



UNIVERSIDAD  
NACIONAL  
AUTÓNOMA DE  
NICARAGUA,  
MANAGUA  
UNAN-MANAGUA

**Topic: Challenges faced by an English teacher in multi-grade schools**

Undergraduate Research to opt to the Bachelor of Arts Degree in Education,  
with Emphasis in English Language Teaching

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February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

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“2023: Seguiremos Avanzando en Victorias Educativas”

### **Endorsement Letter of Approval**

Hereby it is stated that the students: **JORGE JOSUÉ ZELEDÓN ZELEDÓN, BELKIS YADIRA RIVERA MAIRENA and YERLING ESTHER TERCERO GONZÁLEZ**, in compliance with scientific, technical and methodological requirements, have completed their undergraduate program in English Language. They have presented the work *Challenges faced by an English teacher in multi-grade schools* in accordance with the stipulated guidelines for undergraduate studies at the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua, UNAN – MANAGUA; in order to qualify for the Bachelor of Arts Degree in Educational Sciences, with a major in English Language Teaching.

Therefore, the aforementioned students are authorized to make the presentation and public defense of the undergraduate research project before any examining board that is deemed appropriate.

This letter is issued in the city of Estelí, on the third day of the month of February of the year two thousand and twenty-three.

Sincerely,



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Dr. Marjorie N. Gomez

Advisor

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**Abstract**

The main purpose of this investigative work is to analyze what are some of the challenges faced by English teachers in multi-grade schools. This topic is very important, since it contributes to the improvement of multi-grade education, which is a modality that predominates in rural areas of Nicaragua and is a topic of interest to many teachers who work in multi-grade schools. This study tries to find a way to help teachers with these challenges to facilitate their work in the classroom, and there is a better-quality education in the country. In order to carry out this research, it was necessary to make a literature review of the most important aspects of this research topic, among which are: challenges in primary education, the teaching of multi-grade English in Nicaragua and in Central America (e.g., El Salvador).

The research approach was qualitative, the type of research design was interview research. We selected one participant, a multi-grade English teacher from the San José de Pire elementary school in the municipality of Condega, Department of Estelí. The instrument used was a semi-structured interview, which allowed us to know the challenges faced by multi-grade English teachers. Some of the results showed are: classroom management, familiarizing students with the English language, active participation, lack of teacher training, limited didactic resources and limited time. These challenges found were the difficulties with which the teacher struggles the most in the performance of his work. Therefore, teachers ought to require more support from the MINED where they are provided with training focused on multi-grade teaching and learning where strategies could be shared. In addition, they ought to be provided with the necessary resources for the teaching of the English language.

### **Resumen**

El propósito principal de este trabajo investigativo es analizar cuáles son algunos de los desafíos enfrentados por los maestros de inglés en las escuelas multigrado. Este tema es de mucha importancia, ya que contribuye a la mejora de la educación multigrado, la cual es una modalidad que predomina en las áreas rurales de Nicaragua y es un tema de interés para muchos docentes que trabajan en escuelas multigrado. Este estudio intenta encontrar la manera de ayudar a los profesores con estos retos encontrados para facilitar su trabajo en las aulas de clase y que exista una educación de mejor calidad en el país. Para llevar a cabo esta investigación, fue necesario hacer una revisión literaria de los aspectos más importantes de este tema de investigación, Entre los cuales están: los desafíos de los maestros multigrados en educación primaria, la enseñanza del inglés en escuelas multigrado en Nicaragua y en centro América “Ej. El Salvador”.

El enfoque de esta investigación es cualitativo y el tipo de diseño de la investigación es entrevista de investigación. Seleccionamos nuestro participante, un profesor de inglés multigrado de la escuela de primaria San José de Pire en el municipio de Condega, departamento de Estelí. El instrumento utilizado fue una entrevista semiestructurada, la cual nos permitió conocer los desafíos enfrentados por los maestros de inglés multigrado. Algunos de los resultados mostrados son: la gestión del aula, familiarizar el estudiante con el idioma inglés, participación activa, falta de formación del maestro, recursos limitados y tiempo limitado. Estos desafíos encontrados son las dificultades con las cuales el profesor lucha en el desempeño de su trabajo. Por lo tanto, los profesores requieren de más apoyo por parte del MINED donde se les brinde capacitaciones enfocadas en la enseñanza multigrado y también se compartan estrategias de aprendizaje, además se les brinde los recursos necesarios para la enseñanza del idioma inglés.

### **Acknowledgements**

Firstly, we thank God, the creator of everything that exists, for giving us life, health, and the strength to carry on day by day. In a very special way to our parents, for their unconditional support, for being the ones who have always supported us during the course of this career, for being the ones who believed in us helping us to form as a person.

To Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua (FAREM-Estelí), an institution that opened the doors for us to be part of this student family and thus be able to meet one of our proposed goals.

To each of the teachers who taught us throughout these years at the university. Mainly to our advisor and coordinator of the English major, Dra. Marjorie Ninoska Gómez Talavera, for her dedication and support inside and outside the classroom.

Finally, to the person who supported us in this research process, providing us with the necessary information in this thesis, for being the one who opened the doors of their friendship for us.

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## **1. Introduction**

The educational context in Nicaragua has had curricular changes, with the creation of a new educational model, since 2018, with the implementation of English Language as a foreign subject in the primary education. According to Rivera Herrera (2018), English language teaching is an educational program in Nicaragua that started in regular primary schools, but in this year, it began in some multi-grade schools.

