ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation:	"Speak English": Challenges of and Opportunities for Implementing National Education Language Policy in Rural Nicaragua
	Lindsay Walberg, Doctor of Philosophy, 2018
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The Nicaraguan Ministry of Education (MINED) developed a national language policy to include English as a required subject for the entire five years of secondary school. This case study explores how teachers implement English language mandates in public high schools in rural Nicaragua along with how they are supported by Ministry-provided resources, curriculum, and training. For students living in rural Nicaragua, educational opportunities are affected by the complex interaction of geographic, socioeconomic, and political influences. The traditional narrative of rural Nicaragua is one of scarcity – insufficiently developed infrastructure, a shortage of qualified teachers, inadequate resources, generational poverty, geographic isolation, and limited access to modern technology. This study adds a more nuanced perspective to this deficit narrative by exploring how educators draw upon existing resources to implement and expand upon

the mandated language curriculum. This qualitative inquiry also highlights additional perspectives on how stakeholders, such as teachers, parents, students, and administrators, conceptualize the value and utility of English language education. Although the MINED articulates the purpose of English acquisition as a catalyst for greater engagement in a globalized economy, stakeholders express different views of its importance and usefulness to their everyday realities.

The findings indicate that the MINED has provided increased support for English instruction by creating a complete English language curriculum, distributing new English textbooks for all grade levels, increasing access to technology, enhancing electronic resources through a well-designed educative portal, and establishing a system of regular collaborative planning meetings. Although these developments represent a significant improvement, there remain serious challenges regarding school infrastructure, large class sizes, integration of technology in rural areas, assessment of student learning, and linking English curriculums to the reality of college and career readiness. Students, parents, and school staff consistently express a strong belief that learning English is important and potentially useful in the four areas of university study, employment, intercultural communication, and immigration. Although students are highly motivated to learn English for future economic, academic, and social benefits, all stakeholders acknowledge that students are not proficient in English after five years of study in a rural high school.

“SPEAK ENGLISH”: CHALLENGES OF AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPLEMENTING NATIONAL EDUCATION LANGUAGE POLICY IN RURAL NICARAGUA

by

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Acronyms

CEFR (also referred to as CEFRL) – Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment

DR-CAFTA – Dominican Republic–Central America Free Trade Agreement

ESLC – European Survey on Language Competences

EU – European Union

ELT – English Language Teaching

FSLN - Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional [Sandinista National Liberation Front]

MINED – Nicaraguan Ministry of Education

OECD – Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

SIMCE – Sistema de Medición de la Calidad de la Educación, inglés. [Education Quality Measurement System, English]

RAAN – North Atlantic Autonomous Region

RAAS – South Atlantic Autonomous Region

Chapter 1: Introduction

Overview

This study seeks to understand how local actors in a plurilingual society respond to language policy mandates inspired by global trends and entrenched power structures that promote English proficiency as a mechanism for economic growth and global integration. Exploring English language instruction in rural Nicaragua represents a unique opportunity to explore the tensions between national policy mandates and local policy interpretation because the Nicaraguan Ministry of Education (MINED) adopted a policy to include English as a required subject for the entire five years of secondary school and updated it in 2009 to place an emphasis on communicative English. Nicaragua's English language mandate promotes the acquisition of English as a globally powerful language and a necessary skill to meaningfully participate in modern, interconnected communities.

This qualitative study provides a powerful account of the challenges facing English language instruction and the benefits from it for stakeholders in rural Nicaragua, who face extreme conditions of poverty, a fragile infrastructure, geographic isolation, and limited academic and employment prospects. In this context, it is enlightening to explore how teachers and students reconcile MINED mandates for English education within conditions of scarcity and limited resources. This study seeks to understand how teachers implement English language mandates in public secondary schools in rural Nicaragua along with how they are supported by Ministry-provided resources, curriculum, and training. Additionally, given the highly-constrained conditions of rural schooling in Nicaragua, this qualitative inquiry highlights additional perspectives on how key

stakeholders, such as teachers, parents, students, and administrators, conceptualize the value and utility of English language education.

Conceptual Framework

This qualitative study is guided by Spolsky's (2004) conceptual framework of language policy, which outlines three components: 1) language practices, 2) language ideology, and 3) language management. Spolsky defines specific domains of language use, such as families, schools, religious organizations, workplaces, local and national governments, and supra-national organizations, and outlines how all three language components are interconnected in each domain. Language practices are habitual language choices that reflect how people actively use language in regular daily activities and interactions. "Language practices are the observable behaviors and choices – what people actually do. They are the linguistic features chosen, the variety of language used" (Spolsky, 2007, p. 3). Language practices are the everyday language activities undertaken in homes, schools, and communities and can vary widely depending on the location and participants. Spolsky (2004) claims that "the dynamic forces at work in the every-day activity of language communities are far more powerful than conscious, ideologically motivated policies" (p. 246).

Language ideology is presented as beliefs about the value of language that influence individual or societal choices about language use. Spolsky (2004) summarizes language ideology as "what people think should be done," (p. 388) even if their language beliefs are not acted upon as part of their regular language practices. Language ideologies are expressed by individual speakers, family units, communities, and government powers. "The different values assigned to standard languages and to heritage

languages regularly explain decisions of parents as to what language to speak and encourage in the home, just as they explain government decisions on national language policy" (Spolsky, 2007, p. 5). Language beliefs can certainly impact language practices and management, but are not always translated into practice or policy.

Language management is the "formulation and proclamation of an explicit plan or policy, usually but not necessarily written in a formal document, about language use. As we will see, the existence of such an explicit policy does not guarantee that it will be implemented, nor does implementation guarantee success" (Spolsky, 2004, p. 329). Language management does not necessarily coincide with existing language practices or widely-accepted ideological stances about language, rather it is the direct effort to reinforce, alter, direct, or require language use via targeted language mandates, policies, or laws. Language management is predicated on an assumption of power, namely that an authority figure can modify language practices or beliefs. "The most obvious form of language management is a constitution or a law established by a nation-state determining some aspect of official language use: a requirement to use a specific language as medium of instruction" (Spolsky, 2007, p. 4). Spolsky acknowledges that actors across multiple domains try to manage language via official and unofficial policies, but fully managing individual language choices proves to be difficult (2005). Some barriers to language management include the complex connections between various domains of language and an underestimation of the time and cost of language management processes (Spolsky, 2005). Even when language management occurs, "unintended outcomes may result, implementation may be incomplete or inappropriate" (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996, p. 404).

Spolsky (2004, 2007) points to language practices as the strongest component in shaping language policy: "look at what people do and not at what they think they should do or at what someone else wants them to do. Language management remains a dream until it is implemented, and its potential for implementation depends in large measure on its congruity with the practices and ideology of the community" (Spolsky, 2004, p. 4515). Official regulations regarding language policy are most successful when aligning with existing language practices and beliefs. The suggested primacy of language practices has immediate implications for the study of English language instruction in Nicaragua. This study prioritizes the collection of observational data to determine what teachers and students actually do in English class. The Ministry of Education can mandate English instruction, provide resources, and insist on communicative English, but their attempt at language management is ineffective if it is not implemented by English teachers and embraced by students in their daily language practices. "Even where there is a formal, written language policy, its effect on language practices is neither guaranteed nor consistent" (Spolsky, 2004, p. 269).

Schools are a "domain committed to language management. The two main categories of participants are students whose language practices and beliefs are to be modified and teachers charged with the process of modification" (Spolsky, 2007, p. 7). The language management of school depends on a hierarchical, authority-driven structure in which external forces (government, business interests, MINED) determine its language policy, but they remain dependent on individual actors to implement the mandated policy in the classroom. Spolsky notes that language management is largely unsuccessful when in conflict with language practices and ideologies, thus allowing space for individual

agency by teachers and students to exert their own power over school level language practices. In Nicaragua, the MINED establishes language goals and instructional methods. Although language policies are drafted on a national level, the implementation of English language instruction is heavily influenced by teachers' beliefs, knowledge base, language practices, and access to resources. The teacher is highly influential in determining if language management efforts are effective and often operates in considerable isolation from colleagues, administrators, and central office staff supervisors. As Spolsky (2007) notes, "teaching takes place in a closed room, difficult for outsiders to observe. This, of course, increases the power of teachers, so that complex systems of control (classroom visits, centrally controlled microphones and video cameras, or most commonly, externally administered tests and examinations) are needed" (p. 9). Teachers and students have the power to shape how language management efforts are translated into language practices and beliefs. Teachers often engage in their own form of language management, using their authority to enforce "correctness" of speech, accent, vocabulary choice, and standard language versions.

Spolsky's (2004) three components of language policy are directly addressed in this study via multiple qualitative data collection methods. Language practices are described by what people actually do with language and which language, or language variety, they choose to use in different domains. Language practices are negotiated situationally by multiple actors and cannot be predicted by exclusively relying on written policy of mandated language use. Thus, repeated classroom observations shed light on teacher and student language practices within the school domain. My detailed observation protocol provides space and checklists to record accurate information about

teacher and student language choices within the English classroom. Additionally, student and parent interviews describe language practices in the home by including targeted questions about the use of English among family members, language choice of recreational activities, and social interactions with peers. Language ideology describes beliefs about language. The second research question explores stakeholders' beliefs about the utility and purpose of English language instruction in public high schools. Language beliefs are examined via parent and student focus groups and stakeholder interviews. The semi-structured interviews and guided focus group questions reveal stakeholders' beliefs about the purpose and value of English language acquisition and their motivations for English language learning. The language ideology of the state is examined through document analysis of official MINED policy statements and curriculum resources that describe the official rationale for mandating English language instruction for all five years of high school in Nicaragua. In their capacity as MINED employees, the English teacher and high school principal also articulate the language beliefs of the MINED. Finally, Spolsky (2004) describes language management as an explicit plan, policy, or direction about language use. The language management component of Nicaragua's English language policy is explored via two data collection methods: document analysis and classroom observations. MINED policy documents, strategic plans, English language curriculum, and textbooks provide evidence of a clearly articulated and defined management plan for English language instruction. Classroom observations note how the English teacher, in her role as language expert, MINED representative, and authority figure, manages the language choices and practices of students.

After reviewing language policy theories such as Ruíz's (1984) three orientations, language as a problem, right, or resource, Hornberger's (2003) ecological framework, and Tollefson's (1991) historical-structural approach to language policy, Spolsky (2004) ultimately provided most appropriate conceptualization of language policy with which to frame my study. There were, however, some limitations to the applicability of his theory to the case of English language policy in rural Nicaragua. Although Spolsky's three components of language policy provide a useful guide for my inquiry of Nicaragua's English language policy, implementation, and stakeholder beliefs, it lacks a sufficiently nuanced consideration of issues of language power in the context of a developing country. Spolsky's theory of language policy does not adequately address additional questions concerning language status, economic dominance, and political power. Out of the three components, Spolsky prioritizes language practices as the most important factor in language policy, but does not give enough weight to the importance of language management. Nicaragua's English language policy is a prime example of language management in that it is a national policy implemented via the influential domain of school to promote the acquisition a globally prestigious language. The MINED made a calculated choice to include English as the only required foreign language. The MINED's language management choice has a real effect on the language practices of students in secondary school. Many rural Nicaraguan students would have little exposure to English and limited opportunity to incorporate it into their language practices without the MINED mandate. Classroom teachers serve as language managers because they have the power to enforce expected language policies and influence students' language practices.

Language, and by extension, language policies cannot be analyzed in isolation without including a critical examination of existing power dynamics between speakers of languages. Language is not merely a neutral communicative tool, but its use, or non-use, transmits multiple messages imbibed with symbolic markers of power and status.

> English has become the global language of the world. It is the language of economy, research, media, politics and social communication. It is the lingua franca of all spheres and the predominant medium of instruction worldwide. Globalization has undoubtedly played a significant role in creating the status-quo of English language around the globe. Economic, political and cultural globalizations, in their international and highly influential movements, have greatly contributed to the wide unprecedented spread of English. Therefore, learning English has become a top priority to all individuals who seek jobs, academic degrees or/and social privileges. As a result, English has been viewed as a new 'commodity' which has its own market and consumers. (Al Hosni, 2015, p. 299)

English is a globally powerful language, frequently referred to as a global *lingua franca*, a common language adopted by speakers whose native languages are different. This case study examines the purpose and utility of teaching and learning English in rural Nicaragua, a context where English is unlikely to be economically or socially empowering, yet it is a mandated subject of study for all five years of secondary school.

This study is also guided by Phillipson's (1992) conceptual framework of linguistic imperialism. The concept of linguistic imperialism has emerged to describe

"the widespread of English as 'a post-colonial endeavor'" (Al Hosni, 2015, p. 301) and highlights the unequal power relations between speakers of English, learners of English, and speakers of other languages. In 2009, MINED elaborated curricular documents supporting the notion of English acquisition as a tool for greater global connectedness and economic gain. "In modern society, the command of the English language is becoming more and more important as it is considered one of the components of competitiveness at the international level, because it is part of the basic skills that favor employability[1]" (MINED, 2009a, p. 55). There is no reference in any Ministry of Education documents to potential difficulties of English instruction, nor any attempts to problematize the emphasis on English acquisition in Nicaragua's secondary schools. Once again, MINED policy documents emphasize the potential economic benefit of English acquisition: "Through the development of the English language, the student acquires skills and abilities that allow the achievement of skills such as English or other languages, which will to facilitate other beneficial skills for employability and entrepreneurship, such as using technology" (MINED, 2009a, p. 55). Given the existence of indigenous languages within Nicaragua, why is English the only required second language in public schools? Chapter 4 presents the history and background of Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast in greater detail, but, in short, the two geographic regions (Pacific and Atlantic) have followed drastically different paths of development. Although there are six languages spoken in Nicaragua, a vast majority, over 95%, of Nicaraguans speak Spanish (CIA, 2018). The other five languages, Miskito, Sumo-Mayangna, Creole, Garifuna, and Rama, are mostly spoken by residents of the two

[1] All translations from Spanish to English are my own.

autonomous regions along the Atlantic Coast. The Atlantic Coast has a plurilingual population who remain isolated by an underdeveloped infrastructure and limited access to public resources. Although MINED policy statements and strategic frameworks acknowledged the importance of "mother language" instruction in primary schools serving indigenous communities, in practice, there are few resources dedicated to the task. The weak institutional framework along the Atlantic Coast does not ensure that Nicaragua's plurilingual *costeños* have access to bilingual education, yet, English is a mandated foreign language in all secondary schools across the country. Additionally, Nicaragua is consistently recognized as one of the poorest nations in Latin America and data presented in Chapter 4 provides a bleak picture of educational attainment. Therefore, there has been some debate (Coelho & Henze, 2014) as to the utility of dedicating scarce resources to the teaching of English as a required language when many basic indicators of school quality, such as enrollment and graduation rates for secondary school, have seen little improvement within the last decade. The issue of English dominance is addressed by my second research question, which asks stakeholders to conceptualize the utility and purpose of English instruction via interviews and focus groups.

This study is also guided by grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) as an analytical framework, considering the importance of inductively derived categories in my study. Previous literature indicates that the teaching and learning of English in rural Nicaragua is largely ineffective, plagued by scarce resources, untrained teachers, and an over reliance on teacher-centered expository instruction (Chávez, 2006; Henze & Coelho, 2013; Coelho & Henze, 2014). In contrast, MINED policy statements and curriculum

frameworks state that English classes focus on communicative aspects of language learning, using participatory and interactive methods to engage learners in all four modalities of language learning (MINED, 2009a). Which of these two drastically different accounts is a more accurate portrayal of the daily experiences of teaching and learning English in rural Nicaragua? Previous studies and existing policy statements are not sufficiently conclusive to develop a comprehensive theory of how English language policy is implemented in Nicaragua. By utilizing grounded theory as an analytical framework, I did not look for narrowly predetermined themes while completing classroom observations, rather I utilized observational and interview data to discover themes that were consequential across multiple data points. In this way, I allowed themes to emerge from the data grounded in the reality of participants life experiences and voiced perspectives.

Research Questions and Purpose of the Study

This study explores how Nicaraguan English language teachers contend with the difficult task of implementing mandated language policies in light of complex contextual constraints and how stakeholders perceive the utility of English language instruction. The following research questions are explored in this case study:

Research Question #1: How do Nicaraguan English language teachers implement mandated language policy in rural areas?

- How does MINED support teachers in implementing English language policies via curriculum, materials, training, and evaluations?
- How do classroom practices reflect MINED policy orientations and curriculum frameworks?

Research Question #2: How do stakeholders (teachers, students, parents, and school administrators) conceptualize the utility of English language instruction in rural Nicaragua?

- How do stakeholders articulate their reasons and motivations for English language teaching and learning?
- How do stakeholders perceive English proficiency to be useful in future social, academic, or economic endeavors?
- In what way, and using what criteria, do stakeholders evaluate the effectiveness of current instructional practices in meeting their expectations regarding English proficiency outcomes?

For students living in rural Nicaragua, educational opportunities are affected by the complex interaction of geographic, socioeconomic, and political influences. The goal of this study is to provide a detailed description of how English language policies are implemented in rural Nicaraguan secondary schools. The traditional narrative of rural Nicaragua is one of scarcity – insufficiently developed infrastructure, a shortage of qualified teachers, inadequate resources, generational poverty, geographic isolation, and limited access to modern technology. This study adds a more nuanced perspective to this deficit narrative by exploring how educators draw upon existing resources to implement and expand upon the mandated language curriculum. Additionally, this study qualitatively explores how secondary students in a rural Nicaraguan school, together with their families, teachers, and school administrators, perceive the utility and purpose of learning English. Although the MINED articulates the purpose of English acquisition as

a catalyst for greater engagement in a globalized economy, stakeholders express different views of its importance and usefulness to their everyday realities.

This study adds context and depth to the existing literature on language policy and practices in developing countries by analyzing educational language policy decisions not only as pedagogical preferences, but also as influenced by entrenched systems of power and dominance. In the context of a plurilingual nation, this study questions the narrative of unconditionally adopting English as a vehicle for promoting economic development. This research also provides a medium to meaningfully include stakeholder voices articulating their own interpretation of policy decisions and priorities.

Chapter 2: Literature Review: Language in Education

Introduction

There are multiple approaches to incorporating language instruction in schools, thus the following literature review will address 1) bilingual education policies that establish minority languages as official languages of instruction and 2) foreign language policies that mandate the inclusion of a world language, typically English, as an addition to an otherwise monolingual curriculum. An important distinction between bilingual education and traditional foreign language education is that bilingual programs use language as a medium of instruction for teaching standard curriculum whereas traditional foreign language programs teach language as an isolated subject, apart from content-area instruction, using a separate curriculum. Bilingual programs do not focus solely on language acquisition, but rather utilize language as a means to access meaningful content. Another important distinction lies with the differing purposes of bilingual education and foreign language education. Bilingual education targets students whose home language is not the dominant language and is associated with significant political and pragmatic opposition. Foreign language education is an additive form of language learning, generally targeted at speakers of a dominant language, and faces little resistance on ideological or political grounds.

These two types of language policies do not receive equal attention and support from the Nicaraguan Ministry of Education. English as a foreign language is a required course for all five years of secondary school and is supported by a clearly articulated curriculum and resources. Although English is a compulsory subject of study in all secondary schools across the country, Nicaragua's impoverished rural areas confront

significant challenges in meeting the English instruction mandate. Bilingual education is much less pervasive and primarily affects the speakers of minority languages along Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast. Bilingual programs are typically focused in the early primary grades and seek to incorporate indigenous languages and Spanish in all areas of instruction. The Ministry of Education does not demonstrate the same level of commitment to bilingual education as they have shown for English language education. While English is a mandated subject of study, there is only a nebulous policy framework that merely permits the use of native languages, but does not mandate their inclusion nor provide curricular materials. The privileged position of English in Nicaraguan education language policy is further examined in relation to the rise of global English as a form of linguistic imperialism. To provide a deeper understanding of language policy formation and implementation in specific locations, this review provides a brief account of bilingual education policies and practices in Nicaragua as well as English language policies and practices in the European Union, Chile, and Nicaragua. These contextualized descriptions of global trends and regional precedents provide a backdrop for a more nuanced examination of how language policy has been crafted and implemented in Nicaragua.

This review of the literature examines why foreign language learning is traditionally included in school curriculum. To better inform this study's focus on Nicaragua's English language instruction, the review honed in on best practices in the area of second language teaching and learning in the European Union, an area renowned for effective language education (European Commission, 2012; Baidak et al., 2012).

Rationales for Foreign Language Instruction

Bilingualism is an asset in our globalized society. But, what kind of bilingualism is desirable? Bilingual education including indigenous and minority languages faces fierce opposition. This is not the case, however, for foreign language education that focuses on adding another language into an otherwise unchanged monolingual curriculum. It is, by its very nature, an addition to, but not a fundamental change of, existing curriculum and generally remains completely separate from other areas of instruction. The additive nature of foreign language instruction therefore does not threaten to alter existing relationships of power between languages and language speakers and is largely uncontested on ideological grounds. Additionally, in much of the reviewed literature, foreign language education promotes the teaching and learning of globally prestigious languages, such as English, French, Spanish, and German, and is readily accepted as a vehicle for potential social mobility.

Foreign language education is routinely promoted for personal enrichment, social development, cultural, and economic growth. The world is increasingly more connected in political and economic spheres. Technological advances have facilitated easier and more frequent travel and communication between countries. Foreign language education, therefore, is supported by the notion that flexible communication skills and multicultural practices are desired characteristics due to globalization. Bilingualism is a tool utilized to navigate between multiple communities in a globalized and connected world.

Best Practices: A Review of Effective Instructional Design and Supportive Policy Contexts for Foreign Language Acquisition in Europe

European language learning has attracted interest from education policymakers worldwide because its students have historically been quite successful at acquiring additional languages through schooling. There are certain contextual factors unique to Europe, such as geographical proximity and multiple official languages, which cannot be easily replicated. That is not to say, however, that lessons from European countries' strong instructional models for foreign language programs cannot be generalized to other contexts and adapted for local use.

> Many of the factors contributing to foreign language competences are largely beyond the control of the educational systems, such as their general demographic, social, economic and linguistic contexts. Other contextual factors can be modified through targeted educational policies, such as the age at which foreign language education starts, the intensity of the foreign language courses, and the initial and in-service training of teachers. (European Commission, 2012, p. 49)

Educational systems across Europe have created exceptionally supportive language learning environments that consistently produce high-achieving second language learners. Most European nations support foreign language learning through common curricular and assessment frameworks, national policy mandates, highly qualified teachers, and the allocation of specific and dedicated resources for language learning classrooms. Schools in the EU additionally benefit from relatively homogenous home-language populations and multiple supports to develop students' intrinsic motivation for foreign language learning. The *Common European Framework of*

Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment (CEFR) is an expansive and comprehensive framework that serves as a common guideline to develop curriculum and proficiency benchmarks across the EU. EU member states consistently mandate instruction in one or more foreign languages, often beginning as early as pre-primary school and continuing through secondary school. Across European countries, foreign language teachers are highly qualified professionals holding at least an undergraduate degree. They are held to the same licensure standards as mainstream teachers or, in some cases, even more rigorous requirements. Although Europe as a whole is a widely-recognized multilingual and diverse environment, there is remarkable language homogeneity within individual countries. In a majority of EU nations, students' home language largely coincides with the language of instruction, thus limiting the necessity of intense support to integrate non-majority language speakers into the mainstream language curriculum. This language homogeneity facilitates the addition of foreign language instruction. Additionally, the geographical proximity to other countries and the ease of movement between national borders provides opportunity and motivation to contextualize language acquisition as a realistically useful subject, with potential personal and economic benefits for students.

Across the EU, English is "by far the most taught foreign language in nearly all countries at all educational levels" (Baidak et al., 2012, p. 11). Within the last decade, English-language instruction has been greatly expanded at primary levels and continues to gain in popularity as the language of choice among secondary school curriculum. "In 2009/10, on average, 73% of pupils enrolled in primary education in the EU were learning English. In lower secondary and general upper secondary education, the

percentage was higher than 90%" (Baidak et al., 2012, p. 11). In addition to English, many countries require two or more foreign language studies at the secondary level.

This section describes, in greater detail, the individual components across EU member states that combine to form a supportive environment within the public schools to promote foreign language education. First, the social and political context is unique to Europe, resulting in school policies and curriculum that promote multilingualism. The CEFR is a common policy framework that influences curriculum and assessment design across EU member states. The EU has established standards regarding teacher qualifications, instructional practices, and expected student outcomes. Member states differ regarding details of instructional implementation, with highest variability residing in issues of age of initial instruction, number of foreign languages required, amount of time dedicated to language study, and assessment requirements. The European Survey on Language Competencies provides data about the effectiveness of language acquisition across various member states and establishes a link to country-level best practices in language instruction. Finally, English has rapidly become the first compulsory foreign language for most European nations. This detailed examination of best practices in EU foreign language instruction provides a useful guide to develop an observational framework for the implementation of Nicaragua's English language policy.

European Context

The European Union is a political and economic alliance composed of 28-member countries. The EU's structure of representative democracy ensures economic and political cooperation between member states, but still allows for significant sovereignty over national policies. Thus, EU member states are responsible for their own education

systems, but the EU establishes system-wide goals, provides policy frameworks, and shares technical assistance resources.

The creation of a unified Europe resulted in relaxed border controls between countries, therefore people can travel freely throughout most of the continent and have frequent opportunities to genuinely interact with multiple languages and cultures. The European Union is a linguistically diverse continent: "In January 2011, the European Union recognized 23 official languages which had the status of a state language in one of its member countries. While in most countries only one language is recognized as a state language, four countries (Ireland, Cyprus, Malta and Finland) extend the status of state language to two languages spoken within their borders" (Baidak et al., 2012, p. 17). While there is a high level of linguistic difference between countries, individual member states are largely composed of a homogenous linguistic majority. Therefore, education policy within the EU is generally targeted at foreign language instruction, not necessarily bilingual, immersion, or mother tongue education programs. Schools within the EU mandate foreign language courses to students who mostly share the same home language and receive a majority of instruction in other subject areas in their native language. "The recent PISA cycle, which collected data in 2009, confirmed the previously observed pattern that the majority of students in almost all European countries speak the language of instruction at home. In the participating EU-27 countries, on average, 92.9% of 15-year-old students spoke the language of instruction at home" (Baidak et al., 2012, p. 19). In addition to a vast majority of EU students speaking the language of instruction at home, students are largely grouped in schools with other students who share the same home language characteristics (Baidak et al., 2012). The relative linguistic homogeneity

of the EU student population is of the upmost importance when considering the success of second language instruction, particularly as many students begin learning a foreign language in early primary grades. In systems where there is a high level of linguistic homogeneity, it is not necessary to devote instructional time and resources developing proficiency in the official language of instruction. Even EU immigrant students report high levels of proficiency in the official language of instruction, with only a small percentage (4.1% in 2012) who did not speak the language of instruction at home.

The EU openly embraces the importance of language learning and "encourages everyone to learn and speak more languages, in the interests of mutual understanding and communication. Our goal is an EU in which every citizen knows at least two foreign languages in addition to their mother tongue" (European Commission, 2015). Language learning plays a central role in creating social unity, ensuring peaceful coexistence, and economic growth via increased competitiveness in a globalized marketplace. The EU language policy is built upon a belief that "languages can build bridges between people, giving us access to other countries and cultures, and enabling us to understand each other better" (European Commission, 2015).

The high levels of linguistic integration of immigrant students, the largely linguistically homogeneous student population, and the geographic proximity to multiple language communities combine to shape the unique goals and practices of EU language learning policy. The purpose of second language instruction in the EU largely falls into the additive, enrichment category. Most students are not receiving intensive language services in order to assimilate into official school languages or to develop academic proficiency in students' native (non-school) languages as a bridge to academic

achievement in the official language. Rather, most European students receive foreign language instruction as a means to provide intellectual challenge, personal enrichment, and economic opportunities in the context of a highly interconnected continent in close proximity to linguistically diverse neighbors.

Policy Constructs

The European Commission highlights the importance of educational policies that support a multilingual population by articulating strategic goals of increased intercultural communication, migrants' assimilation, and continued economic growth through language learning. "Language learning has also acquired a prominent place within flagship initiatives integrated in the European Union's overall strategy – 'Europe 2020' – promoting smart, sustainable and inclusive growth" (Baidak et al., 2012, p. 7). Of particular importance in establishing a unified and cohesive language policy in the EU was the 2001 creation of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) by the Council of Europe. The CEFR provides a common policy framework that guides individual nation-states as they design their own foreign language curriculum and assessments. While the European Commission establishes goals and guidelines for EU education language policy and *encourages* the adoption of the CEFR framework, ultimately, it is up to each country to craft language policies, curriculum, materials, and assessments that are unique to their own local circumstances. At the country level, the Ministry of Education may choose to require the use of CEFR when creating its own world languages curriculum, teacher training, and language assessments, but it is not universally required.

But, what exactly is the CEFR and how is it useful to policymakers and educators? Within the first pages of the CEFR, the Council of Europe carefully established what the CEFR is not: "We have NOT set out to tell practitioners what to do, or how to do it. We are raising questions, not answering them. […] the Council is concerned to improve the quality of communication among Europeans of different language and cultural backgrounds" (Council of Europe, 2001, p. xi). The Council of Europe did not employ the CEFR as a mechanism to mandate curriculum design, specific learning objectives, or enforce teaching methodologies. It is not a compulsory framework that countries must adopt. It is a framework that provides guidance for policymakers and educators and is open to modifications, partial adoption, and adaptations to local contexts. The CEFR was used in the broadest sense to provide unity across EU countries in promoting a communicative approach to language learning and establishing common metrics to describe progress in language acquisition.

The European Commission (2012) delineates two main purposes for the CEFR: first, it provides "a common language for talking about language learning and teaching" (p. 20) that is consistent across the EU; second, it "provides a set of reference proficiency levels" (p. 20) that "are illustrated by a large number of descriptive scales" (p. 20). Supporting its first purpose, the CEFR advanced an "action-oriented" approach to language learning, which places language learners as "'social agents', i.e. members of society who have tasks (not exclusively language-related) to accomplish in a given set of circumstances, in a specific environment and within a particular field of action. While acts of speech occur within language activities, these activities form part of a wider social context, which alone is able to give them their full meaning" (Council of Europe, 2001, p.

9). Thus, the CEFR framework recognizes that language learning is a purposeful activity, intertwined with context-dependent meaning and cannot be accomplished successfully through isolated grammar and vocabulary lessons in the target languages while ignoring the communicative purpose of language acquisition.

In support of its second goal of providing a consistent measure for language learning progress, the CEFR provides a set of six reference levels (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, and C2) to describe the progression of language learners' competencies, with A1 corresponding to a beginning language student and C2 describing the most proficient student. The CEFR includes "can-do" statements corresponding to each reference level in the areas of listening, reading, speaking, and writing. This is the aspect of the CEFR that has proven to be the most impactful in influencing the direction of language policymaking and practicalities of program implementation, such as curriculum development, materials creation, and assessment. Figueras (2012) notes that the reference level descriptors had "an enormous influence in the drafting of objectives, targets, and outcomes in language learning programmes" (p. 479) across the EU and that the positive "can-do" descriptive language of student proficiency has influenced system-wide evaluations of language learning programs. Thus, a main contribution of the CEFR is the articulation of a criteria-referenced system to evaluate second language proficiency, based upon what the student knows and is able to demonstrate in the areas of listening, reading, writing, and speaking, that is consistent across the EU.

