire will be analysed using descriptive analysis. The percentages found from the questionnaires will be used to compare and decide whether students have positive or negative opinions and attitude towards SCT. The number of students choosing the scaling numbers will indicate the results overall. Percentages will be used for statistical data and further be compared. As for the open-ended questions in the questionnaire, all the answers will be put in categories and matched with their initial questions. The open-ended questions will help explain the initial answers from students and explain the views from the students. The responses will be analysed based on the positive or negative answers.

As for the in-depth interviews, descriptive analysis will also be used to analyse the data. The interview will be transcribed and will be matched with the students' questionnaires. The answers will act as a clear explanation and reasoning of students' response. The views, thoughts and experience will be analysed on the wordings and phrases used.

5. Findings

5.1 SCT Experience

The first question was whether students have experienced SCT or not. 73% of the students have not experienced SCT, while the remaining had experienced. T2 and T3 had the SCT experience. Teacher 2 with as small as 5 students in one class, 10 and also 15 students. T3 had around 16-17 students. T1 had never experienced a small class before. It can be seen that a lot of the students have not experienced SCT, reflecting the uncommonness of English SCT classrooms.

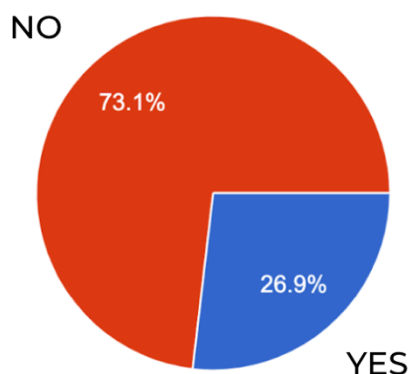


Figure 1: Number of students experienced SCT

When asked the experienced students what the overall difference was between large and small classrooms, only 5 of the students mentioned that they “didn’t notice any difference” “boring” and teachers had the “same teaching”. On the other hand, the others had a positive experience majorly stating that there was more space in the classroom, more interactive tasks and games and adding classes was more “fun” and “enjoyable”.

5.2 Students’ Personal and Language Development in the English Language Learning

5.2.1 Students’ response

Students were then asked if SCT helped or will help them to increase in the following areas;

1. Confidence , 2. Motivation , 3. Participation , 4. Discussion , 5. Interest

| | Exp | Views | Exp | Views | Exp | Views | Exp | Views |
|------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|----------|-------|-------|----------------|----------------|
| | Strongly disagree | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Agree | Strongly agree | Strongly agree |
| I. Increased confidence | 7% | 0% | 28% | 15% | 41% | 62% | 24% | 23% |
| II. Increased motivation | 7% | 1% | 28% | 10% | 45% | 49% | 21% | 39% |
| III. Increased participation | 7% | 1% | 28% | 6% | 35% | 52% | 31% | 41% |
| IV. Increased discussion | 7% | 0% | 31% | 10% | 24% | 37% | 38% | 53% |
| V. Increased interest | 10% | 5% | 35% | 28% | 41% | 27% | 14% | 30% |

Table 1: Percentage of students with and without experience of English classrooms on personal and language development in the English language learning

Students who have not experienced SCT were asked for their views on how they think SCT would help them improve in the mentioned areas in English class. Majority of the students (62%) agreed that it would increase their confidence, half of them agreeing it would increase their motivation, more than half strongly agreeing that it would increase discussions in the classroom. These figures show us that the students view smaller classes as a better place of learning with such high expectations along their development with the language. However, when it comes to interest, it can be seen that students are not sure whether having a smaller classroom will spark their interest towards the language more, even though half of them agree that it would, the rest are unsure about the statement.

Even though students who had experienced SCT did not exactly match the high expectations of the students who had not gone through the experience, the results were still promising. 41% of the students agreed that it increased their confidence in the classroom, almost half of them agreeing that it increased their motivation towards learning the language, two thirds agreeing or strongly agreeing that there was increased participation, similarly with increased discussion. Only half of the students thought SCT helped increase their interest in English.

Comparing the two, we can conclude that both experienced and inexperienced students favour being in a smaller class rather than a larger class as it increases their learning development and behaviour.

5.2.2 Teachers' response

When asked for teachers input in the above areas, they were certain that it would bring a positive change in the English classroom experience

T1 mentioned that ideally a smaller class is supposed to increase the confidence in students, however for the weaker students, it is essential to motivate them for it to happen. T2 linked confidence with SCT creating better relationships between students and teachers as it leads to students being more open with the people in the classroom. T3 thinks that in a large classroom, students can be very shy and afraid to speak out loud. When it comes to a smaller classroom, T3 has experienced that students are more willing to speak and more confident in class. T3 agrees with it by saying “more motivated”.