Therefore, the purpose of this research will be focused on the state of English language teaching-learning in primary education, in a multi-grade school in Condega municipality; specifically, as to analyze some challenges faced by an English teacher in that school. It is important to note that currently the English teachers in primary education, in Nicaragua, must fulfill many responsibilities in the classroom. Through this study of the teacher's challenges, it will be identified different aspects with which the teacher has to deal, and to describe the difficulties that the teacher faces during the teaching-learning process. Finally, it is expected to know what are some challenges faced by an English teacher in multi-grade schools.

### **1.1. Problem Statement**

#### ***1.1.1 Background Information***

After reviewing different literature and examining documents published worldwide related to Challenges Faced by an English Teacher in Multi-grade Schools, the interest of some authors in investigating the English language teaching process in multi-grade schools is evident.

Among the sources consulted are the following:

Quiel & Correa (2020), in the journal, *The Teaching of English in Multi-grade Schools. Equity or Inequity*, which was carried out at the University of Panamá, Panamá, in order to make

visible if there was equity in the teaching received by students who attended multi-grade schools. For the aforementioned study, the unit of analysis was made up of 46 students who attended levels 5 and 6 grade of some educational institutions; Limon, Raudales, Arosemena and Playa Chiquita, and 6 teaching professionals who worked in the aforementioned institutions. To obtain the information, surveys and structured interviews were used. Some of the results were: Teachers have basic knowledge to teach the English language subject, the time factor is not enough for them to develop this subject, and they do not receive training or seminars to be able to teach this language.

Marmolejo Cifuentes (2020), in the study, *The Challenges of Learning and Teaching English in Rural Schools*, which was carried out at the University of Manizales in Colombia, analyzed and visualized the challenges of teaching and learning English in rural schools and also explored the needs in education related to teaching methodologies, the curriculum, and strategies for learning English. The context of this research was the José Antonio Galán educational institution in the municipality of Manzanares. Some of the results were that teachers do not have adequate tools, material and training for teaching English.

The findings in the previous studies are important, and motivated us to carry out our research, since they are directly related to our research topic, because the aforementioned authors have been interested in learning about the challenges and needs that arise in teaching of the English language in rural schools, and the challenges they have found in other countries are similar to the challenges presented by multi-grade schools in our country.

## **1.2. Justification**

The objective of this work is to investigate what are some of the challenges that an English language teacher faces in teaching the language in multi-grade schools, in rural areas in Nicaragua. This topic is of great interest, since in many schools in our country and in other parts of the world,

English teachers teach two or more grades at the same time, which leads to a complex and challenging job, for which this teaching process can cause stress for some teachers, by having to teach large groups of students and having to teach different subjects. As mentioned by Rodriguez (2004), “The multi-grade school is not able to ensure the learning and skills of the students and one of the factors that most directly affects educational quality is the teacher and their pedagogical practice” (p.135).

According to Rodriguez (2004), teachers are responsible for the knowledge and skills that students obtain throughout a learning process, since the teacher is a fundamental element in a student’s learning, as a guide. In other words, if a teacher does not teach according to the level that students have, they could have difficulties as they advance in their studies.

Therefore, the purpose of this research is to show what are some challenges faced by English teachers every day in the classroom, and to contribute to the improvement of the work carried out by many teachers around the world.

### **1.3. Objectives**

#### ***General objective***

- To analyze what are some of the challenges faced by an English teacher in multi-grade schools.

#### ***Specific Objectives***

- To identify the didactic resources that a multi-grade English teacher has for teaching the language.
- To describe the difficulties that the teacher encounters during the teaching process in multi-grade schools.

**Research Problem.**

What are some of the challenges that a multi-grade English language teacher faces?

**1.4. Key Terms**

- ***Challenges***

Challenges is the action and effect of challenging, is a verb that doing references to compete, to challenge or provoke to somebody. Since is some positive where the people pay to the test and are faced with other things for grow and progress in that what know to do, however sometimes is showed as something negative, because the people do not understand the real meaning of this, also challenges is a competition where a rivalry is manifested and defines who is the best in a competition (Pérez Porto & Gardey, 2009).

- ***Multi-grade***

Multi-grade is that educational situation that joining in a same classroom to students of different grades, during a prograded period, generally by the same teacher, is used mainly in primary because the job's groups are integrated for students of different levels, are primary schools that have of one to three teachers (Instituto Nacional para la Evaluación de la Educación Mexico, 2019).

- ***English language***

English is increasingly vital to success in the education and the 21<sup>st</sup>- century workplace, so the learning helps open those doors in different fields, the English language was originated in Britain in the early Medieval period. It the first language of over 400 million people worldwide and is of old Germanic origin, with many influences in other languages, include French, Latin language family, it is the main language, it is the main language of the United

Kingdom, Ireland, the United States of America, New Zealand, Canada and Australia (Twinkl, 2017).

- ***Foreign English teacher***

A foreign English teacher is to teach English language where is consider as a foreign language or second language which work according to the official educational system. Foreign English teachers are masters of the language, demonstrating high proficiency in reading, writing and speaking and listening in the English language teaching, and they must acquire knowledge in phonetic, phonology, linguistic, grammar and semantic, with these skills instructors create an environment for students to learn effectively. Foreign English teachers usually teach several levels concurrently, from beginning speakers of foreign language to students, and explains instruction in freeing language includes vocabulary, spelling, and accent, as well as the evolution and history of the language (Educaweb, 2008).