While there is evidence of CEFR use and reference among EU officials, country-level policy makers, curriculum designers, and evaluation experts, there is less evidence that teachers across Europe regularly incorporate the CEFR standards when planning,

implementing, and assessing language acquisition. "Overall teachers do not use the CEFR very often" (European Commission, 2012, p. 65). Thus, there is wide variation in the percentage of EU teachers who have been trained in the CEFR, but even those teachers who received training do not routinely utilize the CEFR as a regular practice.

While policy intricacies and curriculum requirements vary across member states, EU language policy articulates priorities around developing students' communicative skills in target languages. "The EU does not promote a particular teaching method with a clear defined set of activities, but rather a broad holistic approach to teaching in which emphasis is placed upon communicative ability and multilingual comprehension" (European Commission, 2012, p. 59). The CEFR also reflects the EU's broad communicative goals by focusing on developing meaningful interactions in the target language and highlighting the interpersonal communicative aspects of language use. The CEFR establishes that target "language use is seen as purposeful, involving communication of meanings which are important to learners, in order to achieve goals. The principle underlying this is that learning will be more effective where language is used purposefully" (University of Cambridge, 2011, p. 14).

Teacher Training and Preparation

Teachers are at the front-lines of interpreting and implementing language policies. Research indicates that teachers' educational background, certifications, and years of experience are factors that have a positive effect on student achievement (Rice, 2003). Across the EU, foreign language teachers are highly-qualified professionals holding at least the same certifications as other teachers or, in some countries, additional certifications specific to language instruction. "On average, 89.6 % of foreign language

teachers in the ESLC [European Survey on Language Competences] participating countries claim that they are fully qualified to teach foreign languages" (Baidak et al., 2012, p. 12). Additionally, EU foreign language teachers have extensive classroom experience. The European Commission (2012) found "in most educational systems teachers have been teaching the TL between 10 and 20 years" (p. 66). A majority of language teachers in the EU have received specialized training focused specifically on teaching the target language. "In all educational systems, at least 75% of teachers have received initial or in-service training in teaching the TL as a foreign language" (European Commission, 2012, p. 57). In most cases, language instruction is the area of their teaching certification. Overall, in foreign language classrooms across Europe, "most teachers are well qualified, are educated to a high level, have full certification and are specialized in teaching languages" (European Commission, 2012, p. 97).

Instructional Practices and Student Outcomes

Many children in Europe begin studying a second language in early primary school. "In Europe, pupils are generally between 6 and 9 years old when they have to start learning a foreign language" (Baidak et al., 2012, p. 11). In some countries, like Belgium, the first foreign language is introduced in pre-primary school and a second foreign language is introduced in primary school. "Generally, students report a rather early start to foreign language learning (before or during primary education) and most commonly they learn two foreign languages. However, considerable differences are still found across educational systems in the exact onset of foreign language learning, the current teaching time and the number of languages offered and learned" (European Commission, 2012, p. 96). There are still wide variations between EU countries in

establishing initial ages of compulsory study of a foreign language: students in Spain begin at the age of 3 while in pre-primary school, while students in the United Kingdom begin learning a language in secondary school at the age of 11 (Baidak et al., 2012). In most countries, learning two foreign languages is compulsory. Although there are country-specific variations in the length of required time in the two target languages, most systems generally follow the same pattern of introducing one target language in primary school while introducing the second language later. In 2010, "60.8% of students enrolled in lower secondary education in Europe were learning two or more foreign languages" (Baidak et al., 2012, p. 10).

Importantly, language learning in primary school is treated as a subject of study, similar to a course in secondary school, and does not occupy much of the school day, nor is it typically the language of instruction in non-language courses. "While foreign languages become steadily entrenched as compulsory subjects in the primary curriculum, the time allocated to them, as a proportion of the total taught time, does not generally exceed 10%" (Baidak et al., 2012, p. 11). Thus, language study does not typically occupy much of a student's school day as it is given less or equal weight than other subject areas, but students begin studying languages early in their school career and have many years to pursue proficiency.

In addition to teacher quality, curriculum design, and resource availability, individual student characteristics can affect the success of language acquisition. One of the key factors in language learning is student motivation. Students participating in the ESLC indicated that they were motivated to learn English for economic and academic advancement.

> Pupils' perception of the usefulness of the languages they learn can clearly contribute to increasing their motivation. In the 15 participating countries or regions within countries, on average, the percentage of students who consider it useful to learn English for their future education, work or for getting a good job is higher than the percentage of those who consider English useful for their personal life. These percentages drop quite significantly for other languages. (Baidak et al., 2012, p. 12)

In addition to the motivation to learn English for economic advancement, the EU policy of liberal border crossings for employment opportunities or personal fulfillment provides motivation for purposeful language acquisition.

The CEFR framework promotes language acquisition with the goals of authentic communication and meaningful interactions. The six CEFR reference levels provide guidelines for proficiency ratings in the areas of reading, writing, speaking, and listening, therefore, these are the areas traditionally addressed by foreign language curriculum and evaluations. There is some evidence that EU countries place greater emphasis on "oral skills (i.e. listening and speaking skills) when they start teaching foreign languages to younger pupils. At the end of compulsory education, though, the four communication skills have equal standing in nearly all curricula" (European Commission, 2012, p. 55). This technique is not only developmentally appropriate, as young students might not have reading and writing abilities in their first language yet, but it is also aligned to the communicative focus outlined in the CEFR. The European Commission (2012) examined national curriculums to determine if there were differences in the emphasis allotted to the four communicative skills (writing, speaking, listening, and reading) and

found “only small differences” (p. 59) between educational systems. There were, however, significant differences in access to multimedia materials between different countries, with some countries reporting that over 45% of schools have access to a multimedia lab while other countries report that less than 30% of schools have access to a multimedia lab (European Commission, 2012, p. 55).

In addition to most EU students beginning foreign language classes in primary school, students spend between *three and eight hours a week* learning a foreign language during the school day. At the late primary and secondary levels, these hours may be split between learning a first and a second target language. Again, there are wide variations between countries with respect to time spent in a language classroom. The German Community of Belgium reports a total of over four hours weekly in the first target language and three hours weekly in the second target language. In contrast, Croatia reports a total of four hours weekly for both the first and the second target languages. In regard to time on task, many agencies report recommendations in terms of *yearly* hours spent in the target languages to account for schedule variances. The European Commission (2012) notes that “most central (or highest level) authorities of educational systems give recommendations for the minimum annual teaching time for foreign languages as a compulsory subject. […] most educational systems recommend between 30 and 80 hours on average per year” (p. 52). There have been some attempts to link instructional hours to possible language proficiency outcomes. The Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) “estimate the number of guided teaching hours needed to fulfil the aims of CEFR A1 at approximately 90 - 100 hours, and for A2 approximately 180 - 200 hours” (European Commission, 2012, p. 41). Of course, these

were provided as general guidelines with the caveat that every language learner follows a unique path to proficiency. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that given the variance in national requirements for time allotted to language learning, it can take a student between two to three years of language study to attain the A1 (basic/breakthrough) level of language proficiency and up to six years to attain the A2 (basic/waystage) level.

The ESLC was sponsored by the European Commission and conducted in 2012 with two main goals: provide a metric to measure the progress of language learning across EU member states and provide "strategic information to policy makers, teachers and learners in all surveyed countries' through the collection of contextual information in the background questionnaires" (European Commission, 2012, p. 5). The ESLC "measured the proficiency of pupils in foreign languages at the final stage of lower secondary education and its results – launched in June 2012 – gave, for the first time, an insight into realistic levels of language skills that pupils in Europe possess" (Baidak et al., 2012, p. 7). In order to meet the first goal, the ESLC tested students in the domains of writing, listening and reading via a standardized test tied to the CEFR framework. Additionally, they asked students to self-evaluate their language competence via can-do statements across the same four language learning domains. For example, a student would choose between a series of options in the speaking domain such as, "I can tell a story" or "I can ask and answer simple questions." Overall, in all participating countries, the survey shows that "in first target language Reading 28% of students achieve B2, 14% achieve B1, 12% achieve A2 and 32% achieve A1. […] Many educational systems show high levels of achievement. However, for the first target language there are six

educational systems in which at least 20% of students do not achieve A1 in one or more skills" (Baidak et al., 2012, p. 93).

The ESLC survey conducted in 2012 found wide variations in the results, with a range of pre-A1 to B2. Pre-A1 signifies little to no language proficiency with B2 being an intermediate level of proficiency and was the highest possible score on this exam. Specifically examining the English listening, reading, and writing subtests, Sweden consistently demonstrated the highest performance, with over 60% of its students achieving B2 status on all three subtests and less than 10% scoring in the pre-A1 range. English was also the first foreign language in France, however, it had the lowest percentage of students scoring at the highest proficiency level across all three domains, with less than 20% scoring at the B2 level. France also had the highest percentage of students scoring at the lowest proficiency level, with over 30% of students classified as pre-A1. France was also the only country where students expressed the opinion that English was *not* important for future employment or academic achievement: "The great majority of students consider English to be useful for their future education and work, more than 80 % for future work (except in France), and even more when it comes to getting a good job; showing that students value English for getting not only a job, but for getting a good job" (Baidak et al., 2012, p. 103).

The Growth of English

English is, by far, the most popular foreign language across the EU at all levels of schooling. In fact, it is a mandatory language in 14 EU countries (Baidak et al., 2012) and trends show "an increase in the percentage of pupils learning English at all educational levels, and particularly at primary levels. In 2009/10, on average, 73% of

pupils enrolled in primary education in the EU were learning English. In lower secondary and general upper secondary education, the percentage was higher than 90%" (Baidak et al., 2012, p. 11).

In addition to being the most commonly taught language, students of English reach higher levels of proficiency compared to learners of other languages across the EU. English learners boast the highest percentage of students to reach B1 (intermediate) levels in the ESLC assessments compared with other frequently taught languages. This increased performance in English could be attributed to a variety of factors, namely, early onset of language study and longevity, exposure to target language media, perceived usefulness, and students' intrinsic motivation. The European Commission (2012) notes the special standing of English: "performance in English tends to be higher than in other languages. Further evidence of the particular status of English comes from the students' questionnaire responses, their reported perception of its usefulness, and their degree of exposure to it and use of it through traditional and new media" (p. 91). Students' perception of the value of English, combined with policy mandates that support its high-status and wide-reach, further promote English as a powerful language, providing access to increased economic opportunities and the means to increased social mobility. Thus, across many EU nations, English is a compulsory subject, frequently introduced as the first foreign language, studied from a young age, and results in higher levels of target language proficiency for most students.

Conclusions

The EU has successfully combined targeted language policies with a comprehensive language learning framework, skilled teachers, and motivated students to

produce high levels of foreign language proficiency. The European social, economic, and political context establishes a supportive language learning environment guided by explicit educational mandates requiring instruction in multiple languages throughout primary and secondary school. The CEFR is a common policy framework that influences language curriculum and assessment design across EU member states. Foreign language teachers throughout the EU are highly-qualified professionals with many years of experience in the classroom and specialized expertise in teaching the target language. Student populations within each country are largely linguistically homogeneous and generally come to school already fluent in the official language of instruction. There are authentic sources of student motivation to be successful language learners via geographic proximity to other countries combined with the ease of border crossing and the perception of greater economic opportunities for a multilingual workforce.

Is the EU motto "Unity in Diversity" a reflection of a multilingual reality? Perhaps the most surprising aspect of EU language policy is the extent to which it is represented as an unproblematic expectation that most EU citizens will aspire to multilingualism and schools will play an integral role in the social cohesion of a diverse continent by actively teaching multiple languages, often beginning in early primary school. In the United States and Latin America, language policy is fraught with conflicts arising from language favoritism and power struggles regarding state-supported language dominance and the resulting marginalization of language minority speakers. In these contexts, language is tied to deeper notions of cultural heritage and is depicted as both a personal identity marker and a communicative tool. The presence, and exclusion, of languages within the public realm of schooling carries decisive implications about the

prestige and status of chosen languages. Werlen (2010) criticizes the public discourse around EU language policy as lacking an examination of power dynamics. "Talk about multilingualism in the EU usually neglects power relations and conflicts between linguistic groups and states, which leads to skepticism and the perception of multilingualism as a mere marketing or propaganda tool" (Werlen, 2010, p. 7). Much of the literature detailing the formation of EU's language policy depicts the process as largely free from tension around language choices. The technical aspects of language learning were highlighted far more than the socio-political functions of language. The EU has received significant international attention for the positive results of its campaign to increase multilingualism through targeted educational policy and the ample provision of language learning support structures; however, there has been relatively little examination of the power dynamics involved in mandating language acquisition across an entire continent.

Implications for Study of Nicaragua's Language Policy

How does reviewing the existing literature on language education policies and practices inform the proposed study in Nicaragua? The bilingual education platform promotes the meaningful inclusion of minority languages in schools as a mechanism to promote academic achievement for language minority students. As such it draws upon a paradigm of social justice and consistently faces wide opposition. In contrast, foreign language education is readily adopted as a necessary component of a well-rounded educational program. Discussions of foreign language policy frequently focus on how to best implement it, but rarely focus on *why* it should be implemented. The starkly different tone of each language learning orientation highlights that language choices in

schools is an inherently political process, shaped by contextual legacies of discrimination, power struggles, and unequal access to institutionalized power. Foreign language programs are readily adopted and promoted as mechanisms for integration into a globalized world. This leads to the conclusion that there is not a generalized opposition to language learning, per say, rather it is opposition in the face of marginalized languages occupying positions of power within the classroom. Foreign language programs that promote high-status languages rarely encounter resistance.

Nicaraguan language policy and practices are a microcosm of the overall trends outlined in both bilingual education and foreign language education. The MINED has a permissive policy framework allowing for bilingual education along Nicaragua's plurilingual and multiethnic Atlantic Coast; however, it has only been implemented in a piecemeal fashion and it continues to face significant opposition. In contrast, the MINED mandates English language instruction across all five years, which has been accepted without significant resistance. There is limited evidence of a prolonged discussion of why an English language program should be implemented in Nicaragua, rather, documents suggest that concerns have centered on questions of how to best implement it. The MINED's publications largely skipped over debates that question the importance, or lack thereof, of English in the Nicaraguan context. This study proposes to delve into issues of both why and how English language policy is implemented in Nicaragua's secondary schools and provide space to highlight alternate perspectives and local voices.

The discussion of language policy in the EU serves as a backdrop to guide the discussion of Nicaragua's English language policy. The EU model provides rich examples of the quality input factors that are needed and the high levels of commitment

from policymakers, teachers, and students to achieve advanced levels of proficiency in second languages. What lessons from the EU can be applied to English language instruction in Nicaragua? The EU has consistently implemented a language learning model that promotes early exposure to languages, with at least three hours weekly of required instruction, using a well-designed curriculum tied to internationally approved standards with an evaluation component, and implemented by specialized and highly trained teachers. Additionally, students, overall, are highly motivated to learn a second language in the interconnected continent. Thus, the overall context for language learning across Europe is highly favorable. This is not the case in Nicaragua. Nicaragua does not have the same social context and the economic necessity to acquire English, nor does it have the resources to develop and expand the English language program to be as comprehensive as the European model. Nicaragua's contextual factors, such as geographic isolation, Spanish-dominant neighboring countries, high poverty rates, and recent political instability, indicate that a European model for language learning cannot be readily imported as the same preconditions for success have not been established.

Chapter 3: Language Learning in Latin America

Introduction

Latin America is united not only by geographic proximity, but also by a shared set of sociocultural norms that began with colonization by the Spanish and Portuguese empires. The colonial legacy of linguistic imperialism created a shared language as a defining characteristic of Latin America. In spite of the multitude of indigenous languages that remain active throughout the region: "what gives them [Latin American nations] the common appellation though is not geography but the fact that the principal language spoken in each of these countries is a modern, Romance language" (Rajagopalan, 2005, p. 77). Although recently some nations have moved towards recognizing more than one official language of the state, i.e. Paraguay's Constitution in 1992 and Bolivia's Constitution in 2009, there is, nonetheless, a residual ideal of linguistic homogeneity for national unity stemming from colonial policies. While Spanish and Portuguese are clearly the dominant languages in modern Latin America, "the idea of a monolingual and monocultural society is a complete myth" (Rajagopalan, 2005, p. 78). Although many indigenous groups have successfully remained connected to their cultural and linguistic heritage, it has not been without consequences in societies marked by unequal access to resources. The cultural and linguistic assimilation that was emphasized in colonial Latin America was paralleled by political and economic marginalization that continue to have important ramifications across multiple social, economic, and educational indicators (OREALC, 2013).

As a region, Latin America compares well with other developing regions in widely used international indicators relating to educational access, completion, and

quality as measured by UNESCO's 2015 *EFA Global Monitoring Report*. "Most countries in the region have achieved universal primary education (UPE) and are witnessing a rapid expansion of both pre-primary education, and secondary and tertiary education" (UNESCO, 2015a, p. 1). Despite this progress, there remain significant barriers to ensuring equitable access to education for all children. As the region continues to improve access to and completion of school, future educational policies should "address persistent geographic, socio-economic and ethnic disparities. In 2012, the region was still home to nearly 4 million out-of-school children of primary school age; boys' under participation in secondary education has remained high; and 33 million adults, 55% of whom are women, lacked basic literacy skills" (UNESCO, 2015a, p. 1). The most marginalized children are often negatively affected by multiple risk factors. The intersecting disadvantages of rural residency, ethnic and linguistic minority status, and poverty typically weighs most heavily on indigenous populations, who have the poorest schooling outcomes (UNESCO, 2015a).

In addition to the renewed emphasis of indigenous rights and linguistic inclusion, there is a parallel trend across many Latin American countries to incorporate English language instruction in both primary and secondary schools. The increased emphasis on English in public schools is presented as a mechanism for greater participation in global politics, economic development, and personal social mobility. Despite the official inclusion of English instruction at multiple levels of public schooling, there is limited evidence of its effectiveness in promoting high levels of English proficiency across Latin America (Ramírez-Romero & Sayer, 2016). There remain significant challenges to effectively

implementing the English language mandate, namely entrenched social and economic inequalities and a severe shortage of qualified English teachers. This chapter provides an account of the rise of English language instruction in public schools across Latin America. Additionally, this chapter provides a detailed portrait of Chile's English language program, which contributes contextual support to guide this study of Nicaragua's English language program.

The Teaching of English in Latin America

Introduction

The dominance of English as the foreign language of choice is clear across the globe. The mandated inclusion of English in national curriculums across Latin America highlights a growing recognition its importance. Despite the near universal mandate of English language education across Latin America, important questions remain unanswered regarding its utility for all stakeholders and its role in promoting equity among traditionally marginalized groups.

The push to increase English language instruction across Latin America has consistently been coached in terms of economic growth, global integration, increased participation in a globalized marketplace, and competitiveness in international business and academic arenas (British Council, 2016; Rajagopalan, 2005; Ramírez-Romero & Sayer, 2016). Although Spanish and Portuguese are the dominant languages across the region, "English language learning has a positive association with wealth, education, managerial employment and international industries" (British Council, 2016, p. 3). The English-mandate has grown, in part, based upon the widespread assumption that "knowledge of English is a must for those who aspire to climb a few rungs up the social

ladder" (Rajagopalan, 2005, p. 85). The increase in English language learning across Latin America cannot simply be attributed to an individual's choice of language, driven exclusively by personal motives of self-advancement. Rather, the growing English trend represents explicit government mandates to invest in building its human capital by including additional requirements for compulsory English language instruction in schools. Some countries have emphasized the incorporation of English in the national curriculum as a "mechanism to promote democracy, modernize their educational systems, and to prepare their students to be more competitive in the global labor market" (Ramírez-Romero & Sayer, 2016, p. 4). Increasing proficiency in English is perceived to have system-wide benefits in an era of intense economic competition and global commerce. Across Latin America, "governments are implementing English language policies grounded partly in an economic rationale, propelled by a focus on building the proficiency of the population in part to boost a country's competitiveness in a globally integrated marketplace" (British Council, 2016, p. 2).

Regional Trends: The Growth of English Language Instruction in Latin America

Although there is a clear regional consensus in Latin America to promote English language instruction in public schools, there remain significant challenges to effectively implementing this policy mandate across the region's unique educational contexts. "In Latin America, the push to include English in primary education began to gain strength in the 1990s in countries like Argentina, Chile, Colombia, and Mexico. Since then, most of the countries in the region have followed suit and currently have English language teaching (ELT) programs in their public schools" (Ramírez-Romero & Sayer, 2016, p. 3). In spite of a strong push across Latin America to increase English language instruction in

public schools, most people across the region do not successfully demonstrate basic English language proficiency. Ramírez-Romero and Sayer (2016) indicate "that across Latin America most people do not have any appreciable English language skills" (p. 2). How can the relatively low performance in English across Latin America be explained in light of a supportive policy context? The previous two decades have been marked by unprecedented mandates for the compulsory inclusion of English language instruction across Latin American school systems, increasingly reaching into younger grades, yet English proficiency is markedly lower than in other regions, notably Europe. The policy landscape suggests general support for English language instruction, but how have these language policies been translated into practice and what resources have been dedicated to support English language implementation? A review of the literature indicates that there are five key factors that adversely impact the effectiveness of English language instruction across Latin America: 1) the challenge of increasing coverage with limited resources, 2) equalizing opportunities for quality English instruction, 3) tensions about prioritizing English over indigenous languages, 4) local ownership of curriculum and assessment materials, and 5) developing teacher capacity.

Overall, one of the most widespread concerns is the inability of Latin American educational systems to quickly increase the scale of English language programs to provide complete coverage across the entire system, including rural areas. In the context of many developing nations, there are limited resources available to dedicate towards English language education. Many school systems are already operating under stringent budgetary constraints that adversely affect general educational indicators, such as primary and secondary school access and completion rates. "Given the relatively weak

educational infrastructure and limited budgets in virtually all countries studied [in Latin America], one of the great dilemmas they have in common is the question of what to prioritize: the range of school grades attended or the number of schools" (Ramírez-Romero & Sayer, 2016, p. 4). In order to stretch limited budgets, school systems generally implement a partial language program, with limited coverage in the early grades. In light of these monetary restrictions, Ramírez-Romero and Sayer (2016) indicate that a majority of Latin American countries have chosen to mandate English language education beginning in the upper grades of primary, "beginning with fourth grade primary school students (Argentina) or fifth or sixth grade students (in Chile, Brazil and several states of Mexico). However, regardless of the option, in all countries the coverage has been only partial and insufficient, favoring more well-off students in the urban areas and neglecting children from indigenous, semi-urban, or rural communities" (Ramírez-Romero & Sayer, 2016, p. 4). Students across rural areas in Latin America consistently demonstrate lower educational attainments compared to their urban peers. "In 2006, most countries showed very large gaps in reading proficiency between urban and rural students" (UNESCO, 2015b, p. 8). In particular, it is especially challenging to ensure access to quality English language education in impoverished rural areas across Latin America, where educational outcomes are already impaired by limited infrastructure and limited resources.

There is also evidence of limited instructional time dedicated to English in most countries. Ramírez-Romero and Sayer (2016) indicated that the duration of English classes ranged from a low of just one hour a week in Colombia to a maximum of two and a half hours a week in Chile and Mexico (p. 5). Across Latin America, "English is

treated as what some scholars refer to as a 'limited instruction EFL context': taught as a foreign language for relatively small amount of time" (Ramírez-Romero & Sayer, 2016, p. 5). There is no indication of more expansive instructional models, such as English immersion, within the public schools in the region. Thus, Latin American schools dedicate much less time to English instruction compared to schools in the European Union, where English language instruction often begins much earlier in primary school and averages between three and eight hours a week.

The second area of difficulty in English instruction in Latin America is that of equalizing access to quality English instruction. While many students acknowledge the value of English in terms of increased employment opportunities (British Council, 2016), in reality, English provides economic benefits for small portion of the population in Latin America. Future employment opportunities that require English proficiency are limited and unattainable for many Latin American students, particularly those in rural areas. In such circumstances, students naturally question the utility of dedicating time and resources to learning English when there are limited prospects for future personal or professional use. Initial findings indicate that current English language educational policy further stratifies existing inequalities in English language proficiency. Historically, quality English language education in Latin America was primarily found in private schools. Although English is now compulsory in many public primary and secondary schools across Latin America, many countries continue to report that English proficiency remains highly correlated with students' socioeconomic background.

The dominance of Spanish and Portuguese across Latin America belies the vast linguistic diversity among indigenous groups in the region. The expansion of English

across the region and its inclusion in primary schools has prompted some criticism in plurilingual countries where advocates have struggled for greater recognition and inclusion of indigenous languages within public institutions. “There is a debate in some countries such as Brazil, Chile, Colombia, and Mexico, related to the attempt to enshrine English as a symbol of prestige over other foreign languages in the country and disregard the reality of those who are already bilingual in Spanish and their own indigenous language” (Ramírez-Romero & Sayer, 2016, p. 5).

Additionally, critics of the English mandate movements across Latin America question the appropriateness of wholesale adoption of English language policy guidelines, curriculum frameworks, and evaluation materials from other regions. The reliance on external experts undermines the authority of local curriculum experts to craft original versions of English language materials, which may better reflect regional priorities and contextual realities. In particular, many Latin American countries have drawn upon European frameworks, in spite of the vastly different contextual factors differentiating the two regions. For example, in 2008, Chile tied its end-of-year English language proficiency expectations to the levels established in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Barahona, 2016).

Finally, Latin American nations are facing critical shortages of qualified English language teachers as they attempt to universalize language education across public primary and secondary schools in the region. There is no clear consensus across the region as to the minimum qualifications of an English language teacher. In some cases, regular primary and secondary school teachers, who may not have any special training in language teaching or even an advanced command of English, are responsible providing

English language instruction in addition to all other subject areas. "Other countries, such as Mexico, Argentina, Chile, and some municipalities in Brazil, have chosen to hire anyone who has some command of English, even though he or she has no special training in ELT or working with children" (Ramírez-Romero & Sayer, 2016, p. 5). There are an "insufficient number of specialized English teachers available in each country" (Ramírez-Romero & Sayer, 2016, p. 5). As with many aspects of English language instruction, the negative ramifications of the teacher shortage fall most heavily to rural areas, where it is more difficult to attract highly qualified teachers with advanced proficiency in English.

In conclusion, regional trends across Latin America indicate a growing mandate to include English language instruction in primary schools as well as secondary schools. These expanded English language policies face a number of obstacles to effective implementation that result in limited English language proficiency across most countries in the region. "To date, knowledge of English in Latin America has reflected existing political and economic power structures. It has remained the preserve of the elite with access to private schooling, and as such it demarcates and divides social groups by reinforcing an unequal distribution of wealth, resources, and knowledge. However, the number of people learning English as a foreign language is growing across the region" (Matear, 2008, p. 131).

Contextualizing Language Policy: Lessons from Chile's English Opens Doors Program

This section focuses on Chile because it has implemented a successful English program in public primary and secondary schools, which has undergone multiple rounds of reform in the past two decades. By providing specific information about Chile's

English language program, along with its slow progress through various reforms, I will ground my description of English teaching in Nicaraguan schools.

Chile, the most stable and prosperous nations in Latin America, has embarked upon an ambitious program of English language instruction in both primary and secondary schools since 1996. Chile emerged from decades of repressive dictatorship to become one of South America's leading economies and most stable democracies (CIA, 2016). In 2012, Chile became the first South American country to join the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). For fiscal year 2017, the World Bank classifies high-income economies as those with a GNI per capita of $12,476 or more (World Bank, 2016). Chile is classified as a high-income economy as its 2015 GNI per capita was $14,060 (World Bank, 2016).

In spite of the upwards trend in economic indicators, there is still an overall high level of inequality evident across the country. "In recent years, Chile has been identified as one of the countries with the highest income inequality reflected across social structures including education" (Barahona, 2016, p. 4). Neoliberal reforms to the educational system during the Pinochet dictatorship resulted in a highly stratified educational system, based on free-market principles of competition and consumer choice, which continues to characterize the current Chilean school system. This complex web of public-private partnerships includes subsidized (voucher) private schools, municipal public schools, and fee-paying private schools. Education reforms have highlighted "the need for a modern education system in a democratic society to overcome inequalities; to promote greater social justice and equity; and to strengthen Chile's entry into a global economy through investment in skills, knowledge and technology" (Matear, 2006, p. 38).

National policies mandating English language instruction have been used as a tool by democratic governments to signal a commitment to reducing inequities in the schools. The first education reform concerning the expansion of English instruction occurred in 1996 when English instruction was mandated from fifth to twelfth grade. Before this reform, "English was only an optional element of secondary education curriculum in the public system (i.e., voucher schools and municipal schools)" (Barahona, 2016, p. 5). Although the reform was enacted in 1996, in reality, it took years for an expanded English language program to trickle down to schools across Chile.

Goals of the English Opens Doors Program and Curricular Framework

The initial 1996 education reform was further refined in 2008 and 2012, with each subsequent version further highlighting the importance of English as a strategy for national development, economic growth, and social equality. Barahona (2016) indicates that the initial push for English education in the 1990s focused on developing Chilean students' receptive English skills in the areas of listening and reading, but only dedicated a small percentage of curriculum focus to writing and speaking. "The basis for this approach was justified by assertions that English for Chileans was a tool that allowed people to access information and knowledge. The emphasis on receptive skills would allow people to access the global economy and information network" (Barahona, 2016, p. 6). Subsequent refinements of Chile's English language curriculum have redefined the focus to give more equal weight to all four domains of language learning: listening, reading, writing, and speaking.

The most recent reforms further aligned Chile's English language education program with international trends and increased the standardization of evaluation

procedures, largely coinciding with the European CEFR. "The Ministry decided to use CEFRL as a way to support the English curriculum to well-known international standards and follow a trend that other countries in South America and Asia, such as Colombia, China and Taiwan adopted. In line with this, contents and objectives are aligned with the CEFRL framework" (Barahona, 2016, p. 10). The 2012 reforms explicitly adopt a communicative approach, modeled heavily upon the goals and framework outlined in the European CEFR. The 2012 curriculum also increased the total weekly teaching time so that 135 minutes a week or "three periods per week of the elementary curriculum was now to be devoted to learning English in 5th and 6th grade at public schools" (Barahona, 2016, p. 12). The Chilean Ministry of Education created English textbooks and provided them to teachers in "municipal and voucher schools" (Barahona, 2016, p. 9). In 2012, Chile established target proficiency levels for primary and secondary grades, using CEFR as a reference: "A1=4th grade; A2=8th grade; B1=12th grade" (Barahona, 2016, p. 8).

Chilean schooling continues to reflect larger social and economic inequalities. Within this schema of static inequalities, "English operates as a sort of linguistic currency, the benefits of which accrue more readily to some social classes than to others for whom it is commercial capital that they simply do not possess" (Matear, 2008, p. 133). Students are motivated to learn English largely for the perceived personal economic benefits, yet it is difficult for students in rural, high-poverty areas to have access to high quality English instruction. Within the overall framework of Chilean English language education, there is a sub-program created in 2003, *English Opens Doors,* which focuses specifically on improving English proficiency of public school students between fifth and twelfth grade by providing additional teacher training,

instructional materials, and English language camps. The *English Opens Doors* program has an explicit focus on closing the English language gap between public and private school students.