T1 uses basic typical motivational methods to motivate students in class for learning, for example knocking on the table and calling out their names. The other way is that T1 encourages students to talk more by having discussion tasks and giving more individual attention. T2 usually spots the students' strengths and weaknesses and uses it to design different types of worksheets depending on their language level and matching their needs. This encourages them and when the teacher asks questions, T2 provides hints and options for the weaker students to motivate them.

When asked about the difference in participation of the students, all of the teachers agree that it has increased in small classes. T1 said that the students will feel less embarrassed and be less anxious to speak in a smaller setting and will have more chances to directly interact with the teacher. On the other hand, it also depends on the students' willingness, if they are already motivated, smaller classes will not bring any difference, so it is better for weaker students. T2

has used different strategies for a smaller classroom, where students know that they will have to speak sooner or later so it automatically increases their participation. One of the strategies also includes asking the stronger students for answers, so the weaker students can understand more with the follow up questions and will be less embarrassed. Similarly, T3 adds that for the stronger students, they are willing to do the tasks, however in a smaller class, everyone has to do the work, this can act as a motivation step for the students to learn English.

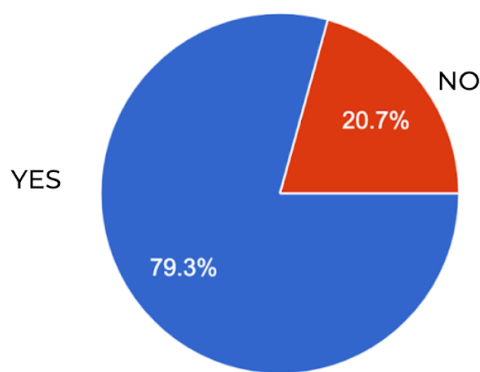
All three teachers agreed with increased discussion as with a smaller classroom they are able to use more group related tasks. For example, mini debates, pair work, brainstorming work, individual tasks leading to collaboration, discussions and group work. All these activities are much more favourable with fewer students as they can observe and walk around to each and every group giving feedback and interact with the group more.

T1 and T2 focused on the same thing for the increasing interest of English learners in a smaller classroom which is the teacher's teaching pedagogy. Both of the teachers mentioned that the methods and activities you choose are very important. If they are the "same" or "teacher-oriented", it will not spark any interest in learning. T1 adds that activities, group tasks and games should be involved to increase interest, and allow students to walk around during the activities. T3 mentioned that if students "understand what is happening in class" then they will be more interested in the class as they will be aware of the context.

Both teachers and students with or without SCT experience agree that English SCT classrooms develop personal and language development towards English.

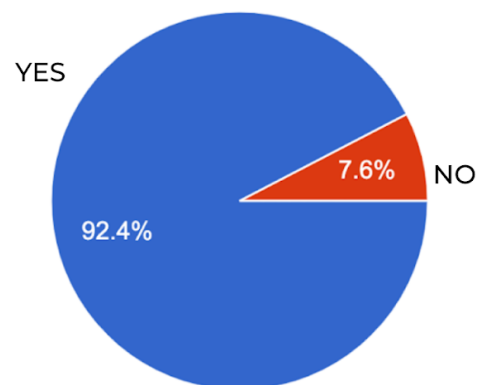
5.3 Group interaction and oral speaking in English SCT classrooms

Focussing on discussion, students who have experienced SCT were asked if there were more group tasks, two thirds of them agreed that there were. For the non-experienced students, 90% of the students expected to have more group tasks. Similarly, 92% of the students expect there to be more speaking than usual, however, only 79% of the students who have experienced agreed that there was more speaking in class. Even though it is a large number, students were still asked why they did not agree. Comments mentioned that “teacher was still talking all the time” “no difference in small class” and “boring”. The interviewed teachers said more speaking is to occur in a smaller class, we will have to change the teaching methods that will make it happen. For example, providing more opportunities to talk by asking questions, making sure all the students are getting the chance to talk and having more discussions and group tasks. Students agreed with the methods as they commented more was spoken in class when “teachers asked more questions”, there were more group and pair tasks and teachers gave students chances to talk more.