- ***Primary Education***

Also is known as elemental education, is a stage of educational system comprising the six academic courses, that it will study between the six to twelve years, is a second level of basic education, where the children learn to read and write to communicate and develop their skills, to learn to live together, to explore the world, understand it and develop as people (Yirda, 2020).

## **1.5. Thesis organization**

This research is distributed into five chapters. Chapter 1 Introduction. This contains the introduction, problem statement, background information, justification, objectives, and key terms.

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Chapter 2 Literature review. This chapter presents different consulted theories related to our research topic. Among them are: Challenges in primary education, the role of the English teacher in the classroom, multi-grade teaching, multi-grade in Nicaragua, English subject as a foreign language in primary education, and multi-grade in Central America.

Chapter 3 Research design. In this chapter is the research approach, type of research design, context of study and participants, ethical issues, data collection methods, and data analysis.

Chapter 4 Results and discussion. This chapter shows the results obtained in this research and also the discussion of these results.

Finally, Chapter 5 Conclusion. This chapter presents the conclusions of this research.

## **2. Literature Review**

This chapter presents the theories that provide a framework in relation to this research, in which there will be presented topic headings and subheadings in support for the main purpose of this thesis. Therefore, through the analysis of different research, we pretend to visualize the challenges, among other aspects, faced by English language teachers in multi-grade education, using a variety of reliable resources.

### **2.1. Challenges in primary education**

According to Freire Contreras, et al.,(2021) in primary education there are many challenges, mainly social-educational challenges in multi-grade classroom. Challenges that are faced every day by the teachers and students in their classroom. These challenges mentioned by the author are: the outside difficulties the teacher face in the educational context, the problems that the students live far from their classroom which affects the academic performance, and the organization of content activities with the suggested time for different grades. Lastly, the socioeconomic vulnerability because this affects meeting some necessities in the school, due to the poverty of some families. The researchers mention some challenges in the educational process, focused mainly in the performance of English teachers in multi-grade schools, so they are whom face the majority of challenges and difficulties.

This research has relation with our research in process, inasmuch as it is focused on the challenges faced by the English teacher in multi-grade schools. And in this previously mentioned research, the authors mention the social-educational challenges in primary education, which can be taxing for the teacher. For these reasons, it is necessary for educational institutions to create new curricula which meshes with the real situation in multi-grade, experienced by the teachers in the classroom during the teaching- learning process.

Also, there are identified challenges related with the educational program policies in English language teaching in primary education, some are mentioned. For example, the lack of didactic and technologic resources appropriated for the English learning. When a teacher does not account with the necessary conditions of didactic resources, he will get little interest from students because without tools the class is not active, and is not productive for the students. Mentioned by the authors, the highlighted challenges facing in classroom are problematic which currently exist in the multi-grade school.

Among some of the challenges faced by primary English teachers are:

- ***Classroom management***

Classroom management is the process of organizing and running the classroom environment. Many see it as maintaining order through the control of teachers. However, classroom management is much more than that. This also includes setting up and maintaining the teaching environment so that the educational goals can be achieved (Savage & Savage, 2009).

Classroom management paves the way for teachers to get students to learn, and good classroom management is more than just being strict, authoritarian, or simply being organized. It contains routines, rules, and consequences, and it creates a set of expectations that are used in an organized classroom environment (Mohamed Qassimi, 2021, p. 2).

According to the aforementioned authors, classroom management refers to the wide variety of skills and techniques that teachers use to keep students organized, orderly, focused, attentive, on task, and academically productive during a class.

- ***Large groups of students***

Adil (2022), Claims that:



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A large number of students in the classroom produce a lot of disturbance and stress for the teachers because teaching a large number of students the teachers have to do more effort and hardworking.

The problems caused by a large number of students are given below:

- Disturbed the teacher by making a lot of noise.
- Difficult to manage the class students.
- Engaging crowded students in learning is very difficult.
- The learning resources are not available for all the students (pág. 18).

From our perspective, a large group of students can cause the teacher a more complex job, he has to make an effort to maintain the discipline and attention of their students, and it is also difficult for the teacher to identify the difficulties that some students have in their learning. On the other hand, it affects the development of skills and knowledge of students.

- ***Lack of teacher training***

Education is one of the major public investments in building the capacity of human resources with a multidimensional aim, including economic, cultural, and social benefits. Thus, it needs proper attention to provide quality input to stakeholders. However, it has been observed that quality is being compromised. The quality of education is greatly affected by the lack of sufficient qualified teachers and facilities such as space, reference materials, and teaching aids or models. Inadequate systems for evaluating students and the lack of training for most instructors can also make teaching impractical.

If teachers do not have pedagogical training, they are unable to set their lesson objective, so they become disorganized. Having pedagogical training is helpful in many ways. For one thing, it helps them to set their objective in a concrete way. In addition, they make

their class participatory and set up the class for group discussion (Demas T & Getahun M, 2018, p. 6).

From the above perspective, teacher training is a very important part of education, since every day challenges are presented to teachers in the classroom and it is of great importance that they be professionally trained to be able to solve classroom problems. The teacher also has the responsibility to train students in all aspects of their education and if the teacher is not trained, he will not be able to transmit knowledge according to the level of competence that his students should have.

- ***Lack of pedagogical technical advice***

The pedagogical technical advisor is a key piece in the training of teachers in front of groups in primary education. Its function is to provide work strategies, methodologies, teaching materials, planning advice, and the use of technology, among others. However, this is not the case in reality for different reasons: there is no manual that regulates its functions, nor is there a regulation that specifies the profile of the PTA (Pedagogical Technical Advisor). Therefore, in most cases, whoever carries out this work cannot train, if he does not know what he must provide to his advisees (Morales Quintero, 2009, p. 1).