Challenges of Implementation

One of the main challenges to full implementation of an expanded English language instruction in primary and secondary schools across Chile is "the lack of qualified teachers of English in the country, especially in the rural areas" (Barahona, 2016, p. 9). Matear (2008) also points to teacher shortages as "perhaps the greatest challenge for the successful implementation of this programme" (p. 138). Many teachers simply do not have sufficiently high levels of English proficiency themselves in order to be able to teach the language to students: "more than 90% of teachers present a lack of an adequate use of English or misunderstand grammatical structures, mispronounce words, misuse vocabulary or are not sufficiently fluent to effectively teach" (Barahona, 2016, p. 18). Alternatively, other professionals, such as translators or interpreters, possess adequate English skills, but are not trained as teachers (Barahona, 2016).

As with other aspects of education policy implementation, students in rural areas suffer from the most negative effects of the teacher shortage. Barahona (2016) notes "that higher percentages of unqualified teachers appear more prominently in rural areas than in urban areas" (p. 17). The Chilean Ministry of Education attempted to lessen the negative impact of the English teacher shortage by producing a pack of additional educational materials titled "*It's my Turn!"* that was distributed exclusively to rural schools. The *It's my Turn!* pack "includes a series of DVDs with the lessons, a guide that explains how to use the program, workbooks for learners, a teacher's book, a CD-ROM

with songs and chants, a bilingual dictionary, and an assessment notebook. It is intended that teachers would become students of English at the same time as using the tool with their students" (Barahona, 2016, p. 20). The effectiveness of this tool is somewhat mixed, with rural teachers reporting discomfort utilizing the kit due to their own lack of English proficiency and technological inexperience. Students, however, did demonstrate that "they learned vocabulary and basic structures of English. This study suggested that a tool like *It´s my Turn* could prove an effective tool for teaching EFL in the rural areas of Chile" (Barahona, 2016, p. 20). Although these alternative materials provide some temporary support for non-English proficient teachers to incorporate English in rural schools, it certainly is not equivalent to having a well-trained, highly-proficient professional teacher providing language instruction.

In addition to a lack of qualified English teachers, effective English instruction has been negatively affected by large class sizes across the country. Large class sizes in public schools, up to 45 students, are also consistently reported to be a hindrance to establishing effective language practices, including more interactive, collaborative and student-centered activities (Matear, 2008; Barahona, 2016).

Initial Results

In 2010, the Chilean Ministry of Education introduced a standardized test, *Sistema de Medición de la Calidad de la Educación, inglés* (SIMCE inglés), to measure English proficiency. The SIMCE is taken by eleventh grade students every two years (Barahona, 2016). The SIMCE was developed based on the TOEIC Bridge (Test of English for International Communication) and reports English proficiency based on the CEFR reference levels. There are four possible levels: below A1, A2, B1, B2. A score

of below A1 indicated extremely limited English proficiency while B2 is the highest reference level included in the assessment. The 2010 SIMCE results confirmed the continuation of marked inequality between Chile's public and private schools with regards to effective English instruction. Of all the eleventh-grade students tested, "only 11% of Chilean teenagers reached level A2 from the CEFRL. Most students scored below an elementary level of proficiency. More alarmingly, SIMCE 2010 results also demonstrated that students with lower levels of proficiency came from more deprived he socioeconomic levels" (Barahona, 2016, p. 17). Results from the 2012 and 2014 SIMCE results show similar patterns of low English achievement for a majority of Chilean secondary students, but also provide evidence of increasing proficiency with each assessment period. The 2012 SIMCE results demonstrate that only 12% of Chilean eleventh graders reached an English proficiency level A2 or B1, with the remaining 82% falling below the A2 standard, which was considered to be the eighth-grade benchmark (Agencia de la Calidad de la Educación, 2013). The 2012 SIMCE results show that 25% of Chilean eleventh graders reached an English proficiency level A2 or B1, with the remaining 75% of students scoring below the A2 standard (Agencia de la Calidad de la Educación, 2015).

Importantly, all three administrations of SIMCE continue to show markedly different English proficiency levels based on students' socioeconomic background. In the 2014 SIMCE exam, 62% of students in the high SES category achieved B2 status whereas only 0.3% of students in the low SES category achieved B2 proficiency. Alternatively, 88.6% of low SES students did not even meet an A1 proficiency level, whereas only 4.1% of students in the high SES category scored below A1 proficiency

(Agencia de la Calidad de la Educación, 2015). Barahona (2016) succinctly summarized the limited effect that English has had on equalizing patterns of privilege: "policy approaches have tended to sustain rather than address the stratification and inequity in schools through English language learning. English as a compulsory school subject at schools has not guaranteed equity and access to a globalised world" (Barahona, 2016, p. 17). The SIMCE results have thus far demonstrated that including English in primary grades as a compulsory subject of study does not guarantee that students in the eleventh grade will have appreciably high levels of English proficiency.

Chilean policymakers espoused multiple goals for the expanded English language program, including national development, economic growth, and social equity. "The expansion of English at the primary level in the public school system has certainly meant that not only elite groups have been afforded the opportunity to be proficient in the English language, with students from all socioeconomic backgrounds now having potential access to the lingua franca of a globalising world" (Barahona, 2016, p. 21). Although there is certainly potential for English language education to play a part in opening up previously restricted opportunities and reducing inequality, evidence suggests that has not yet been a realistic policy outcome. The English language mandate in primary schools has been ineffective at altering existing patterns of English achievement based upon students' socioeconomic background. Chile is identified as one of the OECD countries with the highest income inequality (Barahona, 2016), which reflects deeply rooted social inequities that will not be reversed simply through increased access to English language education. Initial results of the past two decades of mandated English suggest that "the levels of competence in English that are achievable through the school

curriculum alone may be insufficient for expanding employment or educational opportunities" (Matear, 2008, p. 142). The widespread low performance of Chilean secondary students on the SIMCE indicate that students are learning little English despite a minimum of seven years of instruction in the language. The fact that English proficiency remains highly correlated to students' socioeconomic background suggests that current policy implementation has not had the egalitarian effects that policymakers espoused.

Implications for Study of Nicaragua's English Language Policy

Even within Latin America's most economically stable country, Chile's implementation of mandatory English language instruction in primary and secondary schools has been fraught with difficulties and challenges. There were numerous barriers to effective implementation of English language policy, namely the severe shortage of qualified teachers and entrenched inequities. In spite of the English language policy orientation highlighting the potential for social mobility, persistent social and economic inequalities have not been substantially addressed through this educational policy. Overall, students in rural areas and those from low socioeconomic families did not benefit greatly from the expansion of English in Chile's public schools.

If the rise of English language education has been plagued with difficulties and largely ineffective in one of Latin America's most wealthy economies, what are the implications for Nicaragua, which is the second poorest country in the region? An important lesson from Chile's English language policy is the gradual refinement of its English language program over a period of decades. The slow march through policy reforms has resulted in greater alignment with international language learning

frameworks, namely the CEFR and its defined proficiency levels. Since 1996, Chile has dedicated resources to enhancing teacher training, developing an English curriculum, creating English language textbooks, expanding into primary school, and developing a system of assessment and evaluation tied to the CEFR. Like Nicaragua, current results across Chile suggest low-levels of English proficiency, even after years of mandated study, with markedly lower results in rural areas. To address persistent low achievement, the Chilean government continues to improve its English language policy, currently focusing on the *English Open Doors* program to increase teacher capacity. Chile's English language policy has gradually evolved due to a deliberate process of continual reflection and refinement.

Chapter 4: Language Policy in Nicaragua's Schools

Introduction

In order to ground the analysis of Nicaragua's education language policy, it is necessary to first provide an appropriately nuanced contextual understanding of Nicaragua's social, economic, and political history. Nicaragua is the second poorest nation in the region, superseded in poverty only by Haiti, and struggles to reach international goals of educational access and quality for most of its population (UNESCO, 2015b). For fiscal year 2017, the World Bank classifies lower middle-income economies as those with a GNI per capita of between $1,026 and $4,035 (World Bank, 2016b). Nicaragua is classified as a lower middle-income economy as its 2015 GNI per capita was $1,940 (World Bank, 2016b). There are considerable socioeconomic variations based on geography (rural/urban) and ethnic groups. Nicaragua is largely a nation of Spanish-speaking *mestizos* with pockets of indigenous communities isolated in the two autonomous regions on the Atlantic Coast, the North Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAN) and the South Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAS). Nicaragua's language policy takes two distinct forms: transitional bilingual programs in some primary schools targeted at speakers of indigenous languages and English as a foreign language instruction in all public secondary schools. The need for bilingual education is recognized by MINED policies; however, it has inconsistently been implemented and only targets schools on the Atlantic Coast. Simultaneously, MINED requires English courses in all secondary schools, but also faces serious obstacles to meaningful implementation in rural zones where qualified teachers and appropriate resources are limited. Overall, the MINED has been unsuccessful in balancing competing linguistic

priorities to promote greater equity for traditionally marginalized indigenous groups, in spite of official policies supporting greater linguistic inclusion.

The Nicaraguan Education Policy Context

Nicaragua is marked by a turbulent history of civil war, economic instability, and continuing political unrest. Nicaragua's multiple political upheavals in the past century profoundly affect the conceptual framework of schooling, which was altered considerably with each change in political power. The failures and successes of Nicaragua's educational system must be examined in conjunction with an understanding of its unique historical, political, economic, and social context.

Brief History and Current Educational Policy

From 1932 until 1979, the Somoza family largely controlled the Nicaraguan economy, military, and political system with the tacit support of the United States. The Somoza dynasty was notoriously corrupt, utilizing public resources for personal gain, sharply repressing criticism, and suspending civil liberties among Nicaraguans. In the mid-1970s, the endemic poverty and violent repression began to coalesce into a growing movement questioning the legitimacy of the Somoza government and ultimately led to the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* (FSLN) Revolution that toppled the regime in 1979.

After assuming power in 1979, the FSLN focused on rebuilding the nation with a strong socialist stance. The highly restrictive educational system under the Somozas reserved educational opportunities exclusively for elites, thus the government made increased access to schooling a priority. Drawing on the Cuban experience, the FSLN quickly embarked on a literacy campaign both to garner political support and to make

real educational gains. The socialist focus of the FSLN had real and immediate results for average Nicaraguans: "among the Sandinistas' indisputable gains in social justice in the early days of the revolution were large-scale land redistribution, relative basic food security, free basic health care, and literacy campaigns, which initially reduced national illiteracy from over 50% to 12%" (Muhr. 2008, p. 149). These short-lived social advancements were soon undermined by the U.S. backed contra war in the early 1980s. Approximately three percent of the population was killed during the war (Ruiz De Forsberg, 2007) and, by the end of the 1980s, Nicaraguans were clamoring for an end to the conflict. In 1990, democratic elections resulted in Violeta Chamorro winning the presidency and the FSLN peacefully ceded power.

The Chamorro administration quickly embarked on a markedly different course for Nicaragua's growth and development, one dependent upon "establishing contacts with the major international financial institutions; the implementation of structural reforms and the return to a market-oriented economy" (Ruiz De Forsberg, 2007, p. 98). International support was contingent upon the adoption of austere fiscal policies, leading to a marked reduction in social expenditures (Arnove, 1995). These conservative economic policies continued largely unchanged throughout the next two presidential administrations as Nicaragua continued the process of reintegrating into the world economy and global politics, including entry into DR-CAFTA, privatizing of state-owned enterprises, and stabilizing conditions for investment. As part of overall reforms, the conservative government embarked on an ambitious project of educational decentralization for primary and secondary schools through the Autonomous Schools Program. These reforms effectively granted administrative, personnel, and budgetary

powers to school councils, composed of parents and elected officials. The three elected governments from 1990-2006 were "all of a neoliberal vein [and] achieved a discrete increase in the GDP but inequality also increased" (Visser-Valfrey et al., 2010, p. 10). The social unrest caused by such high levels of poverty and glaring inequalities was partly responsible for the result of the 2006 elections ushering in a new era of FSLN political power.

Since the political defeat of the FSLN in 1990, Ortega ran in the three subsequent presidential elections, but was unsuccessful until 2006 when, amidst considerable controversy, he finally won with 38% of the vote. Importantly, Ortega did not win significantly more votes in the 2006 elections than he had in previous attempts, but the electoral rules had been changed to lower the percentage of the vote necessary for victory (Blumenthal, 2007). In 2009, Ortega further cemented his hold on political power in the country when he, alongside members of the National Assembly, rewrote the constitution to permit presidents to serve multiple terms in office. Ortega has continuously been in power since 2006, most recently winning the 2016 election with his wife, Rosario Murillo, joining him in office as vice-president.

Currently, Nicaragua's educational system faces several challenges, including a "high number of out-of-school children, especially in rural areas, low levels of student learning outcomes in regional assessments (which are linked to poor preparation of primary school teachers and insufficient learning materials), and low quality of preschool education, particularly among disadvantaged rural households" (Global Partnership for Education, 2016). Nicaragua's educational indicators are even more uneven when

national data sets have been disaggregated by gender, wealth, residence (urban/rural), ethnicity, and language.

Although Ortega and the Sandinista party have been in power for almost a decade, there remains limited research detailing the effects of political changes on educational policy. The World Bank was the only institution to reference to possible disruption of previous educational policies when it noted that, "With the installation of the New Government for Reconciliation and National Unity in January 2007, the Nicaraguan political and institutional context has undergone deep changes and there have been some initial concerns on the part of the donor community that these changes could potentially be detrimental to agreed-on processes of harmonization and alignment" (World Bank, 2009, p. 121). Thus, the educational sector has been destabilized by political changes in recent decades. In Nicaragua, all civil service agencies are affected when there is a shift in governmental power, which leads to a lack of continuity from one government to the next. In the educational sector, this has led to unpredictable curricular reforms at each change of government and inconsistencies in the educational priorities based on ideological preferences.

Programa Educativo Bilingüe Intercultural (PEBI)

Nicaragua's Plurilingual and Multiethnic Atlantic Coast

The Atlantic and Pacific coasts of Nicaragua followed very different development paths due to their unique colonial histories. The Pacific coast was initially colonized by Spain and all indigenous groups were long ago assimilated into a uniformly Spanish-speaking *mestizo* identity. Indigenous populations along the Atlantic coast, however, never became part of the Spanish colonies. In contrast, the Atlantic Coast region became

a British protectorate until 1894 and English Creole coexisted with existing indigenous languages. For centuries, the political and economic development of the two regions remained unconnected, with the Atlantic Coast being largely disregarded politically, socially, and economically.

In Nicaragua, as in other Latin American nations, "conditions are worse in rural areas, where two out of three people struggle to live on less than $2 (US) a day. Children and adolescents in the Atlantic Autonomous Regions (RAAN and RAAS) – home to the largest portion of indigenous and afro-descendent populations – have the most deplorable social and economic indicators and are the most at-risk" (UNICEF, 2009, p. 4). In the two autonomous regions of the Atlantic coast, progress towards universal primary education has been compromised by intersecting risk factors. Many children in the RAAN and RAAS are negatively affected by a multitude of disadvantages, such as rural residence, poverty, and speaking a minority language. The RAAN and RAAS are home to multiple languages and ethnic groups: Miskito, Sumo-Mayangna, Creole, Garifuna, Rama, and Spanish-speaking *mestizos*.

Even within the Atlantic Coast Region, indigenous groups do not constitute a majority of the Nicaraguan population. There are many indigenous languages coexisting within the same region and often used within the same social or political sphere for different reasons. Freeland (2003) notes that "many Costeños, even some Spanish-speaking mestizos, grow up with dynamic bi-, tri- and even quadrilingual repertoires, and use frequent code-switching to negotiate identity in conversation" (p. 241). This fluid plurilingualism is characterized by the varied and multiple interactions between many languages, sometimes being used interchangeably depending upon purpose and necessity.

Table 1: Ethnic Breakdown of the Population of Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast

Population of the Atlantic Coastal Region	
Mestizos	56.64%
Miskito	36.18%
Sumo-Mayangna	5.93%
Creole	1.15%
Garifuna	0.43%
Rama	0.32%

(adapted from Valiente Catter, 2001, p. 725)

Nicaragua's Bilingual Intercultural Education Policy and Implementation

As a component of the 1987 Law on Autonomy for the Atlantic Coast, cultural rights were emphasized through the "Intercultural-Bilingual Education Programme (PEBI), which for many Costeños has become a key symbol of autonomy" (Freeland, 2003, p. 241). According to the Nicaraguan Ministry of Education, the official policy of intercultural bilingual education, *Programa Educativo Bilingüe Intercultural (PEBI)* specifically serves the Atlantic Coast through mother-tongue instruction in pre-primary and primary school for speakers of *miskito, mayagna y criollos* (MINED, 2016). There is no mention of mother-tongue instruction beyond primary school and there is no policy extending bilingualism to Spanish-speaking *mestizos* on the Pacific Coast. PEBI has been highly regarded as a symbolic victory for indigenous rights in the autonomous regions, but has faced significant obstacles in effective implementation. The limitations in funding, school infrastructure, bilingual materials, and adequately trained teachers

demonstrate the difficulties of implementing PEBI in a limited geographic region targeted at a small percentage of Nicaragua's population.

Relationship between PEBI and Nicaragua's English Program

Thus far, PEBI has only been implemented in some primary schools in the two autonomous regions on Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast. There is currently no bilingual educational policy in place for Nicaragua's 15 other departments, where the majority population is exclusively Spanish-speaking *mestizos*. This unidirectional policy does not fundamentally alter the existing power dynamics of Spanish language dominance in the region. Speakers of indigenous languages must still acquire the language of the state, Spanish, for social mobility and economic advancement. Outside of the RAAN and RAAS, there is no such corresponding demand for Spanish-speakers to acquire Creole, Miskito, Sumo-Mayangna, Garifuna, or Rama, nor are there any educational policies in place that incorporate a bilingual intercultural curriculum for a majority of Nicaraguans. There is, however, a MINED requirement that all students receive English instruction for all five years of secondary school. Phillipson's (1992) notion of linguistic imperialism provides a useful framework with which to analyze the differential treatment of local and global languages within Ministry of Education language policies. MINED's policies imply the importance of English as a dominant, global language as it is a mandated area of instruction with Ministry-provided materials and curriculum. PEBI is not required in any schools along the Atlantic Coast. The Ministry of Education has established a permissive framework wherein schools can choose to implement a bilingual program, but are not obligated to do so. The Ministry of Education's language policies have therefore established three levels of linguistic power – the global, the national, and the local.

Within these levels of linguistic dominance, English is deemed the language global connectedness, while Spanish is necessary for in-country academic success, and local, indigenous languages are used in limited circumstances and typically only as a transitional resource.

English in Secondary Schools

Schooling in Nicaragua is only compulsory at the primary level, until the end of sixth grade. Nicaraguan secondary school includes seventh through eleventh grade, however, it is an optional level of education. According to Article 19 of the 2006 Nicaraguan Education Law, state-provided basic education is free and obligatory starting from the third level of pre-primary (equivalent to kindergarten) until the sixth grade of primary school. Article 19 further states that the free and required levels of basic education "will be gradually expanded to subsequent levels" (Government of Nicaragua, 2006, p. 14). At the time of fieldwork in July and August 2017, secondary school was still an optional level of education for Nicaraguan students.

Nicaragua is the only country in Latin America where lower secondary education is not compulsory (López et al., 2017). Secondary education is not compulsory because access to secondary schools cannot be guaranteed. An impediment to free and compulsory secondary education in Nicaragua is the overall low levels of government investment in education. With its limited education budget, the MINED's strategic plans have consistently prioritized expanding access to primary without an accompanying investment in secondary school. In 2010, government expenditure on education was 4.48% of GDP, representing 23% of total government expenditure (UNESCO, 2010). Government spending in education showed a significantly higher level of investment in

primary school. Government expenditure for primary education was 438 (PPP$) per pupil whereas the government expenditure for secondary education was 289 (PPP$) per pupil (UNESCO, 2010). Although access and initial enrollment in primary education has increased, completion rates remain low, with a primary completion rate of 58% for rural students and 87% for urban populations (UNESCO, 2017). Repetition and dropout in primary school are a financial drain on the overall system. Porta and Laguna (2007) point to the high cost of failing students who repeat primary grade levels, "the Government of Nicaragua spends $12 million annually on primary repetition (which represents about 8% of the total MECD budget)" (p. 8). The increased investment in primary school leaves limited funds to further develop secondary education. A committed program of secondary expansion would incur substantial costs, including the one-time costs of school construction, textbook distribution, and resource provision along with additional reoccurring expenses such as staff salaries, utilities, and maintenance. If secondary school were compulsory, the MINED would be expected to expand access to secondary school, which is not currently reflected in its fiscal priorities.

Nicaraguan policy has emphasized expanding access to primary school for decades, beginning with the Sandinista-led Revolution in 1979, and has yet to conclusively reach the goal of universal access and completion. After assuming power in 1979, the Sandinista government prioritized equitable school access. Drawing on the Cuban experience, the Sandinistas quickly embarked on a literacy campaign and, by 1983, had "initially reduced national illiteracy from over 50% to 12%" (Muhr. 2008, p. 149). In 2005, the literacy rate among the population aged 15 years and older was 78% (UNESCO, 2010). Almost forty years later, Sandinistas are yet again the ruling political

party and continue to invest heavily to reach the same goals of increasing access to and completion of primary school.

Within these constrained conditions, English is a required component of the national curriculum for all five years of secondary school. English as a foreign language has been incorporated as a mandatory subject area in the national curriculum with a minimum of three hours of instruction weekly at all secondary levels. In 2009, the Nicaraguan Ministry of Education clarified existing language policies with the release of an updated English language curriculum and supporting materials for all secondary levels. These revised materials brought Nicaraguan policy into greater alignment with international trends supporting language acquisition as a fundamentally communicative act and sought to enhance student participation in what was previously viewed as a teacher-centered content area.

In 2009, the Nicaraguan Ministry of Education released a publication, *Transformación curricular, paradigmas y enfoques pedagógicos* (*Curricular transformation, paradigms, and pedagogical approaches)* that provides an economic rationale for including English as a foreign language in secondary schools and elaborates a framework for reforming English teaching approaches. The MINED declares that English is indispensable in Nicaragua and worldwide for "science and technology, industry and commerce, tourism, education, scientific research, spoken and written media, telecommunications and sociocultural and business exchanges" (2009a, p. 54). The Ministry further elaborates that the English language is becoming increasingly more essential as it is a sign of "international competitiveness and because it forms part of the basic skills that favor employability" (MINED, 2009a, p. 55). This rhetoric is similar to

other countries in Latin America, where English instruction has also been incorporated into public schooling based upon notions of economic growth and global competitiveness.

The 2009 MINED publication further aligns English language education in Nicaragua with global trends because, for the first time, it highlights the importance of a *communicative* approach to language learning. "The communicative approach is born as a need to develop a new innovative pedagogical approach, which contributes to the strengthening of the students' intellectual, social and moral autonomy" (MINED, 2009a, p. 54). As a contrast, previous research indicates that English language instruction in Nicaragua was characterized by teacher-centered "presentations of grammatical structures or vocabulary items. They contained little, if any, practice or production" (Luxon & Luxon, 1998, p. 164). Additionally, the updated English language policy calls for active students, with "the teacher being only a facilitator making the student a more active participant in the process resulting in learning more meaningful for life" (MINED, 2009a, p. 56-57). Chávez conducted classroom observations in 2006, before the reform was enacted, and noted a "strong tendency to organize classroom instruction as whole class (with students sitting in rows) and most teachers tended to assume teacher-centered roles" (Chávez, 2006, p. 36). There exist a variety of contextual factors that could explain the predominance of whole group teaching, including large class sizes, teachers' limited language proficiency, reliance on traditional classroom organization, and a lack of instructional materials to promote small group work.

In 2009, the Ministry of Education also issued new curriculum guidelines for secondary English programs (2009b). Prior to these updates, English teachers did not

have a consistent national curriculum and crafted lessons based upon outdated textbooks that were in short supply. "Some of the most substantial constraints are the lack of a consistent national curriculum, scarce didactic materials, lack of equipment and libraries, and large classes" (Chávez, 2006, p. 27).

There is not a required national English language exam, nor do students routinely take any international English exams, therefore it is difficult to determine proficiency outcomes of students who completed all five years of English class or to monitor program effectiveness. Chávez (2009) points to some indicators that Nicaraguan secondary students leave school with quite limited English proficiency: "after five years of English lessons three times a week during school years, students still do not manage to have appropriate proficiency levels at the end of their secondary studies" (Chávez, 2006, p. 28). Although the lack of standardized tests make it difficult to judge the effectiveness of Nicaragua's English language program, there are some benefits to exclusively relying on teacher-created assessments. "The lack of a standardized test allows for considerable teacher autonomy and flexibility. Teachers do not have to ''teach to the test'' as in so many countries" (Coelho & Henze, 2014, p 155). English teachers can utilize the curriculum, which provides some suggestions for possible student evaluations, or they can create an alternative evaluation.

English Teachers' Training and Preparation

As is the case with many teachers across Nicaragua in both primary and secondary school, English teachers are, on the whole, not highly-qualified: "a large number of English teachers are currently teaching without appropriate professional qualifications and training" (Chávez, 2006, p. 27). In many ways, any Nicaraguan who

was highly proficient in English would be financially self-sacrificing by seeking employment in the public schools due to the extremely low salaries compared to other employment options. The "average monthly salary of a public EFL teacher at the time was between 1800 and 2000 córdobas (about 120 dollars). On the other hand, teachers' working loads were in many cases extreme, as most of them had to teach many hours, face different kinds of students, and be in charge of teaching large amounts of students per classroom" (Chávez, 2006, p. 33). Profesora Andrea indicated that current salary levels had increased, but was still very low. Depending on years of experience and whether they teach at a primary or secondary school, Nicaraguan teachers earn between US $230 to $250 a month, with the school principal noting that he "does not even make $300 a month" for all of his extra hours of work. Due to the poor English proficiency of many teachers, students are "exposed to unnatural, inaccurate and unreal language in many cases" (Chávez, 2006, p. 37).

English in Rural Nicaragua

Nicaragua is still "primarily an agricultural country whose economy remains vulnerable to the fluctuations in the prices of its export goods: coffee, bananas, tobacco, sugar and cotton" (Ruiz de Forsburg, 2007, p. 96). In rural Nicaragua, participation in agricultural activities and informal businesses form the foundation of economic activity. "Agriculture plays a central role in the rural economy, with 90% of households earning at least part of their income from agriculture" (van den Berg, 2010, p. 593). In addition to the production of corn, beans, and coffee, livestock ranching is a main source of rural employment. For those who do not have direct access to land, "agricultural wage work is an important activity" (van den Berg, 2010, p. 593). Households are most often

managing economic risk by engaging in multiple employment sectors simultaneously: "about half of rural households are engaged in the nonfarm economy, mostly alongside agriculture. […] Most nonfarm activities involved services, and especially commerce. […] Nonfarm self-employment activities were often not very capital intensive but did require specific skills or education" (van den Berg, 2010, p. 593). These employment trends were present in Villa Bella Vista as many informants reported that the main jobs available in the community were in agriculture, livestock, and self-employment in home-based small businesses. In rural Nicaragua, English is not a requirement for active participation in the dominant agricultural, livestock, or small business labor markets. Spanish is the primary, and in most cases, exclusive language of business in rural areas. In Managua, on the Atlantic Coast, and along the southern beaches, English could realistically be used for employment in tourism and international business. However, in most rural areas along the Pacific coast region, English is not a requirement for active participation in community life or the job market.

Rural Nicaragua is characterized by high levels of poverty, unemployment, and physical isolation, especially as compared to urban centers, yet rural secondary schools are held to the same expectation to implement English language classes. Across rural Nicaragua, access to secondary school is limited by both supply shortages and poverty constraints. The vast distances between some rural communities and the nearest schools are often too far for students to travel with inadequate forms of transportation, especially in the rainy season when roads become impassable. In the most rural areas, *multigrado* schools are common due to geographic distances, high poverty levels, and insufficient

public funding to build and staff more schools. In *multigrado* schools, teachers face the challenging task of teaching different grade levels in the same room at the same time.

In all educational indicators, rural students are at a disadvantage. Rural students are less likely to complete school: "the geographical divide shows that youths in rural areas are 16 percentage points more likely to be out of school" (López et al., 2017, p. 16). Students in rural schools have less qualified teachers: "at the primary and secondary levels, 42.4 and 24.4 percent of teachers lack teaching certification ("empíricos"), with the vast majority working in rural areas where technical support is scarce" (World Bank, 2015, p. 2). Students in rural areas have lower results on standardized assessments, indicating deficits in access to quality education: "the 2009 national standardized evaluations showed that learning outcomes in grades 4 and 6 were strongly correlated with poverty levels, rural schooling, and low retention rates in primary" (World Bank, 2015, p. 2). Rural students average less total years of schooling than their urban counterparts with an average of 7.9 years in urban areas versus just 4.9 years in rural zones (World Bank, 2015, p. 2). Rural students are less likely to complete primary school: there is only a 58% primary completion rate for rural students while there is a 87% primary school completion rate for urban populations (UNESCO, 2017). In a similar fashion, secondary enrollment, promotion, and completion rates are all lower for rural students when compared to their urban counterparts, with only 7% of rural youth ages 20 to 29 having graduated from secondary school while 26% of urban youth graduate from high school (UNESCO, 2017).

In the context of very poor rural students, who struggle to meet basic needs, English proficiency may be viewed as an unnecessary luxury.

> The rationale for learning English is usually tied to the idea of increased opportunity and prosperity (Shin, 2013). Articles in the Nicaraguan news media frequently reference the need for Nicaraguans to participate in the 'global marketplace,' and English is framed as key to this rhetoric of globalization. But market capitalism poses a problem for children growing up in rural areas all over the world. (Coelho & Henze, 2014, p 147)

Across rural Nicaragua, is English perceived as a useful subject to study or merely a government mandate from the MINED? In rural communities, the English language teaching "situation is deeply impacted by the lack of high tech resources and the poor economic conditions overall" (Coelho & Henze, 2014, p 155). They noted the "lack of Internet access, lack of electricity, and lack of textbooks for each student (in most cases only the teacher has the textbook). There are no native English speakers living in the communities and television programs, where available, is only in Spanish (therefore, students and teachers have no models of fluent English speakers)" (Coelho & Henze, 2014, p 155). Although teaching English in any public school across Nicaragua would present some challenges in terms of scarce instructional materials, limited access to technology, and unclear evaluation standards, English language education in rural areas presents unique hardships.