Students who have experienced

Figure 2 : Experienced SCT students’ increase in speaking in smaller classroom



Students' opinion

Figure 3 : Non-experienced SCT students’ increase in speaking in smaller classroom

5.4 Teachers' interaction and individualisation with students

Moving along to students getting more individualisation. 91% of the students expected to get more individualized attention from the teachers compared to the bigger classrooms, 66% agreed that there was more attention given to them individually. This shows that teachers do tend to give more attention to each and every student in a smaller setting. When asked the teachers, they all mentioned similar viewpoints summarizing them into 3 main points; 1. In a smaller group, teachers can cater to and focus on individual needs which helps them choose the best pedagogical strategies to boost the learning experience. 2. Teachers can make various materials depending on the capability of different learners in the small group. 3. Students and teachers can interact more individually which creates a better relationship making students open up more in class, this leads to better learning.

5.5 Change in teaching methods

The interviewed teachers emphasized on “changing in teaching methods” when it comes to a smaller classroom. As for the inexperienced SCT students, 80% of them expect a change in the teaching style. As for the experienced SCT students, 40% disagreed with the change, this shows not every teacher changes their style of teaching. Nevertheless, 55% agreed that there was a change in the teaching style.

This connects to the students who disagree with the advantages of the smaller classrooms as they do not see any change in teaching styles of the teachers thus seeing no change in the learning environment. If teachers are not choosing different pedagogical styles to match the needs of the students with the favourable circumstances, it leads to a purposeless change in class size.

5.6 SCT influence on academic performance

5.6.1 Students' response

The students and teachers were asked about the impact on academic performance, whether SCT had any influence on grades. 38% of the experienced SCT students did not see any improvement in their grades, while the other 62% of the students did see an improvement. As for the inexperienced students, 76% expect to get better grades in a smaller class. There are students who are getting the advantages from the smaller class sizing. This reflects on the better academic performance of the students.

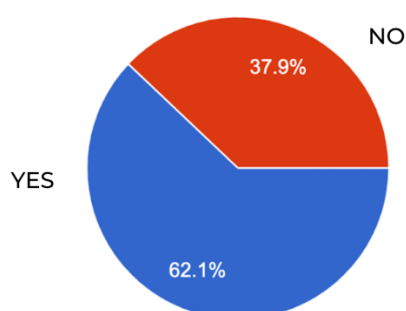


Figure 4 : Experienced SCT students' increase in academic performance in smaller classroom

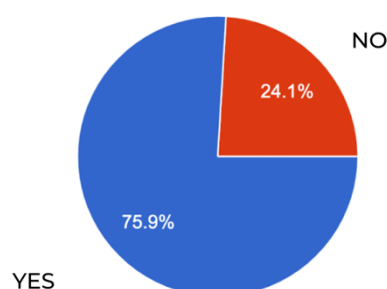


Figure 5 : Experienced SCT students' increase in academic performance in smaller classroom

5.6.2 Teachers' response

All the teachers have experienced better grades when it comes to smaller classrooms.

Summarizing their comments and viewpoints, a link between the steps was figured out. First, in a smaller classroom, there is better interaction between teachers and students which leads

to better interaction, where teachers can cater and focus on individual needs. Then, teachers can choose the best teaching strategies for different students and use it in the classroom giving more practice and letting students be active. At the end, better academic performance is expected as there is much more catering to each student and they are able to understand the language and content more.

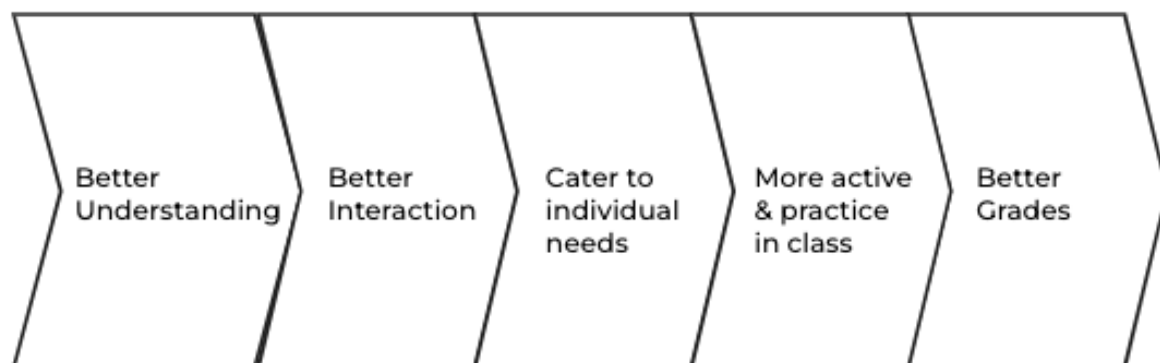


Figure 6 : Overall teachers’ perspective on SCT improving academic performance

5.7 Overall statements regarding English SCT

The last section of the questionnaire required all of the students to rate 5 sentences to gain an overall sense of opinions and views of SCT.

| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
|---|-------------------|----------|----------|----------------|
| 1. The number of students does not change the learning in the classroom | 35 (32%) | 38 (35%) | 30 (28%) | 4 (5%) |
| 2. If there are less students in the class, it is easier to learn. | 3 (3%) | 11 (10%) | 62 (57%) | 32 (30%) |
| 3. If there are less students in class, the students can talk more. | 3 (3%) | 14 (13%) | 43 (40%) | 48 (44%) |
| 4. If there are more students in class, the teacher cannot give attention to every student. | 5 (5%) | 14 (13%) | 51 (47%) | 38 (35%) |
| 5. I would enjoy the class more if there were less people in it. | 5 (5%) | 19 (18%) | 57 (53%) | 27 (25%) |

Table 2 : Percentage of overall students perspective on English SCT classroom statements

It can be seen that two thirds of the students see eye to eye that the number of students do change the learning in the classroom. There are still one third of the students disagreeing with the statement. More than half of them agree that it is easier to learn in a smaller class, however they are not strongly agreeing with it, and only 30% of the students are. Majority of the students strongly agree that there will be more talking in a smaller setting. 82% agree or strongly agree that teachers will display more individualisation to each student with fewer people in the lesson. Finally, 77% of the students agreed that they would enjoy the class much more than a larger classroom. However, only one fourth strongly agree with the statement.

The overall figure shows that all students have positive attitudes towards SCT with most of them agreeing with the statements given. The two statements which should catch attention are statements 2 and 5. Not all students are confident with those statements, therefore teachers should use this opportunity to find new strategies to make students feel SCT is an easier environment to learn in and to have more fun and enjoyable activities where it can spark students' interest.

There are still around 20 students who disagree with each statement. It is not a great number compared to the others, however, this statistic shows that not all students are 100% confident about SCT. This may be due to the fact that they have not experienced it or are not motivated towards the subject. This all comes down to the teachers teaching methods to engage the students in the learning process.

5.8 Teachers' pressure and stress in English SCT classrooms

Teachers were exclusively asked about the pressure and stress when they teach a smaller class. They all disagreed with the statement that it does cause more pressure and stress.

T1 thinks if there is a chance for teaching a smaller class, there will be “not too much pressure”, T1 added that “as a teacher, you treasure every chance” and that smaller groups give you a better chance to connect with students and be happier. Moreover, T1 included the school policy where each teacher can only be given a certain amount of classes to teach, therefore even if there are smaller classes, it will not increase the number of classes they have to teach leading to “have less stress”.

T2 said “definitely less stress” as the “outcome” will be better making T2 more “relaxing” and “comfortable” in the teaching environment. T2 also mentioned that the discipline is better in a smaller classroom so the teacher can “fulfil the role better leading to more confidence in teaching.”

T3 added “not a big difference because still teaching”

5.9 Teachers’ time and effort towards English SCT classrooms

When asked if it took more time and effort, all three teachers said no. T1 said that the preparation time is still the same and you just have to “Adjust the teaching methods” but it will not affect the planning time. Similarly T2 and T3 said that the time used to make materials is the same and even for marking, it will take less time for a smaller classroom making the process much faster and efficient.

All teachers also mentioned that they would encourage their school to implement smaller class teaching as it would help the students. First, they would try splitting up the larger classes into smaller for trial classes to see if there are any differences.

5.10 Views on continuation of English SCT classrooms

Finally, students and teachers were asked to choose between a small and large class.

5.10.1 Students response

92% of the students picked small class. They were asked for the reasons, the vast majority of them mentioned the following: “More speaking” “More individual attention” “More group work and games” “More fun / enjoyable / useful” “better learning” and “easier to learn”. The other 8% (9 students) out of 108 respondents wrote “No difference” “Still boring” “Idk” as their reasonings to keep larger classes intact.