Taking into account the words of Morales Quintero, the pedagogical accompaniment importance, which must be provided to teachers, in order to raise the educational quality and motivate them. Through the Ministry of Education (MINED) a pedagogical accompaniment in multi-grade education is vital, since they are a significant key to the educational process.

- ***Limited didactic resources***

Teaching with limited resources simply means that you don't have access to the diverse tools or means many schools, with better resources, typically provide in order to strengthen the teaching. There are many types of teaching resources that can enhance instruction or help deliver an especially engaging lesson. Some examples of resources that are typically ought to be available to English teachers include:

- Wi-Fi
- A projector
- A copier
- Textbooks
- Whiteboards
- Computers or others types of technology devices

Teaching resources aren't just restricted to technology and equipment. Others types of resource limitations could include a lack of adequate classroom space or not having a teaching assistant, aide, or other support. Some teachers have access to the resources and materials but are inappropriate for the age or level of the students they are teaching (Turner, 2021, p. 5).

According to the aforementioned author, the use of didactic material in schools is of great importance, since they make it easier for students to acquire new knowledge and develop new skills, and the lack of these teaching materials may be one of the main causes of the lack of attention that students present in the classroom.

- ***Limited time***

Time is the most important thing in learning the English language. It takes time for the teachers to observe their students and teach them at their level. The time of the class is very little for the teachers to teach the English language.

This is one of the most difficult tasks the teachers face to teach in less time. This is probably why is not possible for the teachers to complete topics in less time, which is not enough (Adil, 2022, p. 25).

In the previous findings, the author states that the time in the classroom is very limited to develop all the activities with the students. Also, many teachers due to lack of time do not finish developing a topic or clarifying doubts to the students.

## **2.2. The role of the English teacher in the classroom**

In the word of Mora Nuñez (2017):

The English teacher has been subject to changes as education has progressed, which is why the educator has to be in constant training, acquisition and updating of knowledge in teaching learning methodologies and technological tools that help good academic performance (p. 1).

The role of the teacher is essential for the development of skills, personal growth, meaningful learning and motivation to learn. The teacher is the main mediator in the classroom. Being a factor of great importance in the formation, both academic and of the self-esteem of the student. The role of the teacher is not only to provide information and control discipline, but to be a mediator between the student and the environment, ceasing

to be the protagonist of learning to become the guide or companion of the student (Briceño, 2021, p. 1).

Based on the words of the previous authors, the role of the teacher in the classroom is fundamental, since he helps students by imparting knowledge so that they learn effectively and can develop skills. Nowadays, a teacher must keep their knowledge updated and be in constant training to provide a quality education.

### **2.3. Multi-grade Teaching**

Multi-grade teaching is generally to teach two or more grades at the same time by the same teacher in a classroom, multi-grade teaching is not a new concept in our system of education, nowadays is being practiced in many schools, the teacher has to adapt many techniques and approaches to help the learners of different grades in the same classroom, also is to teach the content to the students of different learning levels, skills and abilities, since all learners do not possess the same level of learning (Thomas & Shaw, 1992, p. 2).

The aforementioned authors explain what multi-grade teaching consists of, and it is understood by them as a great responsibility that implies a loaded process of work, mainly by the teacher, since he has the responsibility of teaching in different levels. Multi-grade teaching is complicated, but it is a necessity in our society, especially in rural areas. There exists the necessity to employ this multi-grade modality, since elementary education has the purpose to ensure access, equity and quality of education for all children in communities dispersed around the country<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mined.gob.ni/educacion-primaria-multigrado/>

### **2.3.1 Multi-grade in Nicaragua**

The multi-grade teaching in Nicaragua, as stated previously, is an educational modality in primary education that has the purpose of ensuring the access, equity and quality in the education of children of disperse communities. In Nicaragua, this modality has more than half a century, and arise as an alternative of attention to those population of students in the smallest communities, so currently where exists a major number of schools with multi-grade classrooms is in the departments of Boaco, Chontales, Jinotega, Matagalpa, the Miner Triangle and RAACN. In those locations, the population of students attended are in the ages of six to twelve years old, in the six grades of primary education. In many schools of Nicaragua, two or three teachers work who attend primary education. In other places, there is only one teacher who attends all six grades, this indicates that the classroom is shared by students of different learning levels by one teacher that facilitates the educational process, supported by participative techniques and methodologies. Also, there they are using text books that help the students and teacher to have a cooperative work according to the model of primary education in the multi-grade modality (MINED, 2022, p. 2).

This information explains the role of the multi-grade education in Nicaragua, and tell us the places where this education has more impact in Nicaragua. In other words, where it is more implemented this modality, due to the little population of students in those communities, and how the teachers are expected to use different techniques to develop their classes with students of different ages.

### **2.3.2 English subject as a foreign language in primary education in Nicaragua**

The English language was implemented in primary education in the year 2018 as a way of the students to get the basic competences and an integral training, according to the necessity

and requirements of this country. It is expected that the learning of a new language will develop linguistics abilities, which are going to allow the students to respond to the challenges and demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with the objective that the students achieve an A2 level to finish their primary education, adopting a communicative approach, promoting the use of English language as the mean for principal communication in the classroom, in this way to implement active methodologies that guarantee the development of the four skills, and the pedagogical units are organized by cycle. (MINED, 2018, p. 3).