Conclusions

There are two distinct aspects to Nicaraguan education language policy: transitional bilingual programs utilizing indigenous languages in some primary schools along the Atlantic Coast and English as a foreign language instruction in all public secondary schools. While both types of language programs are supported in official

policy statements, MINED policy emphasizes the importance of expanding communicative English instruction and deprioritizes bilingual programs. English as a foreign language is a required subject of study for all five years of high school, with a MINED provided curriculum, textbooks, and regulations establishing the expected amount of instructional time in English. Bilingual education is permitted, but not required, and existing programs are located exclusively in plurilingual communities along the Atlantic Coast. Although English instruction receives priority in MINED policy statements, Nicaraguan schools still operate with constrained budgets. A lack of material resources across all levels of education remain a barrier to higher levels of educational achievement for all students. As is consistent with other Latin American countries, poverty levels in rural areas are even more extreme. Students attending rural schools face additional difficulties such as a lack of qualified teachers and limited instructional resources. Previous studies of English instruction in rural Nicaragua depict deeply challenging conditions, including English teachers with limited English proficiency, little to no technological resources, few textbooks and curricular materials, dominance of traditional teacher-centered instructional practices, unclear proficiency goals, and limited student engagement (Chávez, 2006; Coelho & Henze, 2014; Henze & Coelho, 2013). Even though English instruction is supported by the MINED, evidence suggests that students have very limited English proficiency after five years of study in public high schools.

Chapter 5: Methodology

This chapter provides an overview of the methodology used to research Nicaragua's English language program. I provide an account of the existing literature that informs my decision to pursue qualitative methods. The subsequent sections explain the choice of a specific qualitative method, a case study, as well as outlining the details of site selection, data collection methods, and data analysis using grounded theory as an analytical tool. Classroom observation, interview, and focus group protocols are included as appendices.

Research Questions

This study explores how Nicaraguan English language teachers contended with the difficult task of implementing mandated policies in light of complex contextual restrains. The following research questions are the focus of this study:

Research Question #1: How do Nicaraguan English language teachers implement mandated language policy in rural areas?

- How does MINED support teachers in implementing English language policies via curriculum, materials, training, and evaluations?
- How do classroom practices reflect MINED policy orientations and curriculum frameworks?

Research Question #2: How do stakeholders (teachers, students, parents, and school administrators) conceptualize the utility of English language instruction in rural Nicaragua?

- How do stakeholders articulate their reasons and motivations for English language teaching and learning?

- How do stakeholders perceive English proficiency to be useful in future social, academic, or economic endeavors?
- In what way, and using what criteria, do stakeholders evaluate the effectiveness of current instructional practices in meeting their expectations regarding English proficiency outcomes?

Language Education and the Qualitative Tradition

A review of relevant literature exploring language education policies and practices in Latin America reveals that, to date, research designs predominantly favor studies of a qualitative nature. In the literature review of Latin America's language programs and Chile's English language program, no studies rely exclusively upon a quantitative analysis. The bilingual and English-language education literature in Nicaragua primarily utilizes research methods steeped in anthropological traditions of qualitative fieldwork, namely ethnographies and case studies. Although there are few published studies about Nicaragua's language policies, all available publications include qualitative research methods. All studies of Nicaragua's PEBI policy along the Atlantic Coast (Freeland, 2003; Midling & Ayala Alvarado, 2013; Valiente Catter, 2012) as well as the three studies of English instruction in secondary schools (Chávez, 2006; Coelho & Henze, 2014; Henze & Coelho, 2013) examine language policy and implementation using qualitative methods.

Ethnographic approaches, and qualitative research in general, have been critiqued for "lack of rigor" and a reluctance to generalize across disparate contexts for educational policy making. In response, Creswell (1998) states that "qualitative research shares good company with the most rigorous quantitative research, and it should not be viewed as an

easy substitute for a 'statistical' or quantitative study" (p. 16). Creswell (1998) details the demanding features of qualitative research, which includes extensive fieldwork, sorting large amounts of data, coding large quantities of data, writing thick descriptions of sites and participants, drafting lengthy narratives, and engaging in observations and interviews that require strong interpersonal skills (p. 16-17). The nature of the research question is often the ultimate determinate of research methods. In qualitative studies, "the research question often starts with a *how* or a *what*" whereas quantitative questions "ask *why* and look for a comparison of groups" (Creswell, 1998, p. 17). As the research questions in this study all focus on *how* questions and seek to explore the intricacies of classroom interactions and instructional practices as well as describing stakeholders' perceptions of language learning, a qualitative study design is the most appropriate choice to seek answers to these questions.

Qualitative studies can provide descriptive accounts of the gaps between official policy and the reality of implementation. Many previous researchers point to the unquantifiable characteristics of language classrooms when deciding to use qualitative methods to describe and evaluate language policies. Benson (2002) notes that benefits of bilingual education appear in descriptions of classroom observations and stakeholder interviews, but do not translate easily to quantitative data: "decision-makers and even donors tend to rely on what they understand as clear-cut performance data such as scores from comparative testing to rationalise the spending needed to implement bilingual programmes, yet these data are not always available" (Benson, 2002, p. 309). Benson's observations regarding the difficult-to-measure aspects of language policy is an important precedent for this current study as it asks students and other stakeholders to reflect upon

their own motivations for learning English and perceptions of the purpose and utility of English language education. While these perceptions and beliefs can be deeply described, they are difficult to express in a purely quantifiable way. Delany-Barmann (2010) highlights the importance of qualitative research for creating space for indigenous voices, particularly among teachers who were charged with implementing bilingual programs. In a similar way, I incorporate significant quotes and excerpts from classroom exchanges to document teachers and students' authentic experiences with English language education.

Stritikus and Wiese (2006) note that ethnographic methods are "uniquely suited to understand the micro levels of organization in a way that moves beyond surface-level descriptions" (p. 1109). In the case of language education programs, the micro level research focuses on how national language policies are connected to classroom practices, specifically detailing how teachers, students, and parents are active agents shaping implementation through their interpretation of policy. Quantitative studies cannot account for contextual variations on the classroom level that also affect student outcomes, yet such micro level examinations are essential for understanding how broad policies are interpreted by school personnel, students, and parents.

The three studies published within the last decade specifically researching Nicaragua's policy of English language education in secondary schools all utilized qualitative methods (Chávez, 2006; Henze & Coelho, 2013; Coelho and Henze, 2014). In an important precedent for my proposed work, Coelho and Henze (2014) became participant-observers as they detailed the challenges of implementing English language education in rural Nicaragua and established the importance of prolonged and continued

observations. While all three studies contribute to understanding the development of Nicaragua's English language policy and practices, they are not focused specifically on examining the multiple roles of teachers in advocating for, creating, modifying, and implementing English language instruction in conditions that offer little institutional support. As with many developing countries, rural areas in Nicaragua pose a unique and extremely challenging region to study as they often lack adequate infrastructure and are characterized by high levels of poverty. Thus, a qualitative study provides much needed insight as to how teachers take ownership of the monumental task of implementing a required language policy in situations of scarcity and institutional neglect. Additionally, this study highlights stakeholders' conceptions of purpose and utility and unpack the traditional narrative of English acquisition as a gateway to prosperity in a globalized economy.

Research Design: An Exploratory Case Study

My case centers on the teaching of English in a public secondary school in rural community located in the Spanish-dominant Pacific region of Nicaragua. I focus on the manner in which language policy is implemented, how the policy is supported, and the perception of stakeholders concerning utility and effectiveness. The case study methodology is an appropriate choice of research methodology for this study because the focus of research questions is on *how* current language policies are implemented, supported, and perceived in schools. According to Yin (2014), "doing case study research would be the preferred method, compared to the others, in situations when (1) the main research questions are 'how' or 'why' questions; (2) a researcher has little or no control over behavioral events; and (3) the focus of study is a contemporary (as opposed

to entirely historical) phenomenon" (p. 2). I have little control over larger policy formation in Nicaragua, nor do I have the capability to manipulate stakeholders' behaviors or events. This study focuses on current language policies and is therefore an examination of contemporary events. The case includes a complex interaction of multiple stakeholders, layered with theoretical perspectives rich with power struggles, symbolic relationships, and global trends. Yin (2014) encourages the researcher to consider if "the distinctive need for case study research arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena" (p. 4). The contextual conditions of rural Nicaragua combined with the policy mandates of the Nicaragua Ministry of Education and the various stakeholder responses can be judged a sufficiently complex social phenomenon to be explored via a case study.

Data Collection

Site Selection

The site selected for this study is San Ramón high school located in the rural community Villa Bella Vista in the department of Chinandega, Nicaragua. Chinandega is one of fifteen Spanish-dominant departments along the Pacific side of Nicaragua and, geographically, is the furthest away from the plurilingual Atlantic Coast. There are thirteen municipalities in the department of Chinandega, which is in the northwest region of Nicaragua, sharing a land border with Honduras and a water border, via the Golfo de Fonseca, with El Salvador. Chinandega city is two hours northwest of Managua, the capital city of Nicaragua. Agriculture is the primary commercial activity in the department of Chinandega. Its proximity to the Port of Corinto, the city of Leon, and the Honduran border is advantageous for transporting goods. The climate is consistently hot

throughout the year. Although there are several beaches, nature reserves, and volcanoes within the department of Chinandega, it is not among the popular tourist destinations (INIDE, 2005b, p. 15).

Figure 1: Political Map of Nicaragua

Chinandega is the third most populous department in Nicaragua with a 2005 population of 378,970, representing 7.4% of the total population of Nicaragua (INIDE, 2005a). The 2005 national census indicates that the population of Villa Bella Vista community is 3,900 inhabitants (INIDE, 2005a). The total population of the additional four neighboring communities, whose children also attend San Ramón secondary school, is 3,200. Thus, San Ramón secondary school draws its student population from five rural communities with a total population of 7,100. By way of comparison, the city of Chinandega, capital of the department of Chinandega, has a total population of 85,500, including its *repartos* (neighboring communities).

Villa Bella Vista and its surrounding communities are classified as areas of severe poverty, with 63% of households living in "extreme poverty," according to the El Instituto Nacional de Información de Desarrollo's (INIDE) 2005 Municipal Poverty Map. INIDE compiles regionally-specific poverty data using the 2005 household census information and utilized the Unsatisfied Basic Needs (NBI) methodology (not an established monetary level) to calculate relative poverty levels: low poverty, medium poverty, high poverty, and severe poverty. INIDE measures five indicators to establish the level of poverty within each community: 1) overcapacity of family dwellings, 2) adequate housing conditions, 3) access to clean water and hygienic services, 4) low school enrollment (at least one child between 7 to 14 years old not enrolled in school), and 5) employment/economic independence (INIDE, 2008, p. 28). If a household reports two or more unmet needs, they are classified as households of "extreme poverty." Thus, 63% of households in Villa Bella Vista reported two or more unmet needs.

This specific site was selected for several reasons: applicability to research questions, links to the Ministry of Education and official public policy, and accessibility. The community of Villa Bella Vista is, in many ways, a quintessentially typical rural community in Nicaragua. It has a limited physical infrastructure, with inconsistent access to water and electricity, few paved roads, and varied housing conditions. There are limited opportunities for employment outside of the agricultural or informal sectors. The research questions specifically address the difficulties and constraints of teaching a globalized language in rural areas of Nicaragua, therefore, I could only consider completing the fieldwork portion of this case study in rural communities.

In spite of the rural constraint of my research questions, I could not choose a community that was so remote that it did not even have access to a secondary school as the conditions of learning and instructional practices within government supported schools are also essential elements of the research questions. In some rural communities, there is only a *multigrado* school that serves all grade levels with one teacher responsible for all subject areas. In many cases, these schools receive significant support from an NGO (e.g., Fabretto's SAT program as cited in Coelho & Henze (2014)) and therefore do not strictly implement the MINED policies and curriculum. As Research Question #1 explicitly investigates how Nicaraguan English teachers implement national language policy, it is essential to select a site that has a dedicated English teacher utilizing the state-provided curriculum. Although Villa Bella Vista is a rural community, it is large enough to support one primary school and one secondary school. The secondary school is not a *multigrado* as there are separate teachers for each subject area, thus there is a trained English teacher responsible for English language instruction utilizing the MINED curriculum.

Finally, my previous Peace Corps experience in Nicaragua and continued connection to Nicaraguan educators facilitated access and permission to conduct this study. My previous experience in surrounding communities not only paved the way for entry into the school for observations, but it also meant that I was a "trusted" figure in the community and could more easily obtain parental permission to interview students, conduct a focus group, and interact freely with the parent council, all of which were essential components of data collection. Additionally, my role as a participant-observer,

rather than a passive outsider was significantly advanced by my previous teaching experience in Nicaragua.

Unit of Observation

There are ten public secondary schools in the municipality of Chinandega, with two serving the urban area of Chinandega city and the remaining eight drawing students from various rural areas. The unit of observation for this study is one rural secondary school in the area, serving approximately three hundred-fifty students. Students attending San Ramón secondary school hail primarily from the Villa Bella Vista community, but are also drawn from four neighboring smaller communities. Although some schools in Nicaragua have both a morning and an afternoon session of classes, allowing for greater student enrollment utilizing the same building, this school only has a morning session beginning at 7:00 a.m. and ending at 12:00 p.m. The school staff includes one director and thirteen teachers.

San Ramón secondary school is a typical public secondary school in rural Nicaragua. Students walk from the surrounding areas or take a public bus from neighboring communities. As secondary school is not compulsory, enrollment is highly variable as students progress through the grade levels. San Ramón school demonstrates typical enrollment patterns of rural high schools across Nicaragua. Student enrollment levels are greatest in the seventh grade, but student attrition increases at each grade level, resulting in a significantly reduced graduating class in the eleventh grade.

The teaching staff members have various educational backgrounds themselves, with some teachers having advanced degrees and many years of teaching experience with others being more novice teachers. Additionally, the school staff is representative of

many Nicaraguan schools in rural areas in that many staff members do not live in the small communities served by the school, rather they live in the nearest city and travel via public bus to school daily.

Although San Ramón School serves a largely rural population, it is not a *multigrado* secondary school that serves the most remote areas of Nicaragua. San Ramón school draws its student population from five communities, resulting in a sufficiently large student population to support separate classes at all grade levels and teachers dedicated to a specific subject area. As it is a public secondary school, it draws its financial and curricular resources directly from the Ministry of Education. Therefore, the English teacher at San Ramón secondary school implements English instruction utilizing the same Ministry-provided resources as English teachers at all secondary schools across Nicaragua. Additionally, the financial conditions of the school reflect typical levels of public investment in rural secondary schools across Nicaragua.

The physical infrastructure of the school is also representative of many rural schools in that there is irregular provision of electricity and water services. When accessing the school from the main community, students must cross a small ditch and continue on a dirt road, which becomes muddy and nearly unpassable during periods of heavy rain. The school relies on well water for hygienic services and students must bring potable water from home. Classrooms are oriented around an open courtyard in the middle where there is a small *venta*, a school-run food store where students can purchase snacks during recess. There is also an administrative office, which contains a small collection of instructional materials, which can be used by teachers and students.

The selection of one high school in a rural community in Chinandega represents a single-case design because there is a single unit of analysis. Yin (2014) elaborates a series of circumstances when a "single-case study is an appropriate design," (p. 51) including a *common case*. When examining a common case, "the objective is to capture the circumstances and conditions of an everyday situation- again because of the lessons it might provide about the social processes related to some theoretical interest" (p. 52). In this example, an analysis of English language instruction and a description of participants' perceptions of its utility can provide insights into the implementation of national language policy in rural schools.

Participants

Extended interviews of a variety of stakeholders provided sufficient data to explore Research Question #2, focused on stakeholders' perception of utility of English language instruction. Thus, the participants in this study were the school administrator, English teacher, students, and parents. Their responses to the questions outlined in the interview and focus group protocols permitted a more detailed analysis of the purpose and utility of English language instruction in rural Nicaragua. Additionally, students and teachers were the subject of classroom observations, which provided data to answer Research Question #1, focused on the implementation of language policies and classroom practices.

Administration. There was one secondary school director at Sam Ramón. He gave preliminary permission for me to conduct observations and interviews at the school for the six-week period. He also facilitated access to MINED officials at the departmental level and official MINED documents pertaining to English instruction. He

was interviewed in his role as school administrator. At this school, there was no *sub-directora*, an assistant principal, so his input represented the entire administration.

Teacher. There was only one English teacher who taught all five levels of English classes in this secondary school. I observed and participated in all levels of English classes that she taught. She was interviewed and facilitated access to official MINED documents and the English curriculum.

Students. Students formed an integral part of the observations of English classes at all grade levels. I directly interviewed seven eleventh grade students, for whom parental permission was obtained prior to the interview process. I also conducted a focus group of five tenth grade students to gain further insight into their perceptions of the utility and purpose of English instruction, again, with parental permission obtained prior to their participation.

Parents. Each school had a *Consejo de Padres de Familia* (Parent Council) that held regular parent meetings and was in direct communication with the school staff. I contacted the head of the Parent Council for recommendations regarding scheduling parent interviews. I planned to interview five parents regarding their perception of the utility and purpose of English instruction for their students in this secondary school. After unsuccessful attempts to recruit parent participants for individual interviews, I chose instead to conduct a parent focus group with six parents whose children were enrolled in the eleventh grade.

During my study, the Nicaraguan school year began on February 6, 2017 and the last day of classes was on November 29, 2017. There was an inter-semester break from July 5–11 for teachers and from July 5–16 for students. On the last Friday of every

month, teachers participated in mandatory professional development activities organized by the MINED and students did not attend school. In order to collect sufficient data via daily classroom observations, multiple interviews, and focus groups, I collected data over a period of six weeks, beginning July 3, 2017 and ending on August 21, 2017, allowing additional time for the inter-semester break and teacher preparation days.

Data Sources

Yin notes that "a major strength of case study data collection is the opportunity to use many sources of evidence" (2014, p. 119). Utilizing multiple sources of data allows researchers to approach research questions from multiple trajectories. When these multiple data sources produce similar results, researchers have then triangulated their data. According to Yin (2014), data triangulation consists of "collecting information from multiple sources with the goal of corroborating the same findings" (p. 121). Therefore, in this study, the triangulation of multiple data sources added validity to the results. I collected data via document analysis, interviews, observations, and focus groups.

Document analysis. Before beginning fieldwork data collection, a number of relevant documents were available and added important data about English language instruction in Nicaragua. For example, many of the Ministry of Education documents provided details about the English curriculum, the rationale behind mandated English instruction, and supplementary materials available for instruction. Yin (2014) states that "documents play an explicit role in any data collection in doing case study research" (p. 107). In this case study, MINED documents were considered expressions of official policy and provided guidance to shape questions for the observations and interview

protocols.

Observations. Yin (2014) notes that observations can be a key source of data in case study research, "because a case study should take place in the real-world setting of the case, you are creating the opportunity for direct observations" (p. 113). In this case study, I conducted daily observations of all English classes (45 minutes each section) for a six-week period that included 7th to 11th grades. I was positioned as a participant-observer, which "is a special mode of observation in which you are not merely a passive observer" who "may assume a variety of roles within a fieldwork situation and may actually participate in the actions being studied" (Yin, 2014, p. 115). In order to guide my observations, I utilized an observation protocol with two complementary sections (adapted from Hedstrom, 2011; Auburn, 2015). The first page provided a detailed checklist of best practices in both general education and foreign language classes. This section of the observation protocol had a number of descriptors for each indicator, allowing me to check-off instructional practices as they were observed, as well as a blank space for me to include additional comments. There were three general categories guiding the checklist: Instructional Planning and Delivery, Target Language Use, and Foreign Language Instructional Strategies. While the first section could be applicable to any classroom observation, the second two sections provided specific guidance about teaching practices that were effective for language instruction and those consistent with a communicative approach to teaching and learning. The second page was a "Daily Classroom Activity Log" and allowed me to note the details of class attendance, seating arrangements, daily objectives, the date/time, and the grade level being observed. Additionally, there was space for additional open-ended notes regarding the duration of

each instructional activity, the type of activity, student-teacher interactions, materials used, and any assessments or evaluations that were administered.

Interviews. Yin (2014) states that "one of the most important sources of case study evidence is the interview" (p. 110). Semi-structured interviews guided by distinct interview protocols were conducted to gather data about both research questions. Samples from all relevant stakeholders were interviewed, therefore, interviewees were the English language teacher, school principal, parents, and students. Each interview was conducted in Spanish and digitally recorded for subsequent transcription.

Focus group. The focus group consisted of five tenth grade students, with appropriate permission obtained from parents before participating. The focus group occurred at the school after the conclusion of the school day during week five of data collection. The data from the focus group provided insight regarding Research Question #2, focused on students' perception of the utility of English language instruction. Yin (2014) notes that in order to conduct a focus group, I "would moderate a discussion about some aspect of your case study, deliberately trying to surface the views of each person in the group" (p. 112). Therefore, this focus group had guiding questions focused on students' motivation for learning English, perceptions of utility, and purpose of English instruction in their school. Although our discussion was guided by these initial questions, students' perspectives and responses shaped the subsequent course of the conversation within the context of English language instruction and learning.

Analytical Approach

Each component of data collection, document analysis, focus groups, interviews, and classroom observations, was directly related to the conceptual frameworks that guide

the two main research questions directing this case study. The two conceptual frameworks outlined in Chapter 1, Spolsky's three components of language policy and linguistic imperialism, provided a foundation to generate analytic themes. When analyzing stakeholders' responses to interview and focus group questions regarding the purpose and utility of English instruction, the conceptual framework of linguistic imperialism guided the analysis to consider questions of language status, dominance, and prestige. Classroom observations provided evidence to determine to what extent the MINED's language management policy had been translated into language practices via curriculum implementation in a rural English-language classroom environment. Document analysis was guided by both conceptual frameworks as the analysis of official policy statements was examined through a lens of linguistic privilege while also establishing a basis for determining language management and language ideology.

During the six weeks of fieldwork in Villa Bella Vista, I engaged in both data collection and data analysis. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) state that "collection and analysis should be a *simultaneous* process in qualitative research" (p. 195). The concurrent data analysis allowed me to examine initial data in relationship to the themes derived from the conceptual frameworks and literature review and continue to refine coding categories and future data collection priorities. This initial analysis allowed for a more "recursive and dynamic" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 195) qualitative study.

I first established broad categories for data analysis based largely on the literature review and guided by the two conceptual frameworks. There are only three published studies examining the state of English education in Nicaragua (Chávez, 2006; Coelho & Henze, 2014; Henze & Coelho, 2013). The findings of these three studies, along with

policy statements and curriculum materials from the MINED, provided inspiration for guiding the analysis of classroom observations trends and contextualizing interview data. According to Yin (2014), one "general analytic strategy is to organize your case study according to some descriptive framework" (p. 139). The topics for this descriptive framework stemmed from the conceptual frameworks and literature review and were initially general categories, consistent with the use of open coding techniques.

I used Spolksy's components of language policy and Phillipson's theory of linguistic imperialism to deductively create three broad categories: 1) Language Practices, 2) Language Ideology/Evidence of Linguistic Imperialism, and 3) Language Management/Written Policy. As data was collected throughout the duration of fieldwork, it was analyzed and reexamined for additional patterns that "suggest a useful concept [or] suggesting additional relationships" (Yin, 2014, p. 137), thus initial coding categories were inductively refined. After developing the three initial categories, I utilized the guiding principles of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) as analytical tool to inductively code data based on observed patterns in classroom observations, interview data, and document review.

I hand-coded hard copies of all classroom observations, interview transcripts, and documents using a line-by-line coding process in which I noted in the margins descriptive categories as they emerged. These initial descriptive codes were subsequently sorted into the three preestablished broad categories, in some cases combining initial descriptive codes into broader analytical categories. For example, I initially had separate codes for teacher absences, student absences, tardiness, holidays, school cancellations, staff meetings, professional development, and student walk-outs, but these were later

combined into two more comprehensive themes: use of time and absenteeism. As the analytical categories inductively emerged through the data analysis, there were some instances when the same data was assigned to multiple themes. The MINED English curriculum, for example, spoke to language management processes and language practices in the classroom and were thus included in both categories. All coding categories are listed in Table 2.

Table 2: Coding categories

Nicaragua's English Language Policy: Coding Categories	
Category 1: Language Practices	
Subcategory 1.1: English Classroom Practices	Themes: • Instructional time • Absenteeism • Student & teacher-led practices • Communicative English • Constructivism • Use of target language • Fidelity to the curriculum
Subcategory 1.2: MINED Practices	Themes: • MINED provided resources • Infrastructure • Large class sizes • Teacher training • Technology • Teacher evaluations • English assessment • English curriculum
Category 2: Language Ideology	
Subcategory 2.1: MINED Policy Statements	Themes: • Globalization • Economic growth • Social mobility • Trade • Communication
Subcategory 2.2: Stakeholder Beliefs	Themes: • Student engagement • Student motivation • Parental motivation • MINED staff perceptions of student motivation • Perception of effectiveness • Utility for jobs • Utility for university • Utility for intercultural communication • Utility for immigration
Category 3: Language Management	
Subcategory 3.1: MINED Policy Statements	Themes: • Mandated subject of study • Curriculum • Teacher training • English textbooks • Communicative English • Schedule/Time on task
Subcategory 3.2: Teacher as Language Manager	Themes: • Use of English • Managing student language use • Planning and evaluation

Document Analysis

Document analysis provided essential data for answering both Research Question #1 and Research Question #2 and was initially coded to consider the implications of both conceptual frameworks. For example, in determining the purpose and utility of English instruction, documents were examined for statements regarding language prestige or language dominance. In this regard, in 2009, MINED elaborated curricular documents supporting the notion of English acquisition as a tool for greater global connectedness and economic gain, which clearly aligns with the conceptual framework of linguistic imperialism. In order to determine how English language teachers implemented mandated language policies, I first established what MINED's language policies were via an examination of official documents. There are a number of curricular and strategic framework documents published by the MINED that clearly articulate a communicative approach to language learning and advocate that teachers use constructivist methods (MINED, 2007; MINED, 2009a; MINED 2009b). For example, the MINED (2009a) espouses an updated teaching approach aligned with the European CEFR as it placed greater emphasis on English for communication rather than for grammatical precision. Therefore, initial coding categories for document analysis focused on both language as symbolic power and evidence of language management strategies designed to influence language ideology and language practices.

Classroom Observations

Classroom observations provided data to answer Research Question #1, focused on the implementation of MINED language policy and was linked to the conceptual framework of Spolsky's (2004) three components of language policy. The analysis of

classroom observations focused on how MINED's language management policies were translated to language practices in the classroom. The observation protocol is specifically designed to provide a clear checklist of best practices in foreign language classes that are consistent with the MINED management policy of enforcing a communicative approach to teaching and learning, for example, "Teachers and students speak in the target language." This indicator was used because MINED policy documents encourage English teachers to conduct lessons in English as much as possible; however, previous research (Coelho & Henze, 2014) indicates relatively infrequent use of the target language, likely due to low proficiency levels of teachers themselves. There were additional indicators on the checklist, similarly tied to a constructivist and communicative pedagogy, which facilitated coding classroom observations. Additionally, the classroom protocol had an open-ended observation section, which allowed me the flexibility to note the type of activity, the nature of student-teacher interactions, and materials used, which was analyzed to determine the extent that classroom instruction coincides with MINED's constructivist pedagogical aims.

Stakeholders' Interviews and Focus Groups

The interview and focus group protocols focused heavily on collecting data to answer Research Question #2, stakeholders' perception of the purpose and utility of English instruction. Therefore, interview and focus group data was analyzed through the conceptual framework of linguistic imperialism. This theoretical orientation led me to develop the interview protocols with questions concerning issues of language dominance, policy acceptance, and stakeholders' perceptions of the purpose of English. Additionally, initial coding categories focused on power differentials between languages and tensions

between language-speakers and included: Perceptions of Utility, Perceptions of Purpose, and Perceptions of Effectiveness. When analyzing participants' responses to interview and focus group questions, I discovered consistent themes regarding stakeholders' perceptions of the utility of English instruction in secondary school as well as an expression of the purpose of English in their professional or personal lives in the future.

Researcher Positionality and Community Integration

My own personal and professional experiences profoundly shaped the course of this research endeavor. In this section, I transparently present biases that affected the direction of this study.

In my youth, I was a monolingual English-speaker, largely unconnected to speakers of other languages and isolated in a school environment in which everyone looked and sounded like myself. As I entered high school, my school surroundings drastically changed and I became part of a linguistically, ethnically, racially, and economically diverse student body. It was at this point that I first began learning Spanish in a highly-structured classroom environment, but with the opportunity to realistically utilize my budding language skills with native Spanish-speaking classmates. As I slowly unlocked a new linguistic code and gained speaking proficiency, I noted how manipulating language altered the way that I could interact with friends, the larger community, and my own inner thoughts. After graduating college with a Spanish literature major, I moved to Texas to become a kindergarten teacher where I taught native-Spanish speaking students in a transitional bilingual program. In subsequent years, I also taught in dual language programs, with a purposefully linguistically-mixed student population, as well as Spanish immersion programs, with mostly English-

speaking students learning content in Spanish. In total, I have been a public primary school teacher in the United States for twelve years. I have always taught in Spanish, typically in schools that serve low-income, immigrant populations. My experience as a Spanish language educator, who always has content and language objectives at the forefront of instructional planning, necessarily affects the way that I interact with education language policy and its implementation.

Additionally, I spent two years living and working in a small rural community in Nicaragua as an Environmental Education Peace Corps volunteer. I have personally experienced the challenges of teaching in an overcrowded and under-resourced classroom with students who may have difficulty connecting academic themes to the reality of their daily lives. My previous two years in Nicaragua provided some insight into cultural and contextual factors that affect schooling practices, which have surely colored my current analysis. I also gained a working understanding of Nicaraguan Spanish, which was essential for conducting interviews, observations, and focus groups. As part of my Peace Corps experience, I conducted *talleres* (teacher workshops) with primary school teachers on active participation and effective literacy instruction. Through these experiences, I retained contacts with the educational community in Nicaragua, which facilitated entry into the secondary school for the realization of this study.

I endeavored to embrace my role as a participant-observer when conducting observations in the English class. As there was just one English teacher, I spent a significant amount of time in her classroom and stressed that I was in no way seeking to evaluate her effectiveness as a teacher. As a fellow educator, I fully understood how uncomfortable it can be to have an "outsider" watching, commenting, and judging you

while teaching. I positioned myself as a resource, a native-English speaker, whom the teacher could draw upon as needed. During planning periods, or breaks her teaching schedule, I engaged her in informal conversations about school, family, or life in Chinandega. After a few days, she grew more accustomed to my presence and began asking questions about life in the United States, my experiences as a classroom teacher, and my own family. These informal exchanges helped establish greater rapport that led to her being more relaxed in my presence. On a few occasions, she reached out for help pronouncing words or clarifying a grammar point. I always answered her questions, but I did not directly teach the class or co-plan lessons during the main observation period. On my last two days in San Ramón School, I planned activities and created resources to model lessons that increased the use of English through regular classroom routines, such as taking attendance and a morning message. I only modeled these lessons after I had completed all observations, interviews, and focus groups. Although my role as participant-observer might have a small effect on the reliability of observations, I judged the effect to be greater if I did not meaningfully collaborate with the teacher, especially given the possibility for unequal positionality (native English-speaker vs. non-native English-speaker) and her potential regard for my expert status with respect to English instruction.