5.10.2 Teachers’ response

All the teachers chose SCT over teaching in a larger classroom. T1 said teachers get to spend more time and attention with individual students, more time answering questions. There is not much difference in preparing as it is the same curriculum so the same PowerPoints are used, it “Actually saves time if it is a smaller classroom”. Schools can try a “mixed mode” where large classes can be used to teach the curriculum but smaller classes for practice and more “focused teaching”. Students might “get bored of the same arrangement”, this will help them to learn more.

T2 said in a smaller classroom teachers can “understand the students better and prepare the class better based on their needs” and the “discipline is better and can make students do their work more efficiently”. T2 also added that if a teacher has to mark 30-40 papers, it makes it extremely hard to get it done on time and is extra work for teachers. Smaller classes will have less to mark and can show better ability of work.

T3 also mentioned that the student-teacher relationship is better, and “Students are more willing to share with teachers”. Students get more chances to answer questions and participate in class and that it brings “great impact to students”.

5.11 Downsides of English SCT classrooms

5.11.1 Student’s response

Lastly, students and teachers were asked if they thought there were any downsides of SCT. Students mentioned that “teachers do not change how they teach” “No difference in class” “Less friends” “Still boring” “Teacher will make me speak” “Still shy to talk”, while 85% of the others said that there were no downsides or “I don’t know”

This shows that teachers play a very important role in choosing their pedagogical strategies to ensure that SCT brings advantages to the students and can use the resources, time and space smartly to make it a better teaching and learning environment.

5.11.2 Student’s response

T1 said one downside includes the dynamics of the grouping. If all the students in the classroom are passive, “nobody will take the lead role or start the discussion, which will be embarrassing for both teachers and students”. There should be a mix of ability students where they “can learn from each other and have an effective class”. T2 also added that the “teaching method really affects. If just teachers speak, that will be boring and there won’t be any change” .

T2 has not encountered any downsides in her experience. However, she added that the class should not have too few students, if there are only 3-5 students in the class, not a lot can be done. “The activities and tasks will be very limited and it can demotivate the teacher”.

T3 thinks when preparing different materials for different students, that could be “time consuming”, however it is the same for larger classrooms so “not much difference”.

6. Discussion

6.1 Students’ and teachers’ perspective on English SCT classrooms (Key Findings)

6.1.1 Students’ overall perspective on English SCT classrooms

Students and teachers who have had English SCT weigh on the positive experience on the learning development compared to the larger classroom. Students who have not experienced English SCT have high expectations on the difference of class size. Even though the statistics from SCT experienced students do not match its high standards, it still can be spotted that both teachers and students believe that a smaller setting is a much better option for English learners.

By adding the percentages of both experienced and inexperienced SCT English students, the combined percentages in the following areas show a great positive attitude towards English SCT; 1. Increased confidence 80% , 2. Increased motivation 82% , 3. Increased participation 85% , 4. Academic achievement 72%. This shows that the students view learning English in a smaller classroom much better than in a bigger classroom. The personal and language development shows promising value of percentage portraying the positive and encouraging views and opinions towards SCT from all respondents.



Considering the overall statistical data, it is clear that students are in favour of small class teaching as they believe that SCT does change the learning in a positive way, is easier to learn, students get to talk more, get more individualized attention from teachers and is more enjoyable.

80% of the respondents find no downsides of SCT, while the others have some concerns. It includes the unchanged teaching methods chosen by teacher, teacher-dominant class, the dull and repetitive teaching, no motivation and still anxious to speak aloud in class. This depicts that cutting large classes into small ones is not only what it takes for SCT to be effective, but also the pedagogical methods and strategies teachers use in the smaller classes. As there are fewer students, new activities and individualized attention should be given to students, motivating them.

6.1.2 Teachers' overall perspective on English SCT classrooms

All teachers have positive views on learning development of their students through SCT. To summarize, interviewees think SCT reflects a better relationship between students and teachers, students being less anxious, teachers receiving a better chance to cater to individual student needs, and getting to choose appropriate teaching methods and strategies based on their students strengths, weaknesses and progress to boost the learning environment.

The EDB Primary SCT research done in 2009 took account of the teachers' perspectives and views of smaller classes opposed to larger ones. The interviewed teachers show high similarity with the opinions on stress, time and effort. Both parties showed that it took similar preparation time to plan the lessons and the working hours did not change. Additionally,

teachers actually spent less time after working hours on marking, saving them a lot of time.

Most importantly, they found teaching in a smaller classroom to be more flexible, disciplined (Blatchford, Russell & Brown, 2009) , enthusiastic and relaxing.