Therefore, the malla curricular<sup>2</sup> gives us information about English as a foreign language in primary education. This is a subject that was implemented with different expectations, mainly in the development of this country, namely, as is in the development of social and educational aspects. English language has been named as the foreign language to learn for the Nicaraguans.

Currently, the Education Ministry does not have an actual ‘malla curricular’ for the English language teaching in multi-grade schools, so this is a new modality that begun in this year 2022, and the teacher uses the same pedagogical units for primary education but it is modified by them to develop the English language subject.

### **2.3.3 Multi-grade in Central America.**

Currently, it exists formative educational deals which are focused on the modality of multi-grade education. For example, in El Salvador, this kind of formative modality has the purpose to increase the coverage figures in access to educational services. El Centro Educativo Multigrado (CEM) is characterized by the combination of a small member of teachers with different educational sections that correspond to a group of students of

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<sup>2</sup> Curriculum acts as a tool for didactic action that focuses on the educational trajectory, promoting the development of English language that establishes an interaction between children.

dissimilar ages. The beginning of educational multi-grade was expanded in the early nineties, therefore, the rural area historically has been benefited with this kind of education, where this modality fell, having a significant incidence (Ventura, 2016, p. 54).

In the aforementioned research, the author explains the perspectives in the multi-grade education in the municipality of Masahuat, Santa Ana Department. Since most schools in this country are multi-grade, for this reason, it is necessary to detail the conditions of the educational process; such as: teaching specialization and school performance, curricula compliance, teaching methods and educational spaces, and with the program of CEM, it is known every of these perspectives that this Central American country has in the multi-grade modality.

The research which is focused in multi-grade education in a country of Central America, El Salvador, has seen an evolution of this modality over the years so it is considered an important modality. It has had a significant impact in primary education, mainly in the rural area due to the needs of the countryside in which there is a low number of students, and mainly this is in rural areas, as it is in our country of Nicaragua, in the current context. This modality has had a great impact, because, there are many places where there are few students per grade. The existence of this modality in many schools has given the opportunity for these students to learn a new language, being a program that began only in the urban area and now being in multi-grade. It has allowed the children to learn a foreign language, because it is interesting for children to learn new things at an early age. At the same time, the teacher has a very loaded job.

Also, going back to the educational program (CEM); a program whose work with this kind of education takes into account several aspects of this modality in relation to the curricula. In Nicaragua a program like this has been considered in order to work directly with multi-grade schools, so that each one of the problems that are experienced in these schools for both students



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and teachers is identified and thus be able to be solved and to make a change in the curriculum, more related to the reality that is lived in multi-grade classrooms.

### **3. Research Design**

#### **3.1. Research approach**

The methodology presented is qualitative research, which it is the approach of the research, since we are studying the challenges faced by the English teachers in a multi-grade school of our country. Therefore, we pretend to describe several of those challenges, and the necessities that the teacher has in the English subject at the multi-grade school San José de Pire in Condega municipality. Through qualitative research, we also analyzed what multi-grade education is like in Nicaragua, and the needs that exist to establish a curriculum mesh with multi-grade English language teaching so that teachers do not have too many challenges.

Qualitative research is an activity where most of the question being asked by the researchers is involving the extent to which various learnings, attitudes, or ideas exist, or how accurately they are developed, and it is a naturalistic approach.... there is a greater emphasis of holistic description, and this qualitative research allows us to use data collection tools, such as is the interview, observations and other (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012, p. 126).

The definition about qualitative research is due to that fact that our research has a qualitative approach. Since we carried out this research taking into account the type of research design and the type of data collection that is considered to be used in this type research, to obtain the necessary information of this research, to establish a relationship and know the experiences and opinions about the challenges faced in multi-grade schools by the English teachers.

### **3.2. Type of research design**

This present research was carried out by a type of research design that is called interview research which it is found within a survey research approach. It was decided to use this research design, since it is related with the instrument that we have applied to collect data.

Research interview is a method use by qualitative research. It is an approach that continues to expand, diversify and evolve with the reflexive revision of long-standing assumptions. Core principles of the traditional model of the structured interview, such as the distinctive roles of the interviewer and respondent have been reformulated in number of ways and across wide disciplines (Gubrium, Holstein, Marvasti, & McKinney, 2012, p. 9).

In this type of research design, the researcher has the opportunity to use one technique of data collection, an interview instrument. In the case of this study, a semi structured interview instrument was applied for this research.

### **3.3. Context of the study and Participants**

#### ***3.3.1 Context***

Our context was San José de Pire elementary school which is located in San José Community in the municipality of Condega, department of Estelí. It was founded in the year 2000 but until this year 2022 English was implemented as another subject. This is a small multi-grade school, since it only has 4 classrooms. In this school there are 45 students and 4 teachers for the different subjects, including an English teacher. In this school classes are taught only in the morning shift.

The school lacks didactic resources in English to support the teaching process. Since the teacher has to provide others resources to teach the English language, therefore, this is one of the greatest needs that this school has.

### **3.3.2 Participant**

Our research is focused on multi-grade English teachers. We selected the English teacher from the San José de Pire primary school, who provided us with the information we needed about the school and his work as a multi-grade English teacher for our research.

The professor has a degree in English language teaching and he is a graduate of the Martin Luther University in Condega. He has a year of experience teaching English classes. Furthermore, he teaches English classes in 2 other multi-grade schools in the municipality of Condega.

### **3.4. Ethical Issues**

It was important to practice ethics to protect our participant. After having explained the objective of our research to the multi-grade English teacher, through an informed consent for the research participant, we asked him for his support to participate in our research, where we asked him to answer the questions of a semi-structured interview, which was also recorded to facilitate data analysis.