When selecting dates for my Nicaraguan study, I intentionally elected to arrive during an inter-semester break in early July to allow some time for integration within the target community before beginning school observations. I lived with a local family for the entirety of my stay and was accompanied by my four sons, ages 14, 9, 5, and 2. My bilingual children were always open to any opportunities to play and be active within the

community. Their willingness and excitement to explore their new surroundings meant that I accompanied them to the local park, soccer field, baseball games, and daily walks around with strollers and bikes. Therefore, in addition to being an American teacher and researcher, I became known as the mother of four energetic boys and was thus approachable and available to different community members, not just teachers in the school. We attended fundraisers at a traveling circus, participated in the patriotic celebrations in July, and rode the local buses. My eldest son, an avid soccer player, joined a local recreational team of similarly aged boys as soon as we arrived in site. My attendance at these games provided another opportunity to get to know members of the community, establish relationships, and become a known figure. Additionally, several soccer players on the team were high school students and recognized me on the first day of observations and were less reluctant to speak with me. My youngest son was full of energy and we constantly took him on walks, trips to the park, and strolls around the neighborhood. His "hyperactivity" was frequently commented on by other parents and families and served as a conversation starter to get to know the community better or to deepen existing relationships. The presence of my children, and the publicizing of my typical mom life with four boys, was an authentic humanizing factor that made me more relatable to the families that I was trying to connect with and facilitated the interpersonal relationships necessary for completing this qualitative research.

Ethical Considerations

Informed Consent

Months before beginning fieldwork, I contacted the director of San Ramón secondary school for preliminary permission to conduct observations and interviews on

the school premises with school staff and students. I was very explicit about the research goals and the parameters of the study so that he would be able to make an informed decision about allowing me to proceed with the study. I also drafted a letter to be presented to the departmental delegate so that MINED officials were informed about the study's purpose, timeline, and proposed participants. After fully disclosing the intent and procedures of the study, the school principal granted me permission to return in July to begin data collection.

Once I arrived on site, I carefully explained the purpose of this research study to all participants (teachers, students, and parents) before initiating any classroom observations, interviews, or focus groups. Additionally, parent permission was obtained before conducting any interviews or focus groups with students.

Confidentiality

Although a contextual understanding of the school's rural location is essential to understanding how national language policy is implemented in rural settings, I have taken precautions regarding specific names and landmarks within the community to protect the confidentiality of the participants. The name of the secondary school as well as the community itself has been altered. All participant names are pseudonyms. Interview recordings and all transcriptions are stored on a password-protected computer that I alone can access. Observation notes were recorded during and immediately after classroom observations in a binder that was stored in a locked room in my site lodgings. After transcribing observation data, the originals remained stored in a locked file cabinet and the digital copies are also password protected on my computer.

Conclusions

Language education research in Latin America tends to utilize qualitative research to describe policies and practices within specific social and political contexts. While there is an official MINED policy mandating English instruction in all secondary schools, it is Nicaragua's educators who are actively shaping the implementation of this policy, often in remote areas with scarce resources and limited formal training. This case study, through the selected methodology, seeks to provide a deeply contextual understanding of the manner in which English language teachers translate policy into practice, combined with a thick description of constraining factors that inhibit effective language policy implementation. It also seeks to highlight stakeholders perceptions of the utility and purpose of English instruction to examine language ideology.

Chapter 6: The Local Community and Policy Context

This study explores how Nicaraguan English language teachers contend with the difficult task of implementing mandated policies in a rural environment that presents complex contextual restrains. In order to fully contextualize the challenges of rural education, this chapter provides an in-depth description of the rural community and high school where this study took place. Additionally, the main elements of MINED language policies, namely communicative approaches to language learning and constructivist theories of teacher-student interactions, are outlined to detail language management policies that are later compared with language practices in the classroom.

Site Description: Villa Bella Vista and San Ramón School

Villa Bella Vista

Although the school and community were briefly profiled in Chapter 5 (*Site Selection and Unit of Observation*), a more detailed narrative formed after living in site for six weeks. Of initial note was the warm welcome I received within the community and the schools. Although I previously lived in the community while volunteering with the Peace Corps, ten years had passed between the end of my service in 2007 and my arrival in July 2017. During these ten years, I returned to Nicaragua on three occasions, with each trip lasting two-weeks, and felt the same gracious reception each time. When first visiting the schools on this trip, I was pleasantly surprised to see many of the same teachers and community members actively working or volunteering in the primary and secondary schools, all of whom eagerly engaged in easy conversation with me and helped establish a positive rapport. The openness of the community, the willing participation of

students, administrators, and teachers, and the presence of my family combined to make the six-week period of fieldwork a productive, engaging, and positive experience.

The small town of Villa Bella Vista is located next to the Pan-American highway, a major thoroughfare crossing the entirety of Nicaragua and continuing both north and south through the Americas. When using the public buses as a means of transportation, it takes approximately an hour to reach the departmental capital of Chinandega. Within the last year, a significant transportation upgrade occurred with the opening of a new highway just east of Villa Bella Vista. This new route considerably shortens the travel time between Villa Bella Vista and the capital city Managua so that now it is a mere two-hour drive. The community of Villa Bella Vista consists of four main paved streets running perpendicular to the highway and eight unpaved side streets that are parallel to the highway. The four main streets were paved ten years ago, prior to that, all streets in the community were dirt and gravel. In addition to the four main streets, there are nine dirt and gravel roads perpendicular to the highway. On the west side of the main community, there is a smaller community, known as a *reparto* (a lower-income neighborhood on the outskirts of a larger town or city), with three unpaved roads, a smaller primary school, and a baseball field. Immediately outside of these communities, there are livestock ranches and farms.

Lining both sides of all streets within the community are a wide-variety of houses, small stores, businesses, and churches. In general, the houses located on the main four paved roads are well-constructed using cement blocks, brightly painted, landscaped, decorated, and carefully maintained. This area is considered the center of town and houses are more expensive along the paved roads. Houses in the *reparto* are of

noticeably lower quality construction, with some being made of mismatched wooden planks nailed together, others with thatched roofs, or simply thick black plastic tarps wrapped around wooden posts to form walls. There is a similar variation in the restroom facilities between different homes, with some having indoor restrooms connected to running water while other families relying on outdoor latrines. Most homes, regardless of financial status, have an outdoor *pila*—a concrete water well with an attached concrete washboard that is used frequently for washing clothes, washing dishes, preparing food, and bathing young children. The *pila* is filled with fresh water either through a connection to a well or pipes leading from the municipal water supply. Even families who have an indoor American style kitchen frequently take their food and dishes outside to the *pila* for washing. The community has regular access to electricity through the local utility company, Unión Fenosa. In comparison to my experience ten years ago, the reliability of electric and water services has considerably improved. This improvement in basic services was confirmed via many informal conversations with teachers and community members. The frequent water shortages were hugely problematic within the community until just a few years ago. Prior to the improvement, many families depended on well water for bathing and household chores, collected rainwater for clothes washing, and stored potable water in large barrels whenever it became available. There were week-long stretches when no water came out of the pipes and when it finally arrived, it was typically in the early hours of the morning, causing people to wake up to fill up all containers. About four years ago, the municipal water source changed, resulting in much greater reliability and the town now has regular access to potable water. In a similar improvement, there used to be scheduled blackouts for most of the day and early evening.

During the entirety of my fieldwork, I experienced only a handful of power outages and four occasions when the water failed. Although these outages and shortages were still inconvenient and negatively affected the reliability of services within the community, it was nonetheless a huge improvement compared to conditions just a few years ago.

At the main entrance to the town, at the junction of a paved road and the Pan-American highway, there is a large covered bus stop on both sides of the highway. Large colorful school buses form the backbone of Nicaragua's public transportation system and dozens of them pass through Villa Bella Vista's bus stop each day on a regular schedule. Most buses pass through on their singular route from the Honduran border to Chinandega city, but there are also express routes to Managua and other cities in the northern Pacific region. The fare from Villa Bella Vista to the city of Chinandega is quite reasonable, 20 córdobas (about US$.65) for a one-way trip. I observed between 15 and 20 saleswomen, congregated underneath the zinc roof of the bus stop. They cooked and sold food, bags of water, and bottles of soda. Each time a bus stopped, the saleswomen approached the bus and sold items through the windows or they would get on the bus at the front door and sell items as they walked through and exited through the back door. I also observed young children in playpens accompanying their working mothers and school-age children selling items at the bus stop.

On the other side of the highway, there is a public health center, run by the Ministry of Health, providing free health care for all and free or low-cost medications. The town also has many churches of different denominations, the main three being Catholic, Jehovah's Witness, and Evangelical. The physical structure of the churches varies widely, with some evangelical churches being held in outside patios, covered only

by a thatched roof, while the Catholic Church is a large, white sparse building, currently being expanded and remodeled. The town square is dominated by a large covered basketball court with a small children's park right next to it. The town square is bordered by the primary school and the Catholic Church.

There are dozens of *ventas* or *pulperías*, which are small stores based in family homes selling household goods. Within the one single block facing the main square and Catholic church, there are four *ventas*, each selling a similar mix of groceries, fresh natural juices, sodas, and cleaning supplies. In addition to these stores, there are other informal businesses that also based out of family homes, including hair salons, Internet cafes, arcades, and billiards. Other specialty stores include those selling school supplies, clothing, and fabric. There are a few businesses run by skilled craftsmen such as carpenters and tailors. Additionally, there are two small restaurants, two bars, and on any given night, a dozen or more *fritangas*, informal street-food vendor posts. There are two larger stores, considered *distribuidoras,* also located in family homes, but selling items in bulk quantities to the smaller *ventas.*

The economic livelihood of the town depends on informal businesses and remittances from abroad. Informal conversations revealed that many households depended on remittances from family members working in the United States, Spain, and Costa Rica. Multiple informants commented that women generally went to Spain because it was easier to get a visa and they could find employment in child care, cleaning, or elderly care whereas men went to the United States, undocumented, to find whatever work they could and send money back to their family. As I walked through the community accompanied by teachers or other family members, I would occasionally

point out a house that had been remodeled or expanded. Invariably, I was told that someone in that household was working abroad and sent money back to improve the house. I wondered if there was any improved home in the town that was financed exclusively by someone working in Nicaragua and was told by multiple sources that no, it was too difficult to "prosper" in Nicaragua and make those types of investments in housing.

Although there is no data specific to the local community, country level statistics reveals that, in 2013, Nicaragua received US$ 1.1 billion in remittances, representing 9.7% of GDP (Cohn et al., 2015). A 2011 study examined the South-South remittances from Costa Rica to Nicaragua and determined that Nicaraguan households receiving remittances take in an average of US$74.45 per month from Costa Rica" (Monge-González et al., 2011, p. 24). As part of this study, the authors surveyed Nicaraguan households about how they used the money sent from relatives in Costa Rica. The study indicated that most Nicaraguans used the money sent from abroad to provide for basic household needs as well as additional health care and education expenses.

> Most [Nicaraguans] use the income to meet basic needs for food, cleaning products, groceries and personal hygiene (86%); paying utility bills (63.8%), health care (46.7%), purchasing clothing and shoes (45.2%) and education (44.8%). Very few households said they were using part of the remittance money for savings (10.4%), or some type of investment such as home building or repairs (11.6%) or investing in a business (7.5%). (Monge-González et al., 2011, p. 37)

While this study focuses exclusively on remittances from Costa Rica, it is indicative of the overall spending and saving habits of Nicaraguans receiving remittances. Although

Nicaraguans also receive remittances from the United States and Spain, I could not locate similar studies tracing the amount and use of money from those two locales.

The landscape surrounding Villa Bella Vista is breathtaking. When standing outside anywhere within the community Villa Bella Vista, I only had to look south for a stunning view of one of the largest active volcanoes in Nicaragua. Within a 45-minute drive, there are a handful of pristine beaches with wide strips of warm sand, surf-ready waves, and a seemingly never-ending horizon. There is a natural spring-fed pool that attracted locals as a quick way to cool off from the omnipresent heat. When traveling by bike or bus directly outside of the community, my eye was drawn to large tracts of flat ranches and farmland that extended as far as I could see until suddenly disappearing into the deep green of rising volcanic hills. Despite its natural beauty, Chinandega remains largely unknown to many tourists, who often headed directly south after flying into Managua to visit the beaches of Rivas and San Juan del Sur, which are a five-hour drive south from Chinandega. Within the city of Chinandega, there are occasionally visitors or NGO workers, but it is still off the tourist track and uncommon. Given the relative scarcity of tourists in Chinandega, and the almost non-existence of tourists in rural areas, my presence as an outside visitor frequently garnered attention.

In the past, Villa Bella Vista hosted two native English-speaking Peace Corps volunteered who both worked at the elementary school. I was one of those volunteers. At the time of my visit, there were no other native English-speaking foreigners living in Villa Bella Vista. Director Antonio mentioned that a Small Business Peace Corps volunteer came to the school once a month, but she lived in Chinandega. I did not see her during my fieldwork and Director Antonio confirmed that her attendance was sporadic.

The health center occasionally received medical brigade volunteers for very limited durations, one or two days, who were international volunteers. Amongst the town residents, some people had taken English classes as part of their university studies, but I did not meet anyone else in town who could converse with me on an intermediate, advanced, or near-native English level.

San Ramón Secondary School

My host family's home was located on the main street in Villa Bella Vista, right across from the town's Catholic church and a few houses away from the primary school. It was a two-block walk to the local high school, passing the elementary school and many small *ventas* along the way, and crossing a small paved bridge. Although it was early in the morning, as I departed before 7:00 a.m. each day, the sun was already strong and hot. Porch-sitting and people-watching were major activities among older residents of the town, especially in the morning as students walk to school and again in the early evening directly after sunset. From the vantage point of my own porch, I saw the commuting high school students passing by at 6:30 a.m. each day, closely followed by the commuting teachers. While on my short walk to school, I was greeted by dozens of families sitting on their porches and accompanied by many primary and secondary students as they were walking to class.

San Ramón School had a morning instructional session, which began at 7:00 a.m. and ended at noon. For a majority of my time at the school, I arrived at the school before 7:00 and left after students were dismissed at noon, thus I observed the entire school day and as many lessons as possible. The only exceptions to this schedule occurred in order to conduct parent focus groups or interviews. The school staff included one principal,

one secretary, one janitor, and thirteen teachers. All MINED secondary teachers are required to have a university degree, thus the entire teaching staff had at least a bachelor's degree and one teacher had a master's degree. The school staff was representative of many rural Nicaraguan schools in that some staff members lived in Chinandega city and commuted via public bus to school in Villa Bella Vista.

During the 2017 school year, there were 354 students enrolled at San Ramón School, 176 girls and 178 boys. Director Antonio stated that although there was some diversity among his student population, the majority came from poor families. Student enrollment figures were detailed by grade level on a chart and prominently posted in the main office, right above the secretary's desk. When I asked the secretary about the accuracy of the posted figures, she replied that although the poster was made in February, after initial enrollment was finalized, some students have dropped out and others have enrolled so the result was "about the same." As secondary school was not compulsory, enrollment was highly variable as students progressed through the grade levels. San Ramón School demonstrated typical enrollment patterns of rural high schools across Nicaragua with enrollment being greatest in the seventh grade and decreasing each year. There were three sections of 7th grade, two sections of 8th grade, and one section of 9th, 10th, and 11th grade, each with varying levels of student enrollment.

Table 3: San Ramón School Matricula Inicial (Initial Enrollment) 2017

San Ramón School *Matrícula Inicial* (Initial Enrollment) 2017			
Grades	**Feminine**	**Masculine**	**Total**
7th A	20	24	44
7th B	15	28	43
7th C	13	19	32
8th A	22	18	40
8th B	19	23	42
9th	36	25	61
10th	19	18	37
11th	32	23	55
General Total	**176**	**178**	**354**

I noticed some inconsistencies in the enrollment numbers at each section and in the distribution of students per classroom, so I asked the school secretary for more detailed information. Specifically, I questioned why 7th grade section C had 11 to 12 students fewer than the other two 7th grade sections. She informed me that their assigned classroom was very small and no additional students would fit in that section due to lack of physical space. She elaborated that that room had previously served as a teacher's lounge, but as enrollment increased, they converted it into a classroom. I also asked about the 9th grade class, which had the highest enrollment at 61 students, and wondered why it was not broken into sections, like 7th and 8th grades had been. The school secretary once again explained that it was due to limitations of physical space – there was simply no space for an additional classroom, even if they could get an allocation for an additional teacher. She pointed out that they already had 10th grade *afuera*, in an outside, open-air classroom that was still covered by the zinc roof, but they could not locate find a suitable location for any additional outside sections. I also inquired about the decreasing

enrollment rates across the grade levels, pointing out that there was a total of 119 7th graders while only 55 11th graders. She said that many students leave for a variety of reasons, some are failing and do not want to repeat, some leave school to work, others get married and start families, while others might transfer to another school or switch to Saturday school. She emphasized that there was not just one reason that caused the decline in enrollment and that sometimes the school did not even know why students left. The secretary also confirmed that students attending San Ramón School hailed primarily from the Villa Bella Vista community, but were also drawn from four neighboring smaller communities. Most students walked from the surrounding areas, but a small portion took a public bus from nearby communities.

Director Antonio discussed the potential graduation rate for this year's 11th grade students as being almost 67%. "When they were in 7th grade five years ago, 82 students entered and now we have 55. But, of those 82, not all of them dropped out of school, some transferred to other schools, some we just don't know, and others have left the country. So, almost 70% of students who entered here in 7th grade will probably graduate from 11th grade this year." He indicated that this was a fairly typical graduation rate for San Ramón School.

As it is a public secondary school, San Ramón drew its financial and curricular resources directly from the Ministry of Education, thus the financial conditions of the school reflected typical levels of public investment in rural secondary schools across Nicaragua. In previous years, students walking to school had to cross a small ditch and continue on a dirt road, which became nearly unpassable during periods of heavy rain. Two years ago, the municipality of Chinandega built a solid cement bridge so that

students could more easily access the school, even in the rainy season. At the same time, the side road leading to the school was also paved up until the bridge, but the remaining short portion of road leading from the end of the bridge to the school entry was still an unpaved dirt road.

The school did have potable water and electric services. During my observations, however, I rarely saw any electricity being used, except for the newly constructed computer classroom. Lights in the classroom were never turned on and I did not observe any audiovisual equipment used as part of instruction. Classrooms were illuminated via open doors and windows and teachers relied on the whiteboard, blue and black dry erase markers, textbooks, and student notebooks as instructional materials. On one occasion, the lights were turned on and a fan was being used in the principal's office during a meeting, but otherwise, electricity was used sparingly.

There were seven classrooms, one computer lab, one office, a teacher restroom, boys and girls restrooms, two small snack stores, an outside classroom located in the covered walkway, and three storage rooms. The school grounds were rectangular, with one line of four classrooms facing a line of the other four classrooms, connected by a covered walkway. In between the rows of classrooms, there was a dirt patio with mature trees. On each side of the classroom rows, there was a paved basketball court along with additional grassy field space.

As I initially approached the high school, I noted the school grounds were in poor condition. The school was surrounded by a chain link fence with spiral barbed wire along the top, however, large holes were cut throughout the bottom of the fence and inexpertly repaired with rope or wire, still leaving gaping holes in various sections. The

main gate was locked directly after the morning bell rings, supposedly to prevent students from leaving, but they could easily slip through the holes in the fence. As the school building was never painted, the gray concrete blocks and cement mortar were exposed. Students had taken it upon themselves to decorate the school, with a large amount of graffiti written with paint, pens, and markers both within the classroom walls and along the outside of the school. Each classroom had two walls of windows to provide adequate light and ventilation, but most windows were missing all panes of glass. The windows that did have glass only had a few pieces of it. At some point in the school's history, all of the windows were protected by steel security bars, however, many of them had been stolen, leaving the windows vulnerable to breakage and open to anyone who might want to take items from the classroom. Each classroom had a whiteboard, but they were in varying states of usability. In one 8th grade section, there were three holes in the board, one of which was quite large and right in the middle, meaning that teachers could only write in the top two corners of the board. Some whiteboards were attached to the cement walls, but most of them were perched precariously on two overturned student desks. Each classroom was dominated by 40-50 student desks, made of metal and wood, taking up a majority of the space in the room and arranged in various configurations. Student graffiti extended to the desks as well, as many phrases and pictures decorated the tops and sides of desks. At this school, students remained in their assigned classroom throughout the school day and teachers rotated when the bell rang. It was difficult for teachers to decorate classrooms and provide display space for instructional materials as they taught in all eight classrooms during the week. As no classroom was "theirs,"

teachers had little ownership of the physical space within the school and had to carry with them any instructional materials they planned to use.

Chinandega is widely acknowledged to be one of the hottest departments in Nicaragua, with temperatures routinely reaching the low to mid-90s. At San Ramón School, the heat in the classroom became oppressive as the day progressed. The first two instructional blocks were generally comfortable with breezes entering the classroom from open windows and doors. In the final instructional block, starting at 10:30 a.m., direct sunlight began streaming through the classrooms and the rising heat became an uncomfortable distraction. Students started fanning themselves with their notebooks, moving their chairs to escape direct sunlight, and leaving the classroom to get snacks and water. There were no fans or air conditioning units in these classrooms.

The one exception to the generally high level of disrepair was the new computer lab. Director Antonio informed me that the lab was only recently finished a few months previously and they were eagerly awaiting the instillation of an internet connection. The computer room was pristine: freshly painted in the school colors, blue and white, with fully functioning fluorescent lights, an air-conditioning unit, locking doors and closets, a flawless whiteboard, windows with all the panes of glass and a full set of steel security bars. It contained twelve desktop computers, fully assembled and plugged in with surge protectors, new computer tables and chairs, and a projector. This room was always locked. In order to gain entry, teachers would have to get the key from the janitor, secretary, or principal. Students were supposed to have a technology class, but I rarely witnessed students entering the computer lab as their classes were frequently cancelled so

that the technology teacher could work on setting up computers or have meetings in the room.

Participant Profiles

This qualitative study depended on the active participation of many stakeholders at San Ramón School, including parents, students, teachers, and administrators. All participants were selected for observations, interviews, and focus groups because of their connection to the teaching and learning of English at San Ramón School. This section provides a brief profile of the English teacher, the principal, seven 11th grade students, and an overview of the parents and students who participated in focus groups.

English Teacher Profile

As all classroom observations in my study revolved around a central figure, the high school English teacher, Profesora Andrea, a deeper look at her background, teaching experience, and position within the community is essential in contextualizing the English instruction I observed in San Ramón School. Profesora Andrea was the only English teacher at San Ramón School, therefore, she taught all grade levels and sections of English. She was an experienced educator, with 22 years of experience teaching English in various public and private secondary schools in Nicaragua. She was in her mid-fifties with three adult daughters, who all lived in Chinandega city. Her sister was also a teacher at San Ramón School. She was a highly qualified teacher holding a bachelor's degree from the UNAN – Leon, a prestigious public university, with a major in secondary education and a specialization in English. Thus, she possessed the appropriate credentials and was fully qualified to teach English at the secondary level in Nicaragua. She has been the sole English teacher at San Ramón School for eleven years and was well

respected in the school community by the principal, fellow teachers, parents, and students.

San Ramón School was the only rural school where Profesora Andrea has taught; her previous teaching experience was at public and private high schools in the urban areas of Chinandega city and in Managua. She lived in Chinandega city and commuted for an hour each way via public bus to the community Villa Bella Vista. She was accompanied by a group of five other San Ramón teachers who all traveled from Chinandega city together on the bus. During our interview, she noted the strain of daily travel and emphasized that it was not her choice, nor that of her colleagues, to work at a rural school: "it is not to our liking, not for our pleasure, to be traveling because it is more complicated, it's not like it's close." She explained that the MINED assigned each teacher a position according to school needs, but there was little consideration for teacher preferences. She has petitioned for a transfer, but she acknowledged it is unlikely that she will be reassigned to an English teaching position in the city anytime soon due to lack of openings.

She initially decided to be an English teacher because it was her best subject in high school and she enjoyed listening to English-language music and watching movies in English. She wanted to be a teacher because she perceived teaching as being an integral part of a supportive environment with fellow teachers, students, and parents all working together for the betterment of students. She reported, however, that her initial enthusiasm has waned over the years, largely due to the increasing demands of the teaching profession combined with decreasing community support. She lamented that education was no longer the same profession that it was when she first began teaching over twenty

years ago. She singled out declining parent involvement as a prime reason that her job was increasingly difficult:

> *Como le dijera yo, nosotros los maestros, todos así hablamos, nosotros aquí no tenemos apoyo por parte de los padres de familia. Son bien despreocupados; la mayoría de los padres son bien despreocupados. Nos dejan solo al uno al alumno. Solamente le hace falta al Ministerio de Educación que me diga, 'Mire, después que salga del colegio, váyase a la casa donde el alumno para que lo ponga a estudiar.' Los padres de familia se han descuidado con nosotros…podrían preguntar, '¿Qué te dejaron? ¿Estudiaste? Voy a ir a preguntar a ver cómo vas.' Mejor, vienen a maltratar a uno. Bueno, y los otros maestros, te digo sinceramente, cuando estamos en estos TEPCE, igual dicen que así les pasa. Allá llegan los padres de familia para tratarlos mal a uno y eso decepciona. El sistema educativo ya no es igual. No hablo primeramente de aquí, el lugar . . . en Nicaragua, Nicaragua completa.* [As I said, we teachers, we all talk like this, we do not have support here from the parents. They are very unconcerned; most parents are very neglectful. They leave only the teacher in charge of the student. I only need the Ministry of Education to tell me, 'Look, after you leave school, go to the student's house and tell him to study, to do his homework.' The parents have been neglectful with us and with their children ... they could ask [the students], 'What did they leave you [for homework]? Have you studied? I'll go to school and ask to see how you are doing.' Instead, they just

> come to school to mistreat us. Well, other teachers, I tell you honestly, when we are in these TEPCE [professional development] meetings, they say the same thing happens to them—parents come to school to treat the teachers badly. That disappoints and demoralizes us. The education system is no longer the same. I'm not talking about only here, this school…. in Nicaragua, all of Nicaragua.]

During my observational period, there was one large parent meeting involving all grade levels so that parents could sign for their child's report card. In Profesora Andrea's homeroom section, she reported that only seven to eight parents showed up for the meeting. My notes indicated that there were eighteen parents at the meeting, although six of them arrived twenty to thirty minutes late and did not hear all the information. Thus, out of the 43 students in her homeroom section, less than half of the students had a parent attend the meeting. She noted that report card distribution meetings were some of the most important meetings for parents to attend so that she could inform them of their child's progress and take steps to help those that were in danger of failing. She was disappointed in the lack of parent attendance, especially since half of her homeroom students were failing classes and on a path to repeating the seventh grade.

Profesora Andrea followed a similar classroom routine throughout the period of my observation and with all grade levels. Upon entering the classroom, she placed her tote bag containing textbooks, her planning notebook, whiteboard markers, and an eraser on the teacher's desk in the front of the room. She then took out her planning notebook and found the appropriate date and section and began writing on the whiteboard. She would rarely talk to any students while doing this. They were expected to get out their

notebooks and copy from the board without any reminders. She would always write the date, the lesson's content and objective, and a vocabulary list. Depending on the content of the lesson, she then wrote out a list of grammar rules that would be taught or a series of dialogue examples that would serve as a model for student dialogue. It generally took between five and ten minutes for her to write everything on the board. After she finished, she sat at her desk, allowing time for students to copy from the board, perhaps an additional five to ten minutes. During this initial wait time, sometimes she took attendance, in Spanish, while at other times, she took attendance after getting students started with an independent activity. Once she judged that most students had finished copying from the board, she began the lesson by saying, in English, the date and the content of the day's lesson and its objective. She then read the list of vocabulary and sometimes provided a Spanish translation, verbally or by writing it on the board. After this initial introduction to the lesson, which was always in English, there was great variability in target language use for the remainder of class depending on the specific activity that she had planned. Spanish was used extensively at most grade levels and with most instructional activities. After the initial introductory remarks, she generally explained a grammar point, a dialogue, or a reading activity. After her explanation, she would assign either a textbook exercise, a dialogue practice, or write another assignment on the board for students to complete. A more complete account of the content of English lessons and instructional activities will be further detailed in Chapter 7; however, this brief description demonstrates the consistent routine that Profesora Andrea established in her classroom.

She used a variety of grouping techniques for students' independent practice time:

individual, pairs, or small groups of four to five students. She generally permitted students to choose their own working groups. Most of class time was spent completing these follow-up individual or group assignments. On occasion, there was time allotted at the end of class for groups to present their work, but at other times, Profesora Andrea collected written assignments to grade later. At times, students were dismissed without turning anything in or presenting any work. There was similar variability in teacher actions during independent practice time. At times, Profesora Andrea circulated throughout the classroom, monitoring student work and answering questions, while on other occasions, she stayed at her desk or left the classroom unattended.

Although I followed standard procedures informing her of the purpose of the research study, ensuring that her participating was voluntary and she could withdraw at any time, and obtaining her signature on an informed consent form, she was initially reluctant for me to shadow her classes and observe her all day. As my initial entry into the school had been facilitated by her direct supervisor, Director Antonio, and permission had also been secured from the MINED delegate in Chinandega, it is likely that she felt obligated to allow me to observe classroom instruction, despite the "voluntary" nature of her consent. Fortunately, her initial reluctance reduced drastically over the observational period and by the end, we had established a warm working rapport. This was due, in large part, to many informal conversations that we had during breaks in instruction and the reciprocal sharing of information. She was curious about schools in the United States and I openly talked about my classroom experiences as a kindergarten teacher and a language teacher. Although many contextual details are different, there was a core of shared teaching experiences that promoted a bond. I acknowledged the difficulty of

having someone observe me teaching and the nervous feelings of judgement that are often associated with evaluations. I also emphasized that I was there to learn from her as she was the expert in teaching English in Nicaragua, not I, and that I appreciated her generously sharing her time and classroom with me. I also positioned myself as a resource if she had any questions about pronunciation, vocabulary, or customs in the United States. I emphasized that I was only there to observe typical classroom routines for the first six weeks of fieldwork, but during the final few days, I would be happy to model different activities, co-teach a lesson, plan activities or make materials, or any other activity she would like. This relationship building helped to equalize our working partnership and to minimize the anxiety involved with constant observation and promoted a more open sharing of ideas, opinions, and experiences.

Principal Profile

The school principal, Director Antonio, was a key figure in securing access to San Ramón School. Director Antonio was born and raised in Villa Bella Vista and continued to live in the community with his two children and his wife. He has been an educator for 15 years and always worked in the department of Chinandega. He began his career as a primary school teacher at a rural *multigrado* school with an hour commute on a bicycle up the side of a steep volcano. He was then a teacher at the primary school in Villa Bella Vista. He did not attend the teacher training school, *la normal*, before becoming a teacher. While actively teaching in the primary school during the week, he attended Saturday school at the UNAN-Leon and earned his university diploma with a specialization in secondary education. Director Antonio then worked with multiple secondary schools throughout the department as a traveling counselor, advising teachers

and students using the MINED counseling curriculum. After two years in his role as counselor, he was chosen to serve as the principal of San Ramón School. At the time of my visit, Director Antonio had been the school principal for four years.