6.2 Effective SCT teaching methods

The findings show more oral practice in the classroom through discussions, group tasks and more frequent question answering used in the classroom. While acquiring a language, it is essential for learners to have speaking practice as well. Not only does it fulfil the requirements of DSE speaking paper, but also help learn the language itself. “Speaking is the most important skill out of the four” (Madrid, and McLaren, 2006) when it comes to learning language. SCT can encourage teachers to incorporate more oral based tasks in the classroom, such as group tasks, pair work. Interactive and collaborative work (Pedder, 2001). Showing that there is more of oral practice, it can be said that students are able to actively take part in class and practise the content being taught verbally more in SCT. This helps students boost their learning experience and eventually learn more in class.

By analysing the statistics, data and transcripts, there are some ways where both teachers and students have to balance it out to make SCT effective. Firstly, teachers need to choose appropriate teaching methods which are interactive and interesting to students while still relating to the curriculum and content. Some of the examples include better use of group tasks, pair work, interactive and collaborative work in class (Pedder, 2001). Next, it is important to let each and every student know and fully understand what is being taught in class. If they are aware of the knowledge being taught, it will help with their interest and participate in class more. It is easier to do so in a smaller classroom as it helps build better relationships between students and teacher, so students get more individual attention and be

more motivated (Bandiera, 2010). This also helps teachers to monitor student's progress and focus on their strengths and weaknesses (Fassinger, 1995). Lastly, students have to play an essential role in the classroom as well, by being willing to give the chance and opportunity to learn the language. Giving students the advantage to participate more in class is not enough if students themselves are not motivated to give it a chance. Teachers are aware that in a smaller classroom, each student is likely to participate in every activity as there is more time. The "forceful" participation can be used as hidden motivation for the students to learn and engage in the learning process.

7. Limitations

The pandemic limited the students' age to be above 16 as the younger students required parental consent which would have been difficult to obtain online. Gaining junior secondary students' views and opinions would have been a bonus to balance out the whole school balance. Another point is that this research was based on one local secondary school which is small-scaled, more schools would have allowed the research to obtain different views and opinions from different backgrounds of local secondary schools.

8. Recommendations

8.1 Workshops

For the students who have mentioned that there is no difference in teaching or did not find any difference in the experience as they were not motivated. It is recommended for both teachers and students to attend workshops. The workshops designed for students will aim to

educate students on how to use smaller classes as an opportunity to learn more and participate in class. As for the teachers, new pedagogical strategies and methods can be taught to fit the smaller classroom. Teachers can take up more interactive, collaborative and fun tasks for the students to develop interest and language development for the subject making SCT an effective pedagogy. Some teachers may fit into a teacher-dominated classroom. The workshops can encourage them to use newer methods to cater to students' individual needs and boost the learning experience helping them develop the confidence, motivation and interest towards English learning. Currently, local universities such as Education University of Hong Kong, have professional development workshops and training programmes for teachers to learn and share their experiences on how to make SCT effective for both students and teachers (The Education University of Hong Kong, n.d.)

9. Further study

9.1 Future experimental research

A proper research should be conducted where students are split into smaller classes. Researchers can compare the effectiveness of SCT based on language development, personal development and academic performance of the subject. Researchers can also concentrate on the teacher's teaching style, to pick the most effective pedagogical methods and strategies. More local secondary schools of different backgrounds such as bands, and medium-based schools should be included to see the difference in variety of schools. The study should be long-based to analyse the change in subject learning more effectively. This study can be a first step to further researchers on SCT in English Hong Kong Secondary Classrooms. The experience, opinions and views gathered can be compared to the actual experiment and conclude whether SCT acts as a better pedagogy for English Secondary learners.

9.2 Focus on students' academic performance

The academic performance tends to increase as of the findings. Students and teachers who have experienced SCT support the statement. However, there is no hard evidence for the statement. More research is needed to conclude this claim.

10. Conclusion

While there are only a few students who have doubts on SCT, the vast majority of students and teachers agree SCT brings more positive effects than negative. The opinions, views and experience depict that SCT is more effective than learning in a smaller classroom boosting the language learning development. SCT should be used for English classrooms in secondary schools. For SCT to be an effective learning pedagogy, findings conclude that teachers have to pick appropriate teaching methods such as collaborative, interactive and fun tasks so that the students are actively involved in class. Teachers can pick the best methods by giving more individualized attention and catering to their needs to spot out the strengths and weaknesses of the students.

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