We asked our participant if we could use his name in our research, however, he said no. In this case, we replied to him that to protect his identity we could use the pseudonym of “Participant 1” (man, 31 years old, multi-grade English teacher). In this way we took into account the ethics to use the information of the teacher, since he is the only participant in our research. The information of the informed consent is in Annexes.

### **3.5. Data Collection methods**

The data collection instrument used in this research was the semi-structured interview. This helped to gather the information that we needed to achieve our objectives in this important research topic.

Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun (2012) define the semi-structured interview:

Semi-structured interview are verbal questionnaires, consist on a series of questions designed to elicit specific answers from respondents. Often it is used to obtain information that can later be compared and contrasted and is conducted toward the end of a study and it is most useful for obtaining information to test a specific hypothesis that the research has in mind (p. 451).

We choose this type of instrument, since it was the one that best adapted to our research, because, the semi-structured interview allowed us to ask open questions to the interviewee, and also to clarify doubts about the answers given by him, in order to obtain clear information.

### **3.6. Data analysis**

In the present study, data were collected through semi-structured interview, which took about twenty minutes with the participant. This had seven questions and important aspects of the literature were taken into account to create them. Each of these questions had the purpose of obtaining relevant information for our research. In addition, the interview was recorded. Later, the audio of the interview was transcribed verbatim to facilitate the analysis of the data collected. Then, the data was reduced to look for patterns and to organize it based on themes. The organization was carried out to present it later through direct and quotes in block, in the results and discussion section.

#### **4. Results and Discussion**

This chapter presents the results obtained in our research through a semi-structured interview applied to a multi-grade English teacher and also discusses them.

##### **Question 1. What have been the most significant challenges that you have found in teaching the English language in the last year?**

Participant 1 (man, 31 years old, multi-grade English teacher) answered that some of the most significant challenges he has found in teaching English in the last year are: “familiarizing students with the English language, active participation, finding suitable activities for each group of students, and the absence of students”.

Inquiring about what have been the most significant challenges in teaching the English language, we found that the teacher has to struggle with many difficulties every day in the classroom, and find a way to make his class successful. One of these challenges is to familiarize students with the language. This in order to adapt students to interact in a new language. Also, another challenge is active participation so that students can develop communication skills in the English language and they can participate and express themselves without fear of being wrong. Another challenge found is finding suitable activities for each group of the students, so that their classes are attractive to students and achieve meaningful learning. Finally, the absence of students is a challenge that occurs daily in the classroom and this implies a low level of learning in students who do not attend class every day.

##### **Question 2. What are the didactic resources that you currently have in the classroom?**

Participant 1 (man, 31 years old, multi-grade English teacher) answered that the didactic resources he currently has in the classroom are: “flash cards, roulette, dice, balloons, colored sheets, cardboard, flipcharts and music player”.

According to the information that the participant gave us, we can say that there is a lack of teaching resources for teaching English and most of the resources that the teacher currently has are his, since he has to create his own resources teaching. Therefore, the teacher needs to be supported by the MINED with the necessary resources to facilitate the teaching-learning process of the English language. In addition, the lack of didactic resources causes a lack of motivation in students to learn English as well as to have a little understanding of the topic.

**Question 3. What kind of training have you received in recent years to attend multi-grade students and teach English classes?**

Participant 1 (man, 31 years old, multi-grade English teacher) answered that he has received two training courses that are given in the EPI<sup>3</sup> to all English teachers, but only one of them has been focused on multi-grade teaching. This was in order to help teachers answer to the needs of the students, and also to be effective teachers teaching English classes.

He also said “I need more training that focuses on sharing new learning strategies”.

Based on the participant's response, there is a lack of training for multi-grade English teachers, since the training they receive is at a general level for all English teachers, these are not focused on teaching multi-grade English. The participant mentions that there is a lack of training

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<sup>3</sup> Inter-learning Pedagogical Meetings

where learning strategies are shared so that students do not feel bored with the same activities every day.

**Question 4. How do you organize English activities in the classroom in the time assigned by the MINED?**

Participant 1 (man, 31 years old, multi-grade English teacher) answered that he organizes the activities in the classroom in an orderly manner, following the sequence of the lesson plan. “Giving a specific time to each activity”, to achieve what is indicated by the MINED”.

In the previous answer, the participant described how he organizes the activities in the time assigned by the MINED. Since the time assigned for these activities is limited. This means that the teacher has to be precise in what he is going to teach and make the most of the time with the students. He must plan what he is going to teach his students in order to carry out all the activities in the lesson plan.

**Question 5. Could you describe in detail one hour of your work at the school?**

Participant 1 (man, 31 years old, multi-grade English teacher) answered:

When I arrive to the classroom; I first organize the students around the classroom so that I can identify the students who are not participating, then, I start the activities with a warm up to review the previous topic. I present the new topic. I introduce the new vocabulary using flashcard. Later, I develop the listening activities. I develop speaking through dynamics. I carry out reading through activities to practice reading and pronunciation. In written I guide students to write sentences, filling in the blanks, and dictation. Finally, I evaluate the learning acquired through dynamics.



The participant described to us how he carries out his work at the school. In order to make his class successful, the first thing he does is organize the students to control everyone and thus identify those who do not participate or have more difficulties. In addition, he has to look for attractive activities for his students so that they are always active in the whole class, and that through these activities the students can obtain significant learning.