He was quite clear that he did not apply to be a school principal, rather the MINED municipal delegate placed him in the role. On many occasions, he discussed the stress of being a school administrator: "It is a very hard task, very hard, but I try to keep in mind that nothing is impossible, that all things can be done, even under pressure. It can be done, but with sacrifice and above all a sense of job responsibility." He noted that, at the end of the school year, he planned on submitting a resignation letter and returning to the classroom as a high school teacher. He cited the demanding nature of his job as the main reason for his desire to return to teaching: "It is a lot of responsibility. Many times, I have neglected my family, my children. The time, precisely because of that, because I have a start time but I don't have an end time. But it's not because I don't like the work, it's simply because I have to take a break. Imagine that I've been principal for four years and in those four years I have not had even one day of vacation. I have to rest a little."

After participating in one formal interview, many informal conversations, and observing his interaction with teachers, students, and parents, I perceived Director Antonio to be a dedicated educator, committed to the betterment of his students and community. He pointed to his own life story as proof that students in the Villa Bella Vista community could overcome any obstacles, but only with effort and a sense of personal responsibility. He is from the community, the youngest of ten children. His father died when he was very little and his mother sold tortillas to support the family. He

said “we were very poor. But, like a famous writer said, poverty is in the mind. We can be very poor, but if we have a very open mind, with a mentality of improvement, we will achieve what our parents may not have achieved. Only two of my siblings managed to become professionals and we are children of the same woman. So, sometimes it is your disposition and the goals that you work for to have a better life.”

I observed how he helped organize extra-curricular activities for students, including renting a vehicle for students to participate in a science fair in the city, often at a personal financial cost. On numerous occasions, he lamented the lack of resources that negatively affected students, including textbooks, computer time, and physical facilities. When he judged excessive teacher absenteeism to be a serious problem, he implemented a public attendance system that tracked teacher attendance quite visibly in the front office, despite vocal teacher opposition. My initial contact with Director Antonio facilitated access to the school community, including introductions to teachers, parents, and students.

Student Profiles

I interviewed seven 11th grade students and conducted a focus group of five 10th grade students. During the fourth week of fieldwork, Profesora Andrea allocated time during class for me to present an overview of the study’s objectives and research procedures, including detailed information about the nature of the interview, student assent forms, and the necessity of getting signed parental consent forms. No students volunteered directly after the group presentation. Therefore, after class, I asked Profesora Andrea to provide input on which students might be open to being interviewed and whose parents would likely fill out and return the required forms so that I could approach them

individually. She instead recruited a "trusted, responsible student," David, and asked him to help me approach other students to be interviewed. After speaking with me, David agreed to be interviewed and then went on to approach other 11th grade students to encourage them to participate. The next day, David gave me a list of six additional students who had agreed to participate in the study and I proceeded to approach them individually to ensure that they understood the purpose and procedure of the study and gave them the required student assent and parental consent forms. After receiving signed consent forms, I arranged to interview all students after school on the school grounds in either an empty classroom or in the computer lab. Three of the 11th grade girls, Karla, Dalia, and Daisy, expressed that they were too shy to be interviewed by themselves and wanted to do their interview all together, so I recrafted the questions to be more consistent with a focus group discussion. All other students were interviewed individually.

In a similar fashion, Profesora Andrea chose a responsible 10th grade student, Amelia, to recruit other students for participation in the focus group. After Amelia spoke to her classmates, she gave me a list of four other students who agreed to participate. I then approached each student individually to more fully explain the purpose and procedures of the study and gave them the appropriate consent forms. Once I received the signed forms from all 10th grade students, we conducted the focus group in the principal's office after school. All students lived with family members within the Villa Bella Vista community.

The thoughts, opinions, and experiences of the students who elected to participate in interviews and focus groups were not necessarily representative of the majority of

students at San Ramón School. The self-selection bias of my student sample was a result of the voluntary nature of the interview process and the requirement to receive written proof of parental consent to participate. All students who participated in interviews and focus groups expressed an intention to attend college after graduating from high school. Director Antonio and Profesora Andrea both confirmed that only a small minority of students from San Ramón School would actually attend university after high school. All participating students expressed a strong interest in learning English and were highly motivated to participate and "get good grades." During multiple interviews, the students themselves pointed out that many of their classmates were not as motivated, did not pay attention, and that their behavior "was a problem." My notes from classroom observations also indicated that these students were not necessarily representative of their peers in that they were generally attentive, sat near the front of the class, participated frequently, and turned in assignments. As such, the interview data, especially that regarding student engagement and motivation, might paint an incomplete picture of the entire student body of San Ramón School.

David. David was 17 years old. He lived with his two parents and two older siblings, one of whom worked and the other was disabled and stayed at home. He was the youngest of eleven children. David reported that his parents did not actively participate in his education as they had limited financial resources and focused on working to maintain the family and their home. David had three family members who had some English proficiency: one of his older cousins who took an extra class, his older sister who lived in the United States, and another sister who lived in Costa Rica. No one in his home spoke English.

David was an outlier, even when compared to the self-selected interview participants, in terms of his extreme dedication and commitment to learning. Profesora Andrea volunteered him to help recruit study participants and he readily accepted. He proudly noted that he was the top student in his class, his grades were always 90 or above, and he spent hours studying each day. He viewed himself as a role model for his fellow students: "I like to participate in everything because a good student has to set the example to motivate my peers to continue to work harder." He was also quite critical of his classmates, who "are only motivated to walk around, fooling around or playing at school. It's difficult for them, they do not put in effort." He had a scholarship to attend a private English class in Chinandega on Saturdays, which he had been attending for three years. After graduation, he wanted to attend a university to study IT systems engineering, but was unsure if he would be able to since no one in his family could provide him with any support to pursue higher education. If he did not get any financial support or scholarships, he planned to work during the week, attend university on Saturdays, and continue studying English on Sundays. He also mentioned multiple times that he might leave the country to join relatives in the United States or in Costa Rica in search of employment opportunities.

Maria. Maria was 16 years old. She lived with her younger brother, who was in kindergarten, and both of her parents, who were lawyers in their own family-run law practice. Both parents were active members of the school community. Maria's mother, Jessica, was the head of the 11th grade parent group and was frequently seen at the school organizing fundraisers, activities, and parent meetings. No one in her family spoke English. Maria planned to attend college and pursue a degree in medicine with the goal

of becoming a doctor.

Axel. Axel was 16 years old and the middle child in a family of three boys. His older brother had already graduated high school and was working as a laborer in the fields because "he didn't want to keep studying." Axel's younger brother was an 8th grade student at San Ramón School. Axel lived with both brothers and both parents in a house. His mom was a stay-at-home mom and his dad was a barber who worked from home. Axel reported that both parents were very involved in his education, frequently attending school meetings and always asking about his homework and assignments. No one in his family spoke English. Axel planned on attending college after high school graduation to pursue a degree in medicine.

Julio. Julio was 17 years old and the youngest of three children. He had an older brother who was studying at a university in Managua and an older sister who was married and living in a larger town closer to Chinandega. He lived with both his mother and father in a house. Both parents worked in informal markets buying and selling crops and traveled frequently between Chinandega and the Honduran border for business. He reported that his parents sometimes helped him with his homework, but that he was most often alone in the house after school because they were both working. No one spoke English in his home. After high school graduation, Julio planned to attend college in Managua and pursue a degree in IT systems engineering.

Karla. Karla was 16 years old and lived with her two older brothers, who were both studying medicine at a university in Leon. No one in her family spoke English. She reported that her family supported her education and ensured that she spent time each day doing homework and chores. After graduating high school, she planned to also attend a

university and major in medicine.

Dalia. Dalia was 17 years old and lived with her parents. She was the youngest of five siblings and the only one still living at home. Her eldest sister lived in Costa Rica, her other sister was a nurse in Chinandega, one brother studied at the university, and the other brother had a job. No one in her family spoke English. After graduating high school, she planned to study business administration at the university and take an English course at a private academy on Saturdays.

Daisy. Daisy was 17 years old and lived with her mother. She had one younger brother in 7th grade at San Ramón School and one older brother who worked. One of her uncles spoke some English because he took a course in Chinandega, but he lived in Costa Rica. No one in her home spoke English. After high school graduation, she planned on attending the university to study agricultural engineering.

10th grade focus group participants. There were five students, three girls and two boys, who participated in the focus group discussion. One student was 15 years old and the other four students were 16 years old. All five students lived in Villa Bella Vista. All five students planned to attend college after graduation and expressed interest in a variety of possible majors, including orthodontics, medicine, law, forensic science, veterinary science, or fashion design. One participant wanted to continue studying, but acknowledged that it would be difficult for his parents to provide any financial support, so he planned to find a job during the week and attend a university on the weekends to study civil engineering.

Parent Focus Group

I originally planned to conduct individual parent interviews and recruit parents of

11th grade students from the parent council, but I faced several obstacles enacting this recruitment plan. Parents were not frequently at school and generally only came if they had a concern or if there was an organized meeting. I spoke with the 11th grade homeroom teacher and she agreed to let me speak at the next parent meeting to recruit participants; unfortunately, meetings were continually postponed and I had limited access to a large group of parents. Prior to any parent meetings, I was able to conduct an interview with Jessica, the head of the 11th grade parent council and mother of Maria (an interview participant), because she was frequently at the school and had already heard about my project from her daughter. On Thursday August 10, the last full week of my fieldwork, an 11th grade parent meeting finally took place and I decided to conduct a focus group directly after the meeting with any parents who agreed to participate due to the shortage of time. I informed both the 11th grade homeroom teacher and Jessica, the head of the parent council, and asked them to help identify anyone who might be willing to participate. The meeting was scheduled to begin at 7:00 a.m. and there were some parents present, however, the meeting did not begin until 8:30 a.m. During the lengthy wait, Jessica was instrumental in encouraging other parents to participate in the focus group. She circulated through the crowd, greeted other parents, explained the purpose of my study, and persuasively urged them to stay to be interviewed after the meeting. At the end of the parent meeting, the 11th grade homeroom teacher introduced me and I then presented myself and my research project and asked for volunteers to stay at the end of the meeting to participate in a focus group discussion. Six parents elected to participate, signed the consent forms, and the focus group was conducted immediately in the computer lab at the school. The six parents consisted of four mothers, Isabel, Amy,

Jacinta, Marisol, and two fathers, Carlos and William. They were of varying ages, with some in their mid-30s and others in their early 50s. They also had differing levels of education, ranging from completing only primary school to two parents with university degrees.

Nicaraguan Language Education Policies

Although the Nicaraguan Ministry of Education's policy regarding language instruction was presented in Chapter 4, this section will summarize the most salient points about the language policy and how it guided the findings from both research questions. The Nicaraguan Ministry of Education adopted a policy to include English as a required subject for the entire five years of secondary school and updated it in 2009 to place an emphasis on constructivist teaching practices and the use of communicative English.

Schooling in Nicaragua is only compulsory at the primary level, until the end of sixth grade. Nicaraguan secondary school includes grades seven through eleven, but is an optional level of education. English as a foreign language has been incorporated as a mandatory subject area in the national curriculum with a minimum of three hours of instruction per week for all five years of secondary school. In 2009, the Nicaraguan Ministry of Education (MINED) reaffirmed existing language policies with the release of an updated English language curriculum and supporting materials for all secondary levels. These revised materials brought Nicaraguan policy into greater alignment with international trends supporting language acquisition as a fundamentally communicative act and sought to enhance student participation in what was previously viewed as a teacher-centered content area.

MINED's Constructivist Focus and Communicative Approach to Language Learning

The 2009 MINED publication aligned English language education in Nicaragua with global trends in that it, for the first time, highlighted the importance of a communicative approach to language learning. The communicative approach to language learning includes a consideration of all four language modalities: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. In contrast to previous approaches to language learning, which focused on categorical memorization of grammar features, the communicative approach focused on "relevant topic" categories and "speech acts" (Swarbrick, 1994) with the goal getting students to be active producers of language. Common features of communicative methodology include students using target language to communicate for authentic purposes, teachers selectively correcting errors to encourage more active participation, and limited grammar focus lessons (Swarbrick, 1994, p. 38). Communicative methods use the target language extensively as the language of instruction.

"The communicative approach is born as a need to develop a new innovative pedagogical approach, which contributes to the strengthening of the students' intellectual, social and moral autonomy" (MINED, 2009a, p. 54). As a contrast, previous research indicated that English language instruction in Nicaragua was characterized by teacher-centered "presentations of grammatical structures or vocabulary items. They contained little, if any, practice or production" (Luxon & Luxon, 1998, p. 164). Additionally, the updated English language policy called for active students, with "the teacher being only a facilitator making the student a more active participant in the process resulting in learning

more meaningful for life (lifelong learning)" (MINED, 2009a p. 56-57). In 2009, the Ministry of Education issued new curriculum guidelines for secondary English programs. Prior to these updates, English teachers did not have a consistent national curriculum and crafted lessons based upon outdated textbooks that were in short supply. In 2016, updated English textbooks were issued to secondary schools with sufficient distribution to ensure that each student had his or her own text that could be used both at home and at school.

MINED's 2009 policy document firmly establishes the centrality of constructivism as the pedagogical approach to follow in Nicaragua's classrooms. MINED encouraged the constructivist teacher to understand that "he is not the only source of information to which the student or the student accesses, but rather he is a mediator" (2009a, p. 4), who should allow students to "walk along a path that leads them to build their own experiences and to derive the cognitive structures that allow a deeper interpretation of reality" (MINED, 2009a, p. 4). Furthermore, educators were encouraged to incorporate students' background knowledge in lessons to deepen involvement and understanding: "the goal is clear: the role of the teacher is to guide, orient, and mediate in order for the student to enter the world of organized culture, but starting from his own" (MINED, 2009a, p. 6).

Constructivism as a conceptual framework began with Piaget's (1954) studies on child development in which he emphasized that "reality is not waiting to be found; children must construct it from their own mental and physical actions" (Siegler & Alibali, 2005, p. 33). Constructivist education models, therefore, call for educators to establish a learning environment in which children can "construct" meaning by way of new

experiences, experiments, and interactions that can combine with their own existing knowledge to produce meaning and learning. A constructivist classroom is student-centered with the teacher serving as a facilitator. Students work in a variety of groupings: individual, whole group, partners, and small groups. Thinking and risk-taking are more important than finding the right answer. Students are encouraged to share and draw upon their existing background knowledge as they explore new topics. Student learning is assessed in a variety of ways, including teacher observations, participation, and group work.

After examining Nicaragua's 2009 Ministry of Education document, *Transformación curricular, paradigmas y enfoques pedagógicos* (Curricular transformation, paradigms, and pedagogical focus) and the English curriculums for all grade levels (MINED, 2009b), it is clear that official policy advocates the use of student-centered, interactive, and communicative approaches to language learning. MINED (2009a) documents note that "Communication is an inherent need of the human being. When we feel the need to communicate with others we use language as a means to solve it. […] This communicative attitude is not only knowing how to say something, but when, where, why, and to whom to say it" (p. 54). Thus, Nicaragua's English curriculum emphasizes communication as a fundamental need of people and encourages the use of language to fulfill social purposes – it is not enough for students to be able to simply translate correctly, but they should also have practice in social interactions to be able to communicate across disparate contexts. MINED also emphasizes that English instruction should focus on units of study wherein "the contents are pertinent, relevant and

meaningful for students" and should utilize "student-centered learning" (MINED, 2009a, p. 55).

Prior to the 2009 curriculum reform, the dominant approach to language learning in Nicaragua depended almost exclusively on a grammar translation model of instruction, in which the grammatical structures of the target language were analyzed, often in relationship to the students' native language, and vocabulary lists were memorized. Students' native language, in this case Spanish, was utilized extensively in the foreign language classroom in order to facilitate understanding of target vocabulary, grammar, and translated texts. The MINED's curriculum documents, however, encourage the use of English in the classroom to the greatest extent possible and emphasize students' ability to communicate as a key goal for English language instruction (MINED, 2009a). Therefore, Nicaragua's language policy encourages the use of a communicative approach to language learning, rather than a grammar translation approach. Research question #1 explores to what extent the MINED's language management orientations are reflected in classroom practices via a prolonged period of classroom observations and multiple interviews with stakeholders.

MINED's Stated Purpose of English Instruction

In 2009, MINED elaborated curricular documents supporting the notion of English acquisition as a tool for greater global connectedness and economic gain. "In modern society, the command of the English language is becoming more and more important as it is considered one of the components of international competitiveness and because it forms part of the basic skills that favor employability" (MINED, 2009a, p. 55). MINED policy documents emphasized the potential economic benefit of English

acquisition: “Through the development of the English Language, the student acquires skills and abilities that allow the achievement of skills such as English or other languages, which will to facilitate other beneficial skills for employability and entrepreneurship, such as using technology” (MINED, 2009a, p. 55). The Ministry of Education declared that English was indispensable in Nicaragua and worldwide for “science and technology, industry and commerce, tourism, education, scientific research, spoken and written media, telecommunications and sociocultural and business exchanges” (2009a, p. 54). The Ministry further elaborated that the English language was becoming increasingly more essential for economic growth and global competitiveness. In order to address the second research question, findings from interviews and focus groups determined the extent to which stakeholders’ perceptions of purpose and utility of English learning coincided with the MINED policy statements emphasizing economic benefits.

Chapter 7: Findings

This chapter provides an analysis of the data collected over six weeks of fieldwork in July and August 2017 in one rural secondary school in Chinandega, Nicaragua. Data was collected via 32 classroom observations of English classes at all five levels of high school, semi-structured interviews with parents, teachers, students, and administrators, and student and parent focus groups. Additional information was obtained through an analysis of MINED policy statements, the English curriculum, instructional pacing guides, lesson plans, and English textbooks. Information from all data sources was combined and presented thematically to better understand how language policy was implemented in rural secondary schools as well as to present stakeholders' perceptions of the utility of English instruction. The data collected combined to address the two main research questions of this case study:

Research Question #1: How do Nicaraguan English language teachers implement mandated language policy in rural areas?

- How does MINED support teachers in implementing English language policies via curriculum, materials, training, and evaluations?
- How do classroom practices reflect MINED policy orientations and curriculum frameworks?

Research Question #2: How do stakeholders (teachers, students, parents, and school administrators) conceptualize the utility of English language instruction in rural Nicaragua?

- How do stakeholders articulate their reasons and motivations for English language teaching and learning?

- How do stakeholders perceive English proficiency to be useful in future social, academic, or economic endeavors?
- In what way, and using what criteria, do stakeholders evaluate the effectiveness of current instructional practices in meeting their expectations regarding English proficiency outcomes?

Each research question was addressed in separate sections using information combined from all data sources and the pertinent findings were listed thematically within each section. Additionally, each component of data collection (document analysis, focus groups, interviews, and classroom observations) was directly related to the conceptual frameworks that guided the two main research questions directing this case study. The two conceptual frameworks outlined in Chapter 1, linguistic imperialism and Spolsky's three components of language policy, provided a deductive foundation to generate analytic themes. When analyzing stakeholders' responses to interview and focus group questions regarding the purpose and utility of English instruction, the conceptual framework of linguistic imperialism guided the analysis to consider questions of language status, dominance, and prestige. Classroom observations provided evidence to determine to what extent the MINED's language management policies to education have become language practices in a rural English-language classroom environment. Document analysis was guided by both conceptual frameworks as the analysis of official policy statements were examined through a lens of linguistic privilege, while also incorporating Spolky's theory of language policy by examining language practices, ideology, and management.

Nicaraguan English Teachers Implementation of Language Policy in Rural Areas

The first research question regarding how English teachers implement language policy in rural schools was largely addressed through classroom observations and document analysis, with secondary support from interview data. The first aspect of this analysis examined how the Ministry of Education provided support for teachers via curriculum, materials, training, and evaluations. The second component of these findings analyzed how classroom practices reflected MINED policy orientations and reflect how language management policies were translated into language practices.

Ministry of Education Support for English Instruction

The first detailed bullet of Research Question #1 investigated how the Nicaraguan Ministry of Education supported teachers in implementing English language policies via curriculum, materials, training, and evaluations. A wealth of data relating to this question was gathered through the interviews with the two MINED employees, Profesora Andrea and Director Antonio, who provided detailed information about how the MINED supported English instruction at San Ramón School based on their professional experience and subject matter expertise. I drew additional conclusions from my classroom observations, student and parent interviews, and an analysis of documents relating to MINED policies and English instruction. My document analysis relied primarily on the following sources:

- MINED Curriculum for Foreign Language (English) Instruction, 7^{th} – 9^{th} grades
- MINED Curriculum for Foreign Language (English) Instruction, 10^{th} – 11^{th} grades

- MINED Supplemental Anthology for Foreign Language (English) Instruction
- MINED Strategic Plan 2011-2015
- MINED (2009) Curricular transformation, paradigms, and pedagogical focus
- MINED English textbooks, 7^{th} – 11^{th} grades
- Profesora Andrea's daily and weekly lesson plans
- Profesora Andrea's long-range planning document
- Profesora Andrea's unit tests
- MINED's Educative Portal (website)

Findings indicate that, overall, the Ministry of Education has made significant advances in the last decade in better supporting English teachers via the creation of a complete and cohesive curriculum (2009), publishing and distributing English textbooks for all grade levels (2016), furnishing working computers to local schools (2017), developing a comprehensive educative portal website to house electronic resources (2016), and establishing a system of regular collaborative planning and professional development for English teachers (2009). Challenges remained regarding school infrastructure, large class sizes, integration of technology in rural areas, assessing student learning, and linking English curriculums to the reality of college and career readiness.

MINED resources and instructional materials. Profesora Andrea reported that the Ministry of Education supplied English textbooks to all schools for students in all secondary grades, but for unknown reasons, the English textbooks for 8th grade never arrived at San Ramón School. Textbooks were introduced and distributed widely for the first time two years ago, but this is the second year that they did not have 8th grade English textbooks at San Ramón School. Profesora Andrea reported that she liked using

the textbooks because students helped themselves and helped other students. She was also able to circulate around and help other students instead of spending all her time writing on the whiteboard.

Director Antonio credited the Nicaraguan government with making a great effort in the last five years to increase access to instructional materials, particularly textbooks: "It has been a very hard task, with much sacrifice, but the Nicaraguan government has ensured that all students have their books in all the disciplines. There are textbooks for math, Spanish literature, physics, biology, sociology, English. The government has equipped schools with books for every student in the public sector." Director Antonio noted that before students had access to textbooks, they would sometimes use the internet to find information or just get by with whatever information the teacher presented in class that they had recorded in their notebooks, but that it was now much easier because everyone had textbooks. He was careful to state that the textbooks were not "straightjackets" that the teacher had to follow page by page, but were simply a resource. He noted that although some content areas were not in the textbooks, teachers were still responsible for teaching the complete curriculum. When questioned about additional materials provided by the MINED, Director Antonio replied that there were very little additional resources at their school provided by the Ministry of Education.

When asked about the resources that the MINED provided, Profesora Andrea quickly responded that the main resource the MINED offered was professional development for teachers. The MINED also provided textbooks and a curriculum. At the beginning of each year, the MINED gave teachers didactic materials, crayons, poster board, and markers. Once her beginning of the year allocation of materials ran out, she

bought additional materials herself. If some necessary material was not provided, Profesora Andrea reported that, "I look for the means myself, at least if I want something for my class and I do not see it in the texts that they gave me, well, I have to get into the internet because now, these days, it is easy to search the internet and research for class."

Infrastructure. The physical infrastructure of the school was in desperate need of repair and updating. This lack of instructional resources had a negative effect on instructional activities in all subject areas, but especially in the English class, where students would benefit from increased access to technology, visual aids, and multimodal instructional resources. In the 10th grade outside classroom, Profesora Andrea's voice was often lost as she competed with ambient noise and bystanders for students' attention. In the 8th grade section with the almost unusable whiteboard, Profesora Andrea wrote vocabulary lists on the two small usable sides of the board and then had to wait until all students copied in their notebooks so she could erase that section and write more. It led to an even more inefficient use of English class time. The open windows and doors in all classrooms were necessary to provide air circulation and light because none of the classrooms had functioning lights, fans, or air conditioning. The negative effect of these open classrooms was the distraction caused by the ambient noise from students in the hallway, music from neighboring stereos, farm animals, and loudspeaker announcements from local stores. Profesora Andrea had to use a loud teacher voice to be heard when modeling English dialogues, reading vocabulary lists, or providing instructions.

Large class sizes. In a closely related topic, the Ministry of Education not only did not invest sufficient funds to maintain the physical and material resources of San Ramón School, but also did not invest in hiring more teachers to form smaller classes. In a focus

group session, many parents commented on the large class sizes as a deficiency of the school system. Jacinta, an 11th grade mother, noted that "sometimes there are too many students in a class. There can be 50 or more students in a class. That's too much, class doesn't work, it's too much." The total enrollment of each grade and section ranged from a low of 32 students in 7th grade section C to a high of 61 students in 9th grade. The lower enrollment number in 7th grade section C was due to the small size of their classroom, which was formerly a teacher's lounge. The other 7th grade sections were larger to compensate for the enrollment reduction in this section. Class sizes only became slightly more manageable due to chronically high levels of student absenteeism. As part of my observational protocol, I noted the attendance count in each grade during all observations. My notes indicate that the percentage of students present ranged from 44% to 87%. In spite of regular absenteeism, most classes had approximately 30 to 50 students present each day.

These large class sizes created many difficulties for teachers at San Ramón School. On the most basic level of classroom management, the large number of students led to increased distractions from ambient noise, rampant discipline issues, and increased time spent on routine tasks such as cleaning and attendance. Although smaller class sizes benefit students and educators in all subject areas, it is essential to have a smaller class to effectively implement communicative strategies in a foreign language classroom. Communicative approaches to language learning depend on active student participation, varied student groupings, and allotting sufficient time for all students to engage in purposeful practice. Profesora Andrea used a variety of instructional strategies, depending on the size of the class, the content, learning objectives, and the behavioral

needs of each grade level and section. In some classes, Profesora Andrea implemented several strategies consistent with a communicative approach, including group work, partner work, group presentations, and dialogues. In other classes, particularly the large 9th, 10th, and 11th grade classes, she conducted lessons in a more traditional lecture approach, at times requiring group work, but not calling on students to regularly participate or present the results of their group work. In 11th grade especially, due to the large class size and the behavioral difficulties, Profesora Andrea relied almost exclusively on traditional "teacher-talk" and independent practice exercises using the textbook for follow-up activities. During the few instances when she asked 11th graders to work on a group project, it was very difficult to actively manage so many students working on different assignments. As a result, many students were off-task for most of the group work period and less than half turned in any work after a full class session.

In other cases, especially in 7th and 8th grades, Profesora Andrea frequently incorporated paired dialogues, which was an instructional strategy consistent with MINED's communicative approach. The difficulty of using this approach with a large class was that not all students realistically have time to present or, when they do, the dialogue was the only activity accomplished during an entire class period. During one observation of 7th grade section A, students were practicing a simple dialogue about telephone numbers with the objectives of both asking and answering questions and saying numbers in English. There were 42 students present during this class period. Students worked with a partner and wrote their question, "What is your telephone number?" and an answer "It is 457-8126." They would then switch roles so that both students practiced asking the question and both students practiced answering the question. Students had ten

minutes at the beginning of class to write the prompts and practice in a low voice with their partner. After the practice period ended at 8:47 a.m., Profesora Andrea called each pair to stand up by their desks and say their dialogue "in a loud voice." All students participated and received teacher feedback and corrections as necessary. I noted that while each pair was reciting their dialogue, other students were "quietly listening, some quietly practicing their numbers or asking the phone number question." The last pair of students finished reciting their dialogue at 9:32, resulting in a total of 45 minutes of class spent so that each student could actively participate in sharing the dialogue and receiving appropriate teacher feedback. In an 8th grade class with 31 students in attendance, Profesora Andrea presented new clothing vocabulary and a grammar point about adjectives in English proceeding the noun, i.e. "a blue shirt" and drawing comparisons to the Spanish rule of adjectives following nouns, i.e. "a shirt blue" and explaining that it would be incorrect to do that in English. She allotted 15 minutes for students to individually write one sentence using the sentence frame, "[Name] is wearing [color and clothes]." For example, "Carlos is wearing blue pants." After students' independent writing time elapsed, Profesora Andrea called each student up to the whiteboard where they wrote their sentence and then read it aloud. Profesora Andrea provided written and verbal feedback. While individual students were in front of the class speaking English, other students were largely passive observers. My observation notes indicate that "most other students quiet, some small talking, some practicing their sentence in their notebook, students mostly *passively* sitting in desk." This one-by-one student sentence reading began at 10:55 and ended at 11:44, resulting in a total of 49 minutes dedicated to this one activity. While this example included elements of a communicative approach, namely

students speaking the target language and participating in English, it also demonstrated that a majority of the class remained passive observers for most of class time as they listened to their peers read-aloud their sentence.

These two cases were illustrative of other lessons where Profesora Andrea implemented some aspect of a communicative approach to language learning, but it became very time consuming and other students lost interest and thus its effectiveness was limited. The amount of time it took to have each student participate resulted in other students' disengaging from the lesson when it was not their turn to speak. On days when Profesora Andrea planned a dialogue or other speaking activity, most of class time was dedicated to that one activity, which left little additional time for other instructional activities.

In the 2009 MINED English anthology for grades 7-9, which was a supplemental teacher's guide that paired with the curriculum, the authors provided "some suggestions for teaching large classes" (p. 62). In this document, the MINED acknowledged that large class sizes could be a barrier to implementing communicative activities and provided five ideas to guide English teachers to manage their large classes:

1. Coverage of material shouldn't be your only goal during a class session. It is, throw this sheet away.
2. PowerPoint can be the problem as often as it can be the solution.
3. You don't have to be an entertainer. A good way to keep their attention is through the use of variety.
4. Help them take notes. Give them some signposts.
5. On getting some discussion going during class:

a. Select some students (say, 4-5 of them in a given row) and alert them in advance that you'll have a couple of questions for them.
b. Prepare your discussion questions in advance. Use at least as much care here as you would in preparing your lecture material.
c. Start with safe questions, not ones that they expect will have right or wrong answers.[2]

These five suggestions offered little practical advice for a teacher with 50 to 60 students on how to engage them in meaningful, authentic conversation in a foreign language with the goal of increasing their communicative capacity. Only the last point provided some semblance of advice regarding communication by urging teachers to prepare discussion questions in advance and choose a small group of students to engage in conversation. The reference to using PowerPoint as an instructional resource was in no way applicable to the reality of many rural schools. Most classrooms at San Ramón did not have working lights, much less a computer and projector, so teachers relied on the whiteboard, notebooks, and textbooks. The other suggestions are far too generic to be helpful in engaging large classes in English conversation.

The English curriculum and anthology (MINED, 2009b) focused on involving students in communicative activities by promoting the use of small groups, dialogues, games, and *dinámicas* [icebreakers]. At the same time, these documents acknowledged that many teachers are faced with large class sizes that can be obstacles to student engagement. Although the MINED provided some suggestions to compensate for the large number of students, they were largely impractical for the reality of English

[2] This MINED document was written in English for use by English teachers. This is not my translation and it is quoted here exactly as it appears in the original text.

instruction in rural classroom and were not useful suggestions for English teachers. My observations indicated that Profesora Andrea followed the established English curriculum and, on many occasions, planned and implemented activities consistent with a communicative approach to language learning. Overall, however, the effectiveness of English instruction and the ability of Profesora Andrea to implement communicative learning strategies was adversely affected by large class sizes, which typically had between 30 and 50 students in spite of high student absenteeism.