**Question 6. What techniques do you use in the classroom to keep students organized?**

Participant 1 (man, 31 years old, multi-grade English teacher) answered:

One of the techniques that I use to keep students organized is: I use sad and happy faces and stick them on the board. If any of the students misbehave in class, I write the student's name on the sad face.

I organize the chairs in a circle so that the first grades have that clear understanding of the subject.

In this answer, the participant explains the way he uses to maintain order in his students. The first thing he does is organize them, and he also looks for a way so that the students are not distracted and are attentive to the class. This in order to obtain better learning and greater interaction between students. Since maintaining discipline in a classroom is a challenge faced by teacher in any subject.

**Question 7. What has been the most rewarding thing about working in multi-grade?**

For participant 1 (man, 31 years old, multi-grade English teacher), the most rewarding thing about working in multi-grade has been: "I see how the students become familiar with the

## CHALLENGES FACED BY AN ENGLISH TEACHER IN MULTI-GRADE SCHOOLS

English language, the ability they have developed to understand words and answer questions in English and how they enjoy the English class”.

Based on the participant`s response, we conclude that being an English teacher in multi-grade schools generates satisfaction when seeing the progress that the students is acquiring during the learning process, and how they use the language outside the classroom and share knowledge among their classmate.

## 5. Conclusion

We decided to carry out this research topic because we observed that in the San José de Pire school there was only one English teacher who taught all grades of primary school, and we wanted to know the difficulties that the teacher faces when carry out this work.

This research was focused on investigating what are the challenges that English teachers face on a daily basis in multi-grade school, and this research was carried out with the objective of analyzing and describing the challenges faced by an English teacher in multi-grade schools.

Based on the results of our research, the main challenges that English teachers face in multi-grade schools are: classroom management, familiarizing students with the English language, active participation, lack of teacher training, limited didactic resources and limited time. These challenges were identified, subsequently analyzed, and it was concluded that multi-grade teaching requires creative, dynamic, and professional teachers trained to teach the English language, since more training is needed focused on multi-grade teaching. In addition, teachers ought to have access to various teaching resources to facilitate student learning.

Therefore, we can also say that the objectives proposed in our work have been achieved, since we managed to identify and describe some of the challenges faced by multi-grade English teachers, which helped us to know what their work is like in rural schools.

This study hopes to contribute to the improvement of multi-grade education, since it was possible to identify some of the main difficulties that exist in this modality and thus seeks to provide a solution to these problems in multigrade education.

It is important to note that one of the limitations in this study was that the first participant denied us his support when we were going to apply the interview. Although the first participant

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did not want to participate in our research, this did not stop us from continuing with the research process, since we had to find another participant from another school who would offer us their support.

We recommend to future researchers who wish to resume this research topic, to carry out the interview with three or more participants to compare different points of view and experiences.

This topic is of great importance, since it is a reality experienced by many teachers in Nicaragua and around the world. Therefore, it is necessary to work hard on this topic to reduce these difficulties and there can be a quality education.

### **5.1 Recommendations**

- Multi-grade teachers should implement attractive activities to achieve meaningful students learning.
- MINED should provide the necessary didactic resources to multi-grade schools to facilitate the teaching-learning of the English language.
- MINED should facilitate more training focused on teaching the English language in multi-grade to guarantee quality education in this modality.
- MINED should provide more time in the lesson plan to develop the activities with the students.

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## Annexes



### Semi-structured interview

**General data:**

**Names and surnames of the interviewers:** Jorge Josué Zeledòn Zeledòn, Belkis Yadira Rivera

Mairena, Yerling Esther Tercero Gonzalez

**Name and surnames of the interviewee:** “Participant 1”

**School name:** San José de Pire, Condega, Estelí.

**Date:** December, 08<sup>th</sup>, 2022

**Time:** 20 Minutes

1. What have been the most significant challenges that you have found in teaching the English language in the last year?
2. What are the didactic resources that you currently have in the classroom?
3. What kind of training have you received in recent years to attend multi-grade students and teach English classes?
4. How do you organize English activities in the classroom in the time assigned by the MINED?
5. Could you describe in detail one day of your work at the school?
6. What techniques do you use in the classroom to keep students organized?
7. What has been the most rewarding thing about working in multi-grade?



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Estelí, 22 de noviembre de 2022.

### Consentimiento informado

#### Estimado participante:

El propósito de este consentimiento es para solicitarle su apoyo como participante en la investigación **Challenges faced by an English teacher in multigrade schools** la cual será llevada a cabo por los estudiantes **Jorge Josué Zeledón Zeledón, Belkis Yadira Rivera Mairena y Yerling Esther Tercero González**. Estudiantes de V de la carrera Licenciatura en Inglés, turno Profesionalización, la investigación corresponde a la asignatura seminario de graduación impartida por la docente Dra. **Marjorie Ninoska Gómez Talavera**.

Si usted accede a participar en este estudio, se le pedirá responder a las preguntas de una entrevista semi-estructurada. Esta tomará aproximadamente 20 minutos. La entrevista será grabada para que los investigadores puedan transcribir después lo que usted haya expresado.

La participación en esta investigación es voluntaria. Su nombre no será utilizado en la investigación, para reservar su identidad utilizaremos el seudónimo "Participant 1".

Agradecemos su participación.

Firma del participante

### **Transcription**

1. What have been the most significant challenges that you have found in teaching the English language in the last year?

One of the challenge with which I struggle, is to familiarize the student with the English language. Another is to provoke the active participation in students, because English is that students feel fear to participate. Also find the appropriate activities for each group of students, because sixth grade does not react the same as to first grade, activities so we have to be conductive to create them, and at the same time that they like. Another challenge is the absence of students, since many of them miss class, those are great challenges.

#### 1.2 How do you solve these challenges?

To Familiarize the students with the language is done through ways that the student like, for example music that they like and other activities that they also like and obviously do not speak in Spanish; but we spoke in English in a way that the students can understand with gestures, and in that way innocently achieves that familiarization with the language, since is inevitable that where only English is spoken and with creative class the student appropriates the language to the point that misses it, it is not achieve with all students, but with the majority and with the polling test it is shown as the students have familiarized.

The solution with the student's absence is to talk to parents or guardians in school meetings explaining how important the subject of English, is that is not an option that is very necessary to study it, at the same time motivate them, at least in competition activities there are students who do not then is where it is taken advantage of and they are told it is because you lose a lot of class. To provoke the active participation of the students is achieved by integrating them to participate

all, because inevitably everyone has to participate it is not an option everyone has to participate, because the root that some students participate the rest feel committed to participate, also the activities of competences cause the participation, because everyone wants to win, but the point of all this is to be attractive with the content playful activities, for this reason the activities are ludic, because a boring music does not provoke active participation that is need one that motivate students, mainly that the activities are suitable for each group of students analyze each group, because I as a teacher each group. I know in which schools like them react to each activity. I know that there are schools where they do not like to dance. I know where they do not sing, and others like to write, and also which are the most restless students, then I adapt the activities, then an activity that served him in one school, then applies it in another bet with another purpose, it is changed that you can do the same activity, but with another approach mainly that is pleasant, dynamic and of competition.

2. What are the didactic resources that you currently have in the classroom?

Because I am a multi-grade teacher and I have to move from school to school, I always try to have material that can be manageable movable such as, flash cards, roulette, dice, balloons, colored sheets, cardboard, flipcharts, and music player which is very fundamental in English class.

3. What kind of training have you received in recent years to attend multi-grade students and teach English classes?

Of training I have received a training course that was carried out in the EPI for teachers of regular and multi-grade primary English, in which all the needs of students of the class are developed and the effectiveness, these are two formative courses one that was carried out the last

Saturday of each month, but in itself they are not specially directed to multi-grade, it can be said that one has been received specifically to multi-grade.

### 3.1 Do you think that you need more training to teach multi-grade class?

Yes, I need more training that focuses on sharing new learning strategies, because for the multi-grade modality, you need even more to have strategies, since I attend three schools we need to train us where many strategies are shared to vary them, and that the students do not get bored, if it a training focused on this that is needed.

### 4. How do you organize the English activities in the classroom in the time assigned by the MINED?

The activities are organized in such a way that the students have an active participation, that the students like as the playful activities, try not to be seated, to be moving, I organize the chairs that everyone can perceive, I organize them in circles to see the students who is not participating, and assigned a time to each activity, since the activities that take more time are those of listening and speaking to those are assigned a little more time, the vocabulary takes less time, because it is developed during the class, and also the evaluation are small activities that do not involve much time, and at the beginning a specific time for the start of the class, and introduce the content or do review, there are day that culminated with writing and grammar always attractive based on the parameters, giving a specific time to each activity to take control of the whole class, and it is about giving more time to those that require more, since some are ten minutes others are fifteen minutes and some five minutes.

### 5. Could you describe in detail one day of your work at the school?

A day of work because the first thing I do is enter the classroom and say “hello” and ask them how they are doing? Everything I do in English after each one answers me. I organize the students around the classroom so that I can identify the students who are not participating. Then, I start the activities with a warm up. I choose the music we sing and dance to review or remember the previous topic. In the prior knowledge, I usually do a brainstorm showing some flashcards and for the review. I do dynamic that can be pulling the marker or London Bridge, usually I introduce the new vocabulary using flashcards or Realia depending the content. Then, I start with the average activities the first thing I do is, I develop the listening activities using, dynamic and music, activities such as listening locking, listen and arise the hands, listen and touch. Then, I develop speaking through dynamics. I do competitions and they feel very satisfied because they also like to compete, also I continue with grammar. I carry out reading trough activities to practice reading and pronunciation. In writing, I guide activities such as ordering words that look for them inside a box, and dynamics where students go to write words or sentences, filling in the blanks, and dictation. Finally, I evaluate the learning acquired through dynamics, where I throw a ball and the one who drops the ball tells me a word of what we are studying, and throw the ball one more time to another students, and among themselves they can evaluate some skill by making them dialogue to evaluate speaking for first and second grade only. Speaking and listening are evaluated and for the other higher grades, also writing and reading, and I say goodbye to them in English and give them a hug.

6. What techniques do you use in the classroom to keep the student organized?

Techniques that I use to keep students organized is: I use sad and happy faces stick them on the board. If any of the students misbehave in class, I write the student’s name on the sad face. I keep them controlled, and I organize the chairs in a circle so that the first grades have that clear

understanding of the subject, and so I organize them to better develop the class, so that of them are participating another way to keep the behavior is that when a student knows who to pronounce a word another of his classmates help him to pronounce to make the class more interactive, and I will be monitoring how the other classmate responds.

7. What has been the most rewarding thing about working in multi-grade?

The most rewarding thing is I see how the students becomes familiar with the English language, the ability they have developed to understand words and answer questions in English, and how they enjoy the English class that is very gratifying to see how they are learning English as they speak some words, and also I feel very happy how parents say that their children really like English, because it is an active and very creative class.