Teacher training and collaborative planning – TEPCE and EPI. On the last Friday of every month, there was no school for all students across Nicaragua so that their teachers could participate in professional development and collaborative planning organized by the Ministry of Education. In 2009, the Ministry of Education began implementing mandatory professional development meetings called *Talleres de Evaluación, Programación y Capacitación Educativa* (TEPCE) [Educational Evaluation, Programming and Training Workshops] for all primary and secondary teachers. In August 2017, while I was in Nicaragua completing fieldwork, the MINED changed the title of these professional development meetings to *Encuentros Pedagógicos de Interaprendizaje* (EPI) [Interlearning Pedagogical Encounters]. Director Antonio had a positive assessment of the utility of EPI meetings and said that they "strengthened the quality of education." He said the meeting time was used to determine the strengths and weaknesses of educators and determine next steps for instruction. Profesora Andrea described a typical TEPCE meeting primarily as a planning meeting amongst other English teachers. The focus was not on receiving training or professional development from a MINED content area specialist, but rather, developing plans in collaboration with

other English teachers in the municipality. During these meetings, she met with a group of five to six English teachers from neighboring schools and they developed long-range plans using the MINED English curriculum. She described TEPCE as being,

> planning, we plan, we receive a small training. We, the English teachers, we give ourselves knowledge and train ourselves. That is, at least, we advise each other, you can give the class in that way, look, I do this lesson in such a way. Maybe I have an idea about how to teach my class, so then I would be the one to share with other teachers and they decide if they want to use that teaching idea or not. We train ourselves, the teachers. If there is a doubt in some lesson, we support each other, we help each other. I ask a fellow English teacher, if I do not understand, and he explains to me. Amongst ourselves, the teachers, we teach ourselves. So, that is the TEPCE, the planning and a small self-training.

When referring to the purpose and function of TEPCE meetings, Profesora Andrea repeatedly used the phrase "*nos intercapacitamos."* There is no direct translation for this, but it equates to "we collaboratively train ourselves." When asked to elaborate further about how the meetings were run and directed, Profesora Andrea noted that there was always a meeting coordinator, but he or she was always an English teacher. There were no English curriculum experts, full-time central office MINED supervisors, or delegates running the meetings or providing curriculum support. TEPCE meetings were almost exclusively guided by the English teachers themselves.

Profesora Andrea indicated that there were limited opportunities, other than TEPCE, for her to interact with other English teachers because she was the only English teacher at San Ramón School. She contrasted her experience as the sole English teacher

at San Ramón School with that of an English teacher in a large urban school in Chinandega, "it is big, it is immense, so there's not only one English teacher, there's also a department head, who's also an English teacher. The department head visits other English teachers, supervises them, and advises them." A disadvantage of working at a rural high school was that she could not frequently consult with other English teachers to share ideas, plan, or discuss strategies to promote English learning.

When asked about additional professional development opportunities, Profesora Andrea indicated that there were nonprofit organizations, sometimes from the United States, that advertised different trainings for English teachers. She emphasized that these trainings were for "teachers who want to attend, no one is obligated to participate." Sometimes the trainings were in Leon or in Managua, but that she had not attended any of these optional trainings due to lack of time and distance of travel.

Although it was a positive step that the MINED provided time and space for English teachers to collaborate and develop detailed instructional plans with colleagues, there was little indication that TEPCE was used to build teacher capacity via targeted professional development, input from curriculum developers, or additional language development.

Technology. The Nicaraguan Ministry of Education has two main websites; the standard Ministry of Education site with information about calendars, trainings, and initiatives, https://www.mined.gob.ni, and then an educative portal, *Nicaragua Educa*, https://nicaraguaeduca.mined.gob.ni/. On the main MINED website, parents could register their children for school using the electronic enrollment links. Additionally, parents could request a username and password to check their children's report card via

the online gradebook. The portal is far more useful for obtaining information about the curriculum, required instructional schedules for primary and secondary schools, and MINED policy statements. The portal has a wealth of resources for students, teachers, and community members, although it was not intuitive to use and required careful searching to find specific information.

Through the *Nicaragua Educa* portal, I downloaded the entire English curriculum and supporting anthologies, pdf copies of the five levels of English textbooks, and Ministry of Education policy statements. There is also an educational blog providing information on topics of interest to teachers and parents, such as project-based learning, collaborative groupings, Mayan civilization, downloading apps to develop reading fluency, and interactive games to develop automaticity with multiplication facts. Each blog entry includes a lengthy article and links to other resources, such as apps to download or games to play online.

The Ministry of Education has two YouTube channels, *nicaraguaeduca* and *MINED Nicaragua,* with a variety of original educational videos including "resources and experiences that the teacher can use in class with students." In fact, the title of this dissertation was inspired by a series of educational videos on the MINED Nicaragua YouTube channel that were made in 2015. The series is titled, "Speak English," and has four videos using different Nicaraguan actors demonstrating conversational English with subtitles and a short explanation by a Nicaraguan English teacher. In 2017, the MINED updated the English video series, relocated it to the *nicaraguaeduca* YouTube channel, and renamed it "Communicative English." There are 49 videos, ranging in duration from seven to 29 minutes, all focused on providing model lessons of communicative English

using the MINED English curriculum. All teachers highlighted in the video were Nicaraguan English teachers who demonstrated high levels of proficiency in English. The teachers and narrators spoke English with a notably non-native accent, but were nevertheless fully understandable. The student participants seemed to be actual Nicaraguan students in various grades of high school. In some ways, the videos highlighted many of the same aspects of English instruction that I observed in Profesora Andrea's classroom: vocabulary written on the board and translated, some mixed use of English and Spanish, providing directions and behavioral corrections entirely in Spanish, and a mix of teacher-talk and collaborative groupings. In other aspects, however, the videotaped classrooms displayed much improved learning conditions compared with the rural San Ramón School. There were functioning electric lights, doors that closed, windows with glass and curtains, functioning white boards, painted walls, and visuals displayed. Perhaps most importantly, there were between eight and fifteen students in each classroom and they were fully engaged and attentive, likely aware that they were being filmed. Although the teachers still conducted much of the class as an expository lecture, they were also able to engage students in repeated communicative interactions, such as short conversations and answering direct questions. Teachers were also effective in correcting student errors via modeling pronunciation accuracy or restating the student's statement using correct grammar or vocabulary. These videos provided useful models for Nicaraguan English teachers about how to implement the MINED curriculum and incorporate communicative strategies.

There were also links to different training modules that could be completed entirely online, including a 50-hour course English course, "English Module I." All of

the online modules were developed in a partnership between the Nicaraguan Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Education of Spain. The English Module I course was targeted at beginning language learners and included lecture and explanatory materials, assessments, and practice exercises. Participation was monitored by a teacher and students could use the online platform to interact with each other. At the end of the course, after passing a final test, the student could earn a certificate of completion issued by the Spanish Ministry of Education in coordination with the Ministry of Education of Nicaragua.

While the electronic resources available on the MINED and *Nicaragua Educa* websites were undoubtedly useful additions to the existing instructional resources and trainings provided by the MINED, teachers at San Ramón School, and many other rural schools across Nicaragua, did not have regular access to the internet. Although teachers and students could access the internet via mobile devices, it was always at a personal cost as they had to purchase pre-paid data cards. Unless the resources on the educative portal were highlighted during an existing MINED training or professional development, it is unlikely that teachers in rural schools, without internet access, used those valuable resources. Neither Profesora Andrea nor Director Antonio mentioned using the Ministry of Education website as a resource when preparing classes or providing resources for students or teachers. Teachers at San Ramón School entered all grades in the electronic gradebook and parents could, in theory, receive their children's report card electronically. Although an electronic report card was available, parents in the community of Villa Bella Vista were unlikely to access it, so teachers prepared a paper copy of the report card and scheduled class-wide parent meetings to distribute the paper report cards and obtain

parent signatures.

San Ramón School had recently received a significant upgrade to their technology infrastructure with the installation of a computer lab with twelve desktop computers, a projector, and a color printer. Director Antonio indicated that the computer lab had only been completed a few months prior to my visit, but they were still waiting for an internet connection to be installed. The room was used primarily as a meeting space for teachers and parents. The room was always locked, a reasonable precaution given the state of the rest of the school, but it further limited students' already restricted access to technology. Students were scheduled to have a technology class once a week, but I only observed three technology classes in session during my six-weeks of fieldwork. Students confirmed that they "sometimes" had technology class in the computer room, but never used the computer lab with any other teachers for any other subject areas. I asked Profesora Andrea if she ever held her English classes in the computer lab so she could use the computer and projector to show a video, PowerPoint, or other visual as part of English instruction. She replied that she had not used the computer room with students, only with other teachers as part of meetings. She held classes only in the students' assigned classroom. Students indicated that they only ever used the computer lab when they received their technology class. Jessica reported that her daughter rarely had access to the school's computer lab. She said, the school "gives them very little time. They need more time so that the students can get very familiar with technology. Because of this, students do not have much ability with computers. They only teach them the fundamentals, it's not like other schools where they have more technology options." The inaccessibility of new, untouchable technology is not a problem unique to rural schools in

developing countries. Papert (1993) recounts the initial approach to computer use in U.S. classrooms in the 1980s where the computer lab was an isolated place to study computers, but not initially used as a learning tool for other subject areas.

Students reported using smartphones on a regular basis, mostly interacting with social media sites like Facebook and WhatsApp, but in some circumstances, also to complete homework. Axel noted that he used his cell phone as a Spanish-English dictionary to find the meaning of unknown words for his homework. Although there were two *cybers* [internet cafés] in Villa Bella Vista, students generally did not go to the *cybers* to use the computers or to obtain internet access. Students could add data to their phones by visiting any one of the many small *ventas* and paying as little as 20 córdobas (about US$.65) for a pre-paid data card. After activating the data card, students had full internet access. Axel reported that teachers sometimes asked students to use their smartphones as an educational tool, but very rarely because "sometimes they tell us to look for something on the internet or in the dictionary, sometimes. But there are some who do not do the assignment, they get into Facebook or something instead of doing the homework." Profesora Andrea reported, if she did not find enough information in her planning guides or the English textbooks, then she would search the internet for additional teaching ideas or vocabulary translations.

Director Antonio reported that the MINED oriented teachers to use phones as another learning tool. "Students should research topics using a tool that they walk around with anyway. Some teachers, perhaps, have fallen into traditionalism and they say, 'I don't want anything to do with that.' But, the MINED tells us that if students are going to have phones anyway, then let them use their phones as part of class. Obviously, if they

are not using phones appropriately, you have to take them away." Even though this was explained as an official MINED policy orientation, I did not see any indications that teachers asked students to use their phone as a research tool. If anything, students used their phones during class as a distraction from instruction.

Evaluations of teacher effectiveness. The Ministry of Education conducted unannounced formal observations of high school teachers, including English teachers, twice a year. During these supervisions, MINED delegates inspected teachers' planning documents and gradebooks. They also observed teachers teaching a class and would leave a written observation that indicated strengths and weaknesses of the lessons observed and the planning documents analyzed. Teachers had to read and sign the observation documents in the presence of the MINED delegate, who would then leave a copy of the observation for the teachers' personal records. Profesora Andrea expressed a nonplussed, matter of fact attitude about MINED observations, indicating that "we are prepared for these [observations] because we know our job is to carry our daily plans and have our scheduling documents ready. We know that this is our job, this is our *machete*, the plans and the schedules." Profesora Andrea indicated that none of the MINED supervisors who evaluated her were fluent in English, rather, they were the same delegates who supervised all other teachers at San Ramón School. There was no indication that area specialists from the MINED curriculum and planning department regularly observed or provided feedback about English, or any other subject area, which might require specialized knowledge or expertise. Profesora Andrea indicated that there were rarely any follow-up actions after an observation, such as modeling example lessons or providing targeted professional development based on observed weaknesses. When

MINED delegates supervised, “they only wrote the good and the bad of what they’ve seen,” but training was only received during occasionally during TEPCE meetings and was not directly related to observed needs.

Director Antonio also regularly visited classrooms, observed teachers, and conducted formal supervisions of teachers’ instructional practices. He noted that he checked teachers’ planning documents, gradebooks, and would conduct classroom observations on a weekly basis. Director Antonio split his time between San Ramón School and meetings in the MINED office in Chinandega, thus he was not always present on school grounds. I did not observe him in any classroom conducting observations during my time at San Ramón School. He admitted that he had a very limited understanding of English, but that he still had to observe Profesora Andrea and provide feedback. He explained, in great detail, his process of preparing for classroom observations in the English class.

> Yes, obviously, I do not have a professional knowledge of English, but before going to observe English class, I study first the teacher's plan. Then, the important thing is to see if the students get and understand what the teacher is trying to teach them. It is difficult because when a person does not have an absolute command of the language, well, but… [pause]. So, yes, I read the class plan and I seek to inform myself a little better to give specific observations for the English class. As with all other disciplines, I always look for the objectives, the indicator of achievement. I check that the indicator of achievement coincides with the content that the teacher is teaching. Basically, I will see the teacher's command of her class and check the students' learning.

He also checked her daily planning documents and cross-referenced it with her long-range plans to ensure that it matched what she had written on the board as her objectives for the class.

As a note on MINED terminology, Profesora Andrea commented, with evident sarcasm, on how the MINED repackaged the concept of teacher evaluations: "now they call it 'accompaniment,' but it's really just a supervision." Director Antonio noted the same change and explained that it was intended for teachers to feel accompanied in the classroom, but not judged as a supervision. Director Antonio further stated that the term supervising was akin to the concept of questioning or being second-guessed, but the MINED said that teachers and students are not "objects" to be supervised, rather, they are participants to be accompanied in the journey of learning. So, the term was changed and is now "more discreet." Profesora Andrea noted that nothing about teacher evaluations had changed except for the name and seemed unconcerned about any possible negative results of MINED supervisions. This unaffected attitude towards could be attributed to two reasons: the MINED delegate was not an expert in English could not provide targeted feedback about English instruction and evaluations were not directly linked to teachers' job security.

Although both the school principal and MINED delegates regularly visited classrooms and provided written feedback about instructional practices, neither was qualified to judge the effectiveness of English instruction. Profesora Andrea indicated that none of the supervisors who visited her classroom were functionally fluent in English and the only real feedback she ever received about planning for and delivering English instruction was during collaborative planning meetings with other English teachers. Even

in these TEPCE meetings, there was little to no input from MINED staff with subject area expertise in English. There were limited formal mechanisms, via either planning meetings or classroom observations, for English curriculum experts to interact with English teachers. Classroom observations conducted by experienced administrators could certainly provide feedback about general classroom management and generic instructional practices, but they should have at least some English proficiency if they were to judge how well an English teacher was teaching in English. Because teacher observations were conducted by staff who were not proficient in the target language, MINED could not provide substantive evaluations about how effective a teacher was at providing instruction in and about English.

Director Antonio stated that student achievement was taken into consideration when writing teacher evaluations, but did not indicate exactly how it would be included only that it is a "factor." When he conducts a performance evaluation for a teacher, multiple aspects are considered, ranging from "professional appearance and behavior" to "methodology." Director Antonio reflected that consistent patterns of low student achievement indicated that something was wrong with a teacher's instructional practices: "If I have 40 students and only 5 students are failing, the problem is not the teacher. The problem is just those students, only 5 students are failing. But, on the other hand, if only 5 of them pass, then, the problem is not the students. So, then, the problem becomes the teacher. What kind of methodology is he using? What tools? What's not working?" As the MINED instituted an electronic gradebook, Director Antonio could now more easily analyze data and form conclusions based on student achievement data. Prior to this, he could only refer to hand-written report cards, which was time consuming and difficult to

analyze on a large scale. He now has access to the electronic data base and can sort data according to multiple criterion, which he said was "helpful as he works with teachers to strengthen the quality of education."

Assessment of student learning. In a similar conundrum, MINED could not state with any certainty how effective the English curriculum was nor how effective English teachers were in implementing the curriculum because they have not established consistent, clear, measurable, and concise achievement goals for English proficiency in the language learning domains of reading, writing, speaking, or listening. The MINED did not provide any cumulative proficiency statements or exit standards that might indicate an expected level of English proficiency for graduating students. Nicaraguan high school students did not regularly participate in any international exams measuring English proficiency, such as TOEFL, nor did they take any national English exams.

Profesora Andrea judged that most 11th grade students achieved a "basic" level of English, but they had an especially difficult time speaking English.

> They can do the basic, but, have a conversation, have a dialogue, no. […] it is difficult for them to have a conversation. They can write small paragraphs. For example, we sometimes make personal descriptions, like what they plan on doing in the future or what majors they are considering. And they write it, but they find it difficult because they forget. They say, 'it's because we do not practice it here, here we speak only Spanish' and that's why it's difficult for them.

When asked about the overall proficiency level of graduating students, Profesora Andrea noted that "each student is different, but some become proficient in English. Like I say, not all, if I have 30 students, maybe two or three will become proficient in English.

Honestly, not as proficient as us teachers or you because it's your native language. […] some students will be proficient, not all, but there are always some unmotivated students." Profesora Andrea estimated that approximately 10% of her students would demonstrate basic English proficiency after five years of study, indicating that barriers to greater proficiency levels included lack of student motivation and few authentic opportunities to speak English. She also indicated that students typically struggled more with speaking English and were more comfortable in the domain of writing.

Profesora Andrea explained that she evaluated students' English through a combination of grades from class assignments and teacher-created exams. She emphasized again that there were no national exams that aligned with the English curriculum nor consistent grading guidelines provided by the MINED:

> Here each teacher evaluates by applying the different strategies he has, different ways of evaluating. […] The MINED establishes that to evaluate a student, you must have a maximum of 60 accumulated points [from classwork] and 40 points from exams for a total of 100 points. And, from there, it depends on each teacher. […] it really depends on the teacher, how he wants to evaluate. In that, the Ministry of Education does not get involved.

When asked if Profesora Andrea preferred creating her own assessments or if she would like the Ministry of Education to provide some exams, she responded enthusiastically that she would like more guidance from MINED. "Of course, I would like it [an exam] given to me. I would love that. I would be fascinated to see what materials would be provided for me because, you know, one person's knowledge is not equal to another's. Of course, I would love it, I would like it very much." The 10th and 11th grade students interviewed

confirmed that they received grades from a mix of classwork and exams and reported that all classes utilized a similar mix of grading strategies. When asked specifically whether their speaking proficiency was ever evaluated, all students replied that their English oral language was never evaluated. Axel emphasized, "not really, evaluations are almost always written." The MINED curriculum emphasized the acquisition of English for communicative purposes, with a clear focus on the four modalities of speaking, reading, listening, and writing; however, reading and writing were prioritized over other modalities and English speaking proficiency was never officially evaluated as a component of students' English grades. Additionally, the English teacher reported that students struggled with speaking English in practice conversations and dialogues, partially due to lack of practice and a dearth of authentic speaking opportunities because "everyone here speaks Spanish."

Although Profesora Andrea stated that most students would only achieve very basic levels of proficiency and many students struggled to demonstrate English language competency, overall grades did not indicate that students English achievement differed significantly from other subject areas. Director Antonio noted that English was the area that had the highest grades for all students in the school during the most recent grading period. "Well, it's curious because in this recent marking period, students were failing less in English. We actually had more students fail Spanish, even though it's our own language. At a school-wide level, one of the lowest disciplines in academic performance was Spanish and one of the highest disciplines was English. Maybe it's because of teacher motivation during teaching, maybe it's just that the kids like English because it's new to them. Technology and English are both new and fresh." Director Antonio

equated higher English grades with higher language proficiency and increased motivation.

MINED English curriculum. The MINED provided curriculum guides and textbooks for all five English levels (MINED 2009b; MINED 2017). The MINED also produced an English anthology intended for use as an instructional and planning guide for the English teacher. The anthology provided more detailed lesson plans for each unit, tips for classroom management, game ideas, and reproducible resources.

The content of each year-long curriculum was broken down into six thematic units with each unit of study spanning multiple consecutive weeks. For example, the 7th grade English curriculum began with Unit 1: The Classroom, which was scheduled to be studied for a total of 10 hours (a little over 3 weeks of instruction). The curriculum provided an overview of each unit of study and included achievement indicators, basic content/vocabulary, suggested learning activities, and evaluation procedures. Achievement indicators were often very broad and not linked to specific measurable outcomes, such as "The student follows and responds to simple commands" (MINED, 2009b, p. 25). The suggested activities within the curriculum were also vague and did not provide specific suggestions to teachers about how to structure learning activities. For 7th grade Unit 1, the curriculum suggested activities such as "The student practices key phrases and vocabulary that can be useful in the classroom to establish an effective and respectful communication with the teacher and his or her peers" (MINED, 2009b, p. 25). The English anthology was far more descriptive and included more detailed lesson plans and accompanying resources for each thematic unit. The anthology, however, generally included only three sample lessons per unit whereas the curriculum indicates

that units could be studied for between three and five weeks. Although the curriculum outlined a scope and sequence of English study, it did not provide much practical guidance in developing instructional activities or resources to support each unit. English teachers, in collaboration with peers at TEPCE, had to study the content goals of the curriculum and develop their own lesson plans for effective implementation.

Profesora Andrea considered the English textbooks to be appropriately leveled and, overall, a good match to the curriculum. She noted, however, that "sometimes the curriculum includes content that we [the English teachers] do not find in the textbooks. That is, the exercises for the students to complete are missing. Sometimes there are no exercises in the textbook about the content that we are teaching." The curriculum content was more extensive than that covered by the textbooks. As the textbooks did not comprehensively address each theme that was included in the curriculum, teachers had to supplement with alternative activities, often planned during their collaborative TEPCE meetings.

Director Antonio was overall very complementary towards the Ministry of Education's efforts in the past decade to update the curriculum and standardize expectations at a national level. He noted, however, the limitations of curricular changes without accompanying changes to standards for teacher preparation. Teachers were effectively informed about the content of the curriculum changes, but not necessarily prepared to adopt some of the accompanying classroom practices (such as student-led groups, role playing, dialogues) that would be a prerequisite to effective implementation. Although the MINED could provide teachers with an updated curriculum and a bank of teaching strategies to support the new curriculum, it was much more difficult to mandate

teacher's instructional practices. Director Antonio noted: "It is a widely-accepted curriculum, but first, the one who has to make a change of attitude is the teacher. The curriculum can be very good, but if the teacher is stuck in the same traditionalism, then it will not be of any use that the curriculum has changed. Obviously, here in Nicaragua, it has changed." Director Antonio affirmed that the revised curriculum centers on an interactive, participatory approach to learning in all subject areas, but noted that some teachers still relied on traditional expository teaching practices, such as lecturing the entire class while students took notes.

How Do Classroom Practices Reflect MINED Policies?

The second detailed bullet of Research Question #1 investigated how English classroom practices reflected the Nicaraguan Ministry of Education policy orientations and curriculum frameworks. The analysis for this section was largely informed by classroom observations of all levels of English instruction and an examination of MINED curriculum and policy statements, with additional insights drawn from the teacher and principal interviews.

Findings indicated that, overall, the English teacher consistently utilized the English curriculum with fidelity, attempted to implement communicative strategies in most classes, and incorporated a variety of instructional strategies to encourage student participation. There were more mixed findings regarding evidence of constructivism in the English classroom. Profesora Andrea clearly expressed a belief in the power of a constructivist pedagogy and encouraged students to look to her as a "facilitator" of their own learning. In spite of this philosophy of students constructing their own relationship with knowledge and learning, Profesora Andrea depended heavily on expository lectures

to introduce content objectives, vocabulary, and new grammar structures. The areas that were not consistent with MINED policies and curriculum frameworks include limited use of the target language, inconsistent use of communicative strategies, and a reduced amount of instructional time dedicated to English learning.

Use of instructional time. The concept of time and its use is highly culturally dependent. As a teacher and researcher from the United States, I acknowledge that I approached the issue of time with an underlying bias stemming from my own upbringing, traditions, and professional history. According to my cultural narrative, time is a commodity that should be used judiciously, efficiently, and with clear purpose. Time is a valuable and scarce resource. Within this commodified perspective of time, it is something that can be wasted, spent, saved, and used. Therefore, inaction or inefficiency is a grave misuse of time and should be avoided whenever possible – each minute must be accounted for and used to its full potential. Within U.S. schools, this mindset often translates to rigid schedules with academic tasks carefully divided into separate instructional blocks with little flexibility. Teachers plan for and use every available minute to actively engage in learning activities, minimizing wasted transition times between activities. The school calendar is established well in advance and only altered with little notice in cases of unforeseen natural disasters. Professional meetings are pre-arranged with a clear starting and ending time and are generally accompanied by an agenda that includes the estimated duration of each topic. Tardiness to school or work is heavily frowned upon and can result in more severe consequences if habitual.

In contrast to the U.S. perspective on time, Nicaraguan culture tends to be less focused on punctuality and efficiency and much more concerned with relationship

building and human interactions. Building and maintaining personal connections is prioritized over promptness and adherence to established schedules. The relaxed attitude toward punctuality is also a reaction to the myriad of possible delays that regularly occur and cannot be controlled by individuals, such as riding unreliable public buses or torrential rains washing out roads in the rainy season. The unanticipated water and electricity outages also adversely affect scheduled activities. I was late to school one morning because the tap water had gone out overnight. I had to get assistance from my host family in pulling water from the well to take a shower, causing a long delay in my morning routine. The impoverished living conditions of many rural Nicaraguans result in many hours of human labor for daily tasks like hand washing clothes, preparing meals, house cleaning, and acquisition of provisions. On one occasion, a mother was late to a meeting and simply said, "I was washing clothes," and her tardiness was immediately understood by all to be a natural consequence of the labor-intensive process of hand-washing clothes, a task that had to be undertaken in the early morning so that everything could dry before the daily afternoon rainstorms. In a small, rural town such as Villa Bella Vista, there are many extended families with complicated, interconnected relationships going back generations. Many informants noted that "everyone knows everyone in this town." In such a close-knit community, it is essential to maintain and nurture relationships with friends, acquaintances, family members, and co-workers.

While there are considerable variations across cultures regarding perspectives on time, foreign language educators consistently recommend maximizing instruction in the target language to promote high levels of language proficiency. Global comparisons of the effectiveness of second-language education show that nations within the European

Union consistently produced high-achieving language learners. One of the factors contributing to this success was ample instructional time dedicated to language learning. Many students within the EU began learning a foreign language early in primary school and continue throughout secondary school. Although there were wide variations between countries with respect to time spent in a language classroom, in general, students in the EU spent between three and eight hours a week learning a foreign language during the school day. The European Commission (2012) notes that "most educational systems recommend between 30 and 80 hours on average per year" (p. 52). In the European context, the quantity of language instruction was linked to students' resulting proficiency levels. Students receiving language instruction for three to eight hours a week would take between two to three years of language study to attain the basic level of language proficiency and up to six years to attain the basic-intermediate level. Higher second language proficiency levels were linked with longer periods of study, typically those beginning in primary school and for more than three hours weekly.

One of the most prevalent, reoccurring themes across all data sources was the inefficient use of instructional time in San Ramón School. My observations and interviews determined that there was no singular reason that instructional time was inefficiently used, rather it was a combination of multiple factors, including tardiness, lengthy transitions, political and religious holidays, student discipline, parent meetings, staff meetings, cleaning school facilities, and unclear schedule requirements. Each of these factors will be examined in more depth, providing examples from observations and interviews as appropriate. The cumulative result of these multiple interrupting factors

was that students received far less than the MINED required three hours a week of English instruction.

One of the first factors that led to reduced instructional time was the unclear block schedule that was outlined in the 2009 MINED curriculum. As in the case with most public high schools in Nicaragua, San Ramón's school day began at 7:00 a.m. and ended at 12:00 p.m. with a total of 4.5 hours of instruction daily. Each day students were scheduled to receive three 90-minute blocks of instruction and a thirty-minute recess.

Table 4: San Ramón School Daily Schedule

Instructional Blocks	Times
1st Instructional Block	7:00 a.m. – 8:30 a.m.
2nd Instructional Block	8:30 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.
Recess	10:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.
3rd Instructional Block	10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

According to the official MINED curriculum guides, students should receive three hours of English instruction a week at all grde levels. A complete school week includes 30 hours of instruction in all content areas, therefore English class represented 10% of the total instructional time at the secondary level for all five years. In MINED's English curriculum, directly after establishing this three-hour a week requirement, the authors proceed to explain that an instructional hour was really a "45-minute period of time"

(2009b, p. 15). In further detailing the transition to block schedules, the MINED provided a rationale for providing longer instructional periods:

> The traditional way of designing the schedule in schools has remained unchanged for many years. Teachers have been subject to develop their classes in a period of 45 minutes, which in many cases has forced them to resort to a lecture-style delivery. The new [block] schedule aims to develop a new vision of the class, which should be active and promote greater student participation. […] During a block the teachers will have their students for two continuous periods to have more time for a more effective development of the curriculum and to implement more active and participatory learning experiences with a greater level of depth. (MINED, 2009b, p.16)

Thus, for English instruction, this block scheduling mandate translated to one full 90-minute block and one half 45-minute block each week. The schedule only allots for two hours and fifteen minutes of English instruction each week, which is a full 45 minutes less than the stated three hours a week. If this weekly deficit is compounded across the entire year, students are missing approximately 30 hours of English instruction in a typical school year.

During our interview, I asked Profesora Andrea about the lack of clarity in the scheduled time for instruction as the curriculum mandates three hours a week of English instruction, but simultaneously mandates instructional blocks of 45 minutes. She informed me that the "hour" in the curriculum guides really referred to a "block" in the schedule and that each block was only intended to be 45 minutes. Since the students had three blocks of 45 minutes of English class each week, she said that the school met the

requirement for three hours of English instruction weekly. The difference in MINED required hours and real instructional hours was not only limited to English instruction. All subject areas had mandated weekly minimum hours listed in the curriculum guides, but each was also reduced to 45-minute period during school-level implementation. As an additional example, the MINED lists math with five hours of mandated instruction per week, however, in reality, this translated to two full blocks of 90-minutes and one half block of 45-minutes, a total of 3.75 hours a week. As I continued to question the inconsistencies within the curriculum guides regarding mandated hours of instruction, Profesora Andrea assured me that the block schedule was adopted by most schools in the department of Chinandega and they all followed the 45-minute per period implementation model. Parents pointed to the twice weekly schedule as one reason that their children "did not learn much English." Isabel, an 11th grade mother said, "if the school offered more English classes, if they gave it every day, it would stick more. But, since it's only two times a week, students don't think it's very important. It's not until they get to the university that they realize that it is important. A majority of majors require English."

On four occasions during my six-week observation period at the high school, students were dismissed early, without prior notification, so that teachers could participate in meetings or complete obligatory administrative tasks. One Tuesday morning, instruction was interrupted to conduct a disaster drill at 9:00 a.m. The disaster drill consisted of a teacher blowing a whistle in the courtyard and all students evacuating the classrooms to assemble on the basketball courts on either side of the school. The drill lasted approximately ten minutes. Upon return to class, the English teacher announced

that school would be dismissed after recess for a teacher meeting and then left the classroom to do an errand. Students remained in class unattended until an early recess at 9:30. While the teacher was not in the classroom, many students used smartphones to listen to music, play games, or text. Some conversed with classmates while others simply left the room. After their thirty-minute recess period, students were dismissed at 10:00 a.m. for the previously unannounced teacher meeting. Thus, students only received two hours of instruction. After student dismissal, all teachers and staff members assembled in the new computer room where they were presented with a PowerPoint about upcoming deadlines and important celebrations in the coming month. The principal read from a scripted set of announcements and teachers took notes. After the calendar update, teachers broke into four groups to read and write notes about a MINED document updating procedures for professional training and establishing subject area leaders. They did not reconvene to share out after reading and discussing in their small group. Finally, teachers discussed the newly implemented "leadership chain," which was recently established to provide more in-school leadership opportunities, similar to department heads at high schools in the United States. The meeting ended at 11:30 and teachers left. While teachers did receive new information and updates from MINED memos, I failed to note the urgency of the meeting that required cancelling classes for all students with no prior notice. On a Monday, students were again dismissed after recess due to a teacher meeting. It was not announced until the recess time. The principal said that the meeting concerned teacher attendance and showed me a poster with every teacher's name and then a grid with the dates of July and August. Each teacher had a space for each day where they would be marked absent or present. He explained that teacher absences were

becoming a real problem and that attendance would be marked on this chart, displayed in the office, and then sent to the central MINED office. He lamented that there was still nothing that he could really do if teachers bring a note from their doctor, but that he would be implementing the new system anyway.

In a similar fashion, I observed three parent meetings that were scheduled during school hours and resulted in lost instructional time for the students. The largest, and most well attended, parent meeting was report card distribution. Profesora Andrea scheduled report card distribution for her 7th grade homeroom section at 8:30 on a Tuesday morning. The entire second instructional block was utilized for the parent meeting and students socialized in the courtyard while their parents were in the classroom. Profesora Andrea utilized the meeting time to explain how final grades are averaged using grades from four evaluative periods. A grade of 60 is the minimum passing grade for each subject area. She then said that 15 students in her homeroom section were in danger of failing the school year and repeating 7th grade. Students who fail (less than 60) in three or more subjects fail the year and repeat the grade. First, the teacher called the name of those students who v*a limpio*, i.e. not failing. She gave the parents their child's report card. They then signed and returned the document. Parents of passing students could leave after signing the report card. At 9:00, the parents of those who are failing stayed while others left. Profesora Andrea explained that their children were in danger of failing unless something changes. She calculated the minimum grade that each student would need to get in the last two periods to pass the year. She shared the grades publicly for each student with all parents present. She then distributed the report cards, waited for parents to sign them, and collected them again. At 9:40, the last parents left the room.

Normal instruction resumed at the third instructional block, after recess. Scheduling parent meetings during the school day was a standard practice: all other teachers at San Ramón School also scheduled report card distribution parent meetings for their homeroom sections during the regular instructional day.

On Wednesday, July 19th, there was no school due to a national holiday, *Día de la Revolución*, similar to an Independence Day celebration, marking the first victory of the Sandinista political party. There was a festive atmosphere and many residents left town early in the morning heading to Managua for large political rallies, marches, and parades. Rumors swirled early on that there would be no school the next day due to the festivities, but it had not been officially cancelled yet. I was informed that, in years past, the first lady (now the recently elected Vice-President) Rosario Murillo, announced via a televised speech an additional day off in honor of the *Revolución.* Although there was never an announcement cancelling school, hundreds of San Ramón high school students gave themselves the day off and did not show up to school on Thursday, July 20th. Only a handful of students arrived for school (less than 10). Those that were at school were asked to help clean the school patio and they were sweeping leaves and trash as I arrived. When they finished cleaning, they left. The teachers had to stay and used the time to enter grades electronically in a new centrally controlled MINED gradebook, the Sistema Nacional de Información y Estadística [SINFO] implemented in 2016. After teachers completed data entry, at about 10:30, they left. Classes resumed as normal the next day. An additional day, Wednesday, July 26th, was local school holiday that was not listed on the national school year calendar. It was only a holiday for schools in the Chinandega municipality as it was a religious celebration of the municipal patron saint Santa Ana.

There are similar holidays in other jurisdictions. In the 11th grade parent focus group, Jacinta noted that there were too many holidays and that it seemed like "every other day" students had another day off school. She viewed this as lost learning time that students and teachers could not take advantage of, but felt that she "didn't really have the right to complain" because it was a public school and she was not paying for her child to attend.

At San Ramón School, the established schedule does not include a set number of minutes for transition times between classes. At the end of each instructional block, teachers gathered their materials and moved between classrooms while students remained in their assigned homeroom class. There was great variability in the speed of transitions as some teachers visited the teachers' lounge between sessions while others moved directly to their next classroom. In general, Profesora Andrea's transitions between classes lasted at least ten minutes. In all my observational notes, I noted the class start time to be at least ten minutes after the scheduled start time. Once she entered class, she had to arrange her instructional materials and could then begin her routine of writing objectives on the board and taking attendance.

Although the school employed one full-time janitor, students were primarily the ones responsible for cleaning the classrooms, hallways, and the courtyard. In each classroom, there was a posted schedule of which group of students clean the classroom and the adjoining hallway and each student did it at least once a week. According to the schedule, students cleaned at least three times each day – in the morning before the first instructional block, after recess, and then again at the end of the day. Students cleaned more frequently than the schedule indicated, however, as many teachers asked students to tidy up the classroom after each instructional block. In groups of two or three, students

would sweep, mop, and dispose of any trash. There were dozens of brooms and mops kept in the office area that students used each day and they used a concrete washboard sink in the patio to wash the mops between use. The frequency of cleaning was in part due to the conditions of the school: there was a dirt road leading to the school entrance and the interior courtyard was also dirt. Therefore, as students entered the classroom, the tile floors became covered in dusty footprints. Additionally, many students did not dispose of trash in designated trash cans, rather, they threw it on the floor for it to be swept up later. This is a common practice throughout Nicaragua, not just in schools, and public spaces are frequently littered. Teachers at San Ramón School insisted on a clean classroom and admonished students if the cleaning was not up to standard. In all classroom observations, there were two to three students cleaning the floor for the first ten to fifteen minutes of each class period. In order for the assigned students to completely clean the floor, other students had to move their desks to provide more complete access to the floor. In general, the classroom did not fully settle into instructional activities until the cleaning team finished the floors and returned to their desks. On many occasions, Profesora Andrea utilized the cleaning time to begin writing objectives and vocabulary on the board, but did not formally begin instruction until after the classroom was cleaned. On one memorable occasion, the 11th grade classroom was littered with snack wrappers, plastic bags, crumpled up paper, and dirt after recess. Profesora Andrea consulted the cleaning list to see why the classroom was in such a state of disorder, but all of the listed students were absent and other students were reluctant to help, even when directly asked by the teacher. After much discussion, and only after Profesora Andrea called for reinforcement of the 11th grade homeroom teacher, two

students finally began cleaning the classroom. According to my notes, it took twenty-two minutes of instructional time to sort out who would clean the classroom and then get started with their regular routine.

Finally, student discipline concerns also resulted in lost instructional time. Student behavior problems were by no means limited to English class and this was not necessarily a reflection of Profesora Andrea's instructional practices or management skills. When questioned, other teachers in the school confirmed that certain grade levels and sections were particularly "difficult" and required a "firm hand." Although there were some minor disruptions in all grade levels, there were significant interruptions to instructional time in one section of 7th grade and in 11th grade. In section B of 7th grade there was a group of six boys who were one to three years older than the others, suggesting that they had previously failed one or more grades. This group of boys generally initiated disruptions and required frequent attention from the teacher. In this 7th grade section, I observed students interrupting the teacher's lecture by talking or calling out, passing notes back and forth, drawing on the desks, leaving class without permission, using phones underneath their desks, ignoring directed activities, and talking to other students through the windows. During one class, Profesora Andrea separated four boys who were all sitting together in the back corner by moving them to different corners of the room and reprimanding them, "You don't come to school just to warm the chairs." Profesora Andrea would repeatedly pause in her planned lessons to provide verbal redirections or reprimands such as, "I will lower your grade if you continue this undisciplined behavior." As a point of comparison, one of my observations of 7th section A recorded that "students are quiet, listening, taking notes, no disruptions." In that 7th

grade class, Profesora Andrea completed her entire planned lesson, including lesson introduction, vocabulary explanations and translations, guided practice, and a student dialogue. In comparison to the other two sections of 7th grade, 7th grade section B covered less English material because they generally did not complete entire lessons during one instructional block and were behind the other 7th grade sections.

The 11th grade class was recognized by the principal and other teachers as being notoriously difficult to control. I observed the 11th grade four times, some classes were cancelled due to meetings or teacher absences. During all observations in 11th grade, I noted frequent disruptions and teacher corrections throughout the entirety of each class session. The cumulative effect of students' off-task behavior resulted in very little English instruction occurring according to Profesora Andrea's lesson plans. I will highlight my observations from one class on Tuesday, August 1 as an example of how student discipline negatively affected English instructional time. Profesora Andrea taught 11th grade for a full 90-minute block each Tuesday during the second instructional block, from 8:30-10:00. Profesora Andrea entered the class at 8:40 and began writing on the board while two students cleaned the floor. At 8:47, she began introducing the content "Community resources and needs" by reading the vocabulary list from the board. At 8:51, she verbally corrected behavior by reminding them that "Teachers are only facilitators – it depends on you all." I noted that students continued to be "so loud, talking, eating, disruptive." Profesora Andrea was using a loud voice to be heard over student chatter. She then moved some students around, making them switch desks and telling them, "You only bother people!" She continued her planned lesson about community resources until 9:15, with multiple requests for students to "be quiet." I noted

that students "answer back disrespectfully, then laugh, like they made a joke." At 9:17, she gave them a group assignment to complete two exercises from their textbook in groups of five students and some students moved their chairs around and opened their textbooks and notebooks. My observations indicated that:

> It's unclear how many are engaged in group activity. I note 16 students [out of 45] writing in notebooks. All others are talking, on phone, brushing hair, leaving room, looking in mirror, leaving the room to get food and coming back to eat. A group of six are in the back and talking/yelling loudly. Three girls are braiding one girl's hair while two girls are fake boxing in the middle of the classroom.

During this group work, Profesora Andrea sat at her desk in the front of the room and took attendance. At 9:30, one student walked in through the rear door and threw a *garrobo* [a type of iguana] at the back row of desks, causing seven students to scream, push their chairs out of the way, and run towards the front of the classroom. Another group of students escaped through the rear door. After two minutes of confusion, a girl student trapped it in the corner and carried it out by the tail. It was alive. All students were talking, laughing, moving around, and many had left through either the front or back door. At this point, the teacher said, "Go ahead and leave, I want to leave too." At 9:37, some students had calmed down and resumed their activities, although many had not returned to the classroom. At 9:41, Profesora Andrea asked students to bring their English notebook to her desk and she sat checking their assignments. I saw 15 students turn in their notebooks for review, other students stayed in their desks or walked out and did not turn in anything. One she checked notebooks, students were dismissed. She left the classroom at 9:50. During this 90-minute instructional block, 11th grade students

heard less than five minutes of English, mostly during opening minutes with the introduction of content and vocabulary. All behavioral corrections occurred in Spanish. The attendance routine was conducted in Spanish. Students spoke Spanish amongst themselves while socializing or completing their group assignment. Out of the 45 students present for class, only 15 turned in their assigned group work and many students left the classroom for at least part of the instructional block.

The school staff was aware of the disciplinary concerns in the 11th grade class and there were steps taken to attempt to remedy the situation; however, they had little effect on changing student behavior. Director Antonio pointed to MINED policy orientations as a reason that he could not be firmer with students. "I find kids in the corridors that leave the classroom and basically, that's the culture. If I come and tell a student, 'Go back inside to your classroom.' Well, if the student says, 'No, I don't want to go to class.' Well, then, that's it. In that sense, the MINED doesn't allow me to use a firm hand." There was a great sense of frustration among the principal, teacher, and other students that more could not be done to control "undisciplined" students because it was negatively affecting learning. The 11th grade homeroom teacher and the principal were primarily responsible for dealing with student discipline issues and they, on various occasions, imposed disciplinary consequences to regain control of the classroom. These including calling parents to a meeting, speaking with individual students, and placing a written referral of disciplinary action in the student's file. On my final week of observations, there was a meeting for 11th grade parents to discuss behavioral concerns, distribute report cards, and discuss fundraising efforts for their graduation. The 11th grade homeroom teacher named twelve students who consistently disrupted class and

asked their parents to speak to them regarding appropriate school behavior. The vocational teacher joined the meeting and named additional students who had not turned in a single assignments during the marking period. Although most parents listened without comments, two mothers defended their children and openly stated that they did not believe the teachers. One mother said, "I know the child I have!" and challenged the teachers' credibility. The 11th grade homeroom teacher handled the interaction very calmly and simply repeated her request for parents to continue speaking with their children about appropriate school behavior. The meeting then continued to other topics.

The inefficient time management at San Ramón School had multiple sources. Some causal factors lay beyond the control of the teacher and the local school, such as the MINED block schedule, while others could be altered at the local level for greater efficiency, such as cleaning schedules and lengthy transitions. While student discipline and interruptions represented a significant portion of lost instructional time, it is essential to examine this behavior in conjunction with large class sizes, limited opportunities for active participation, and overarching questions of student engagement and motivation. Student behavior will be discussed further in following sections as it relates to student engagement, sense of purpose, and academic motivation. The observed classroom practices were inconsistent with established best practices in language instruction as stated in the MINED English curriculum. The cumulative effect of the inefficient use of instructional time is that students at San Ramón high school received less than the three hours of weekly English instruction established by the Ministry of Education.

Teacher and student absenteeism. On Monday, July 17, I walked a few short blocks to the high school to begin classroom observations. It was the first day back at

school after a two-week break for the students. Teachers had a week of vacation, but had also spent four days in Chinandega city receiving professional development. As I approached at the high school, I noticed many students lingering near the gate, getting snacks from a small store near the street, playing on smartphones, or just talking in groups. I was unsure as to why there were so many students outside since I was entering the school after the bell had already rung and students should have been well into their first period classes by that point. As the fence was locked with a padlock, I asked a nearby student to find a teacher to unlock it and let me inside. I asked why it was locked and was told "so the kids don't leave school." There were so many large holes throughout the chain link fence surrounding the school that students could leave even when the gates were locked. Once inside the gates, I noticed even more students, all wearing the obligatory blue pants and white shirt uniforms, lingering in the inside courtyard. I was soon told that there were three teachers absent, which was why so many students were wandering the hallways. I searched for the school principal as he had facilitated my entry into the school and could provide guidance as to where to begin my observations. He was waiting for me in the office and informed me that the English teacher was absent and that the students were not receiving English class that day. This started a conversation about teacher absenteeism. When a teacher is absent in Nicaragua, there is no substitute provided, unless it is a long-term prearranged absence, like maternity leave. When their teacher was absent, students simply did not receive class that day and they had a "free block." This explained the large number of students hanging out in the patio area upon my arrival. The principal noted that teachers frequently were absent and there was nothing that he could do about it as long as they

brought a doctor's note. He also noted that some teachers *aprovechan* (take advantage) and had connections with the doctors and there was significant corruption. The principal explained that if teachers were to provide a doctor's note, he could not take any actions against a teacher to curb future absences. During my six-week observation period, the English teacher was absent five days. On each occasion, students did not receive English class at all and were at liberty to walk the hallways, play in the patio, study, talk to friends, or whatever else they could do without leaving school grounds.

In addition to the large-scale student absences reported on the day after the *Día de la Revolución* (a national holiday) activities, large numbers of students were absent in each class period on a daily basis. As part of my observational routine, I took attendance during each class period and recorded it on my daily classroom activity log. When comparing my attendance statistics to the enrollment data provided by San Ramón high school, I noticed there was never a class with full attendance throughout my six-week observational period. The 9th grade class had the highest enrollment with 61 students; however, I recorded only 53, 49, and 50 students present during three separate observations. On one occasion, 7th C had only 14 students present out of 32. These examples are representative of attendance levels at other grade levels throughout all observations, with a range of between 44% to 87% of enrolled students present for each class session. Profesora Andrea took attendance during each class and the students responded for those who were absent, stating either that he/she was not here today, he/she was in the hallway or bathroom, or he/she had dropped out of school and would not be returning. In some cases, students had indeed reported to school in the morning, but chose not to enter the classroom and were instead in the hallway or in the courtyard.

When I asked why so many students were allowed to skip class and wonder around the school grounds, Profesora Andrea and the principal both reported that they could not *force* students to enter the classroom, but they could remind them of where they needed to be and ask them to return. It was then up to the student to comply or not. I observed they mostly chose not to comply with any such requests and would continue walking around the hallways or hanging out in the courtyard. Although all teachers took attendance, absences were not recorded in a punitive way as there were no consequences for excessive absences. If students were absent on the day of an exam, however, they would lose the points without possibility of a makeup test. The cumulative effect of the multiple student and teacher absences is that students at San Ramón high school received less than the allocated minimum hours of English instruction established by the Ministry of Education.

Student-led vs. teacher-led instructional practices. Profesora Andrea noted that the organization of her English classes could not be identical to other classes at San Ramón School. As her class focused on the acquisition of a foreign language that students did not have much experience with, they needed additional support and individual work was not as effective. Profesora Andrea compared English instruction to other subject areas as she explained why she frequently utilized collaborative groupings:

> The Spanish teacher sometimes does a practical class, as soon as they have participated, they already have their grades. Mathematics sometimes puts them to work as a pair. I, in my area of English, sometimes put them to work in group or in pairs, so that they support each other because, you have to realize, it is another language and it is difficult for them. So, I imagine that three or four students

> working together is better, they can help each other. So, therefore, always, always, I opt for them to work as a pair or as a small group. If we are talking about first year students [7th grade], they are just starting, the basics, we only do it more participatory, whole group: listen, repeat, model. Then they will read sentences because they are beginning to read and write the English language. Well, and the rest, ninth, tenth, they already work in groups with their book for support.

Students confirmed in focus groups and interviews that they frequently worked in pairs or groups in English class, more so than in any other class. Students sometimes completed group work in sociology, but otherwise, they generally reported a traditional lecture-respond format for all other classes. They described other classes as listening to teachers' lectures or "explanations," taking notes in their notebook, and then completing some form of written assignment. Students repeated Profesora Andrea's reasoning for working in collaborative groups in English class almost verbatim, so that "they could help and support each other." Students indicated that there were some exceptions, of course, such as quizzes and end of unit exams, which were exclusively individual assignments and were heavily weighted in terms of their final grade.

The physical environment of the classroom was not necessarily conducive to partner or group work since there were no tables and students traditionally sat in rows of individual desks. During Profesora Andrea's introductory lesson, students were seated in their desks either in rows or in a U-shaped orientation facing the whiteboard. When she announced that it was time to work in groups, students automatically started moving desks around. Profesora Andrea and the students developed a system of moving the

individual desks to facilitate working in groups of four to six students by dragging them into an imperfect square shape, with all of the writing surfaces more or less touching to roughly simulate a larger table. Student groups would then use this shared space to consult their textbooks, write in notebooks, or transfer their work to larger construction paper for presentations.

Communicative English. Director Antonio was unequivocal in his strong statement that the Ministry of Education's goal was that all students learn to communicate in English:

> The goal of the MINED is for all of us to learn English, teachers and students. Before, an illiterate person was someone who couldn't read or write. But, now, the new illiterate person in the 21st century is the one who does not speak English and the one who does not use technology. Knowing English is the main objective of the MINED, that is the main objective. Being able to talk and knowing how to express yourself in English. Being able to communicate in English. […] that is the main objective: that the students communicate and adopt English as their own language, as our language.

Director Antonio pointed to MINED's clear policy orientations that the ultimate goal of English instruction was the ability to communicate in English. Although he said that in order to facilitate communication, English class should be "participatory" and "interactive," he did not specifically elaborate on how Profesora Andrea's class organization and structure should reflect a communicative approach to language learning.

Profesora Andrea used a variety of instructional strategies, depending on the size of the class, the content, learning objectives, and the behavioral needs of each grade

level and section. There were many observations that included Profesora Andrea's use of traditional, teacher-centered grammar translation approaches to language learning English. She typically introduced each class session by presenting the content objectives, a list of English vocabulary and its translation in Spanish, and a brief explanation of a grammar point, such as verb conjugations. During this introductory period, Profesora Andrea typically was the only one talking and she rarely asked any questions or accepted any comments while she was presenting. Although the lecture-style of her initial lesson was not consistent with the MINED's emphasis on communicative practices, Profesora Andrea also implemented several strategies consistent with a communicative approach, including group work, partner work, group presentations, and dialogues.

Profesora Andrea noted that when planning for class, she incorporated the different modalities of speaking, listening, writing, and reading as part of her planning. She looked for "different strategies to get the student to participate, because you have plan for motivation too. It is not only up to them and nobody else. I can't just put the subject on the board and nothing else. No, I have to find their motivation. So, then, I look for the strategies, the methods, the means to make them understand English class." She noted that sometimes she had the students practice short dialogues that they would present later or even draw a picture as a response to a reading or a lecture.

In spite of Profesora Andrea's explicit consideration of student participation during her planning process, students were generally quite reluctant to participate in English class. In order to implement communicative practices consistently, students should have had the opportunity to frequently interact with each other, and with their teacher, in a learning environment that was conducive to academic risk taking. A large

barrier to implementing participatory strategies was the apparent lack of trust between students. Students did not feel that they were in a classroom community where they were comfortable taking academic risks, speaking in public, participating in dialogues, and opening themselves up for possible criticism from teachers or peers. Profesora Andrea confirmed that socio-emotional factors impeded classroom participation. "Yes, they don't all participate. What happens to these poor students is that they are afraid that the others will laugh at them. Look what just happened in eighth grade today, one person laughed and then the student talking just got quiet and did not continue. I remind them that we all have to learn, but that's just what happens. They get embarrassed." During student interviews and focus groups, students repeatedly used the phrase, "*me da pena"* [I feel embarrassed], as a reason for their reluctance to speak English. Students said that they were afraid of mispronouncing words and then having others laugh at them.

During my classroom observations, I noted two occasions where students simply refused to go to the board or to say anything in English when it was their turn to speak. One 7th grade girl said, "I didn't do it. I don't know. I can't do it." On both occasions, the teacher asked them twice to participate and then simply moved on to the next student on the list, but made no further comment or attempt to further coax participation. In one 7th grade classroom, Profesora Andrea wrote some sentences incorrectly on the board and asked individual students to come to the board, correct the errors, and then read the corrected sentence aloud. I noted that all students went to the board, but that most were "shy, embarrassed, or nervously laughing when asked to read aloud."

Director Antonio praised the curriculum changes implemented in 2009, across all disciplines, as it sought to make classes more participatory and interactive. He drew on

his own experiences learning English in high school to demonstrate the progress that has been made in making class more interesting and relevant for students:

> Before, like when I received English class in high school, I passed it because it was a requirement. But now, the MINED has provided more interactive classes and has been improving the curriculum. In each discipline, not only English, the curriculum has been improving. For example, when I was a student, I said how nice it would have been to teach me in a more interactive way. Our schools did not even have technological equipment to watch a video, we had to get a DVD player from somewhere else. Now our center has its own projectors and a computer center. All that has come to strengthen the quality of education, thanks to the government that has supported us a lot.

Although the school had a computer center, along with a projector, I did not observe it in use with students to support subject area instruction in any discipline. Students received technology classes sporadically, as they were often canceled, but did not utilize the computers during other classes. Director Antonio praised the MINED for providing "curriculum for interactive classes, which is the most best way for students to capture new information. The MINED has provided CDs and DVDs of classes so that the class is more participative. The class is more dynamic and students do not get bored." In spite of their supposed availability, I did not observe any teachers using CD players or DVD/TV combinations. So, perhaps these technologies were available to support a more interactive class, but teachers did not consistently incorporate them into regular instructional routines.

When I asked Profesora Andrea to analyze whether students achieved MINED

established goals for English proficiency, I received a mixed response. She said that they can do the basics, as defined by the MINED curriculum, but that they cannot really speak English.

> Yes, they can do nothing else, just as the curriculum says, only the basics. If you are going to ask a fifth-year student, what are the verbs *to be*, they do not know. We studied this in first year and then again every year. With this, *to be*, we have made sentences and dialogues. We always study the verbs *to be*. So then, it is difficult for them to have a conversation. They can write small paragraphs. For example, we sometimes write personal descriptions, what they plan to do in the future, what career they think they will choose because it appears in the curriculum. And they write it, but they find it difficult because they forget. The students say it's because we do not practice it here, here we speak Spanish only, and that is why it is difficult for them.

Thus, Profesora Andrea concluded that most students could not authentically use English for communicative purposes. They could write in English, complete a directed response, or participate in a scripted dialogue, but most students could not creatively engage in language production for communication.

The use of constructivism: "Teachers are just facilitators." The Ministry of Education highlighted the importance of incorporating constructivist pedagogy as a part of its 2009 curriculum reform. The MINED advocated for classroom structures based on active students who are collaborative constructors of knowledge. Teachers were encouraged to serve as facilitators and create the classroom conditions for students to interact and collaborate. Although the MINED strongly supported the complete adoption

of constructivist pedagogies, I observed a mix of traditional and constructivist classroom practices in English classes at San Ramón School.

Profesora Andrea remarked that she enjoyed working with fifth year students because "we teachers are facilitators for them. We present the material, explain more or less the content, what they are going to do, here is their textbook and they will work. We are facilitators by this point. It is not like the first-year students: repeating to them, writing for them, dictating to them. Fifth year students already have some knowledge, even if it is just a little, but they have it and they can work by themselves." Profesora Andrea pointed out the difficulty of implementing a completely constructivist approach in a beginning language classroom as students needed additional support due to lack of prior experience with the subject.

Profesora Andrea noted that, whenever possible, she tried to make the curriculum relevant to their everyday lives by asking students to bring their ideas and experiences to the class. She pointed to the example of a 7th grade class that was learning about the correct format for dates. As homework, she asked students to bring their parents' birthday written in their notebooks so they could practice saying dates using something that "was important to them."

She lamented that it was not always possible to incorporate interactive strategies because if the lack of time. "But the question is time, time is short. It's different in elementary, teachers are with students all morning. But, we have to leave after our block because another teacher enters. But, sometimes it is done, we know what to use, books, photographs, and drawings that they can make, we just don't always have time."

Director Antonio lamented that sometimes, educational progress is thwarted by teachers who are stuck in "traditionalism" and do not adopt new practices. In particular, he praised the new curriculum, but noted that it was not always implemented with fidelity because some teachers have yet to change their traditionalist mindset and continue to run "teacher-centered" classes or do not readily incorporate new technologies.

Overall, the MINED's commitment to constructivism seemed to be surface-level at best. Although policy statements encouraged teachers to "take into account the previous learning experiences of the students so they can apply knowledge" (MINED, 2009), the English curriculum was highly structured and based on thematically organized topics that were not inherently interesting and did not directly relate to students' everyday lives. For example, the 7th grade curriculum included six units of study: "the classroom, personal information, usual activities, the time, home, and community." Teachers were expected to adhere to the curriculum and were encouraged to collaboratively plan with other English teachers via TEPCE meetings to ensure that consistency in instruction across the municipality. Therefore, there was little wiggle room in the curriculum to incorporate different topics, perhaps at the suggestion and interest of the students.

Students had not developed habits of thought typical of constructivist classrooms, such as pursuing lines of inquiry related to student interests and questions, engaging in extended dialogues or discussions, analyzing primary sources, and pursuing a reflective questioning of the concept of truth and authority. Specifically relating to beginning language learners, there were limitations to relying exclusively on constructivist approaches without also explicitly teaching language structures in English. Some students reported frustration with Profesora Andrea because "she does not explain things

well." When students were only given a group assignment, but had not received instruction that included the prerequisite skills, they were inevitably frustrated.

There were two aspects that were consistently aligned with constructivist pedagogy: student groupings and varied forms of assessment. I consistently observed students working in pairs or collaborative groups. Students and school personnel affirmed that assessments were a varied mix of presentations, group work, and exams. In all English classes, I observed a hybrid approach as Profesora Andrea incorporated both the traditional, teacher-centered lecture and grammar explanations with some use of student-centered dialogues, group work, and presentations.

The use of target language. Without question, and at all grade levels, Profesora Andrea used very little English in each class. One of my "look-fors" on my observation protocol was "the teacher and students speak in the target language." I then had a checklist indicating whether this statement was true "Less than 50% of the time"; "50%-75% of the time"; "75%-90% of the time"; or "More than 90% of the time." For all 32 observations, I marked that the teacher and students spoke English less than 50% of the time. When I designed my formal observation checklist before conducting observations in Nicaragua, less than 50% of the time was the lowest predefined category. In reality, English was consistently used *much* less than 50% of the time in all classes. In some cases, notably the 11th grade class, English was used for approximately 5% of total class time. In my observation log, I recorded student and teacher speech in whatever language that they used and copied notes from the board, again, respecting original language choice. In the margins of my observation logs, I completed frequency counts to determine how often each language was used. I also added start and stop times for each

activity along with language used to evaluate how often the target language was used during class time. As I noted in my observation log, all classroom routines, such as taking attendance, announcements, and enforcing the cleaning schedules, were handled in Spanish. I used these frequency counts and time logs to calculate an approximate percentage of English used during each class period that I observed, which ranged from a low of 5% in the 11th grade class to a high of 35% in one section of 8th grade where students wrote sentences describing clothing items and then presented them orally to the whole class. Profesora Andrea used English consistently only during her introductory lesson by stating the date, the content (for example, modes of transportation), the sub-content (prepositions: in, on, by), and the vocabulary list. In most cases, right after reading the objectives and vocabulary, she would immediately orally translate to Spanish and wait for students to write both the English and the accompanying Spanish translation in their notebooks. As the class proceeded, Profesora Andrea followed the same pattern of briefly presenting material in English, but then translating them in Spanish and delving into deeper explanations of the material in Spanish. When students worked in groups, I only overheard Spanish conversations, with occasional interjections of English words or phrases as needed according to the assignment.

There was one instance, in the 11th grade classroom, when I observed the teacher using English for less than five minutes of a 90-minute instructional block. Granted, this student group was known for disruptive behavior, but nonetheless, they only heard English for the date, the content title, a vocabulary review, and a class brainstorm about community needs. The brainstorm was conducted mostly in Spanish, with the students contributing their ideas in Spanish and the teacher writing down the

English translation on the whiteboard. She then gave students quick explanation of the difference between the verbs "need, want, have to" again using Spanish to explain how to determine which verb to use in context. After that, she told students to open their book to page 77 and complete the first activity in groups of four or five students. As the directions in the textbook are in English, she provided a verbal Spanish translation and told them to get to work. Students then spent the remaining time completing the activity in groups or simply talking to their friends. I only heard students speaking Spanish amongst themselves during this group work time. I also noted that not everyone completed the assignment as only a handful of students turned in papers at the end of class.

As an interesting note, during her interview, Karla stated that one of the most difficult things about English class was the time two years ago, during her 8th grade year, when Profesora Andrea said that she was only going to speak English during the class and students were expected to respond in English too. The teacher "told us that she was only going to speak to us in English, all English, *all*, only talking in English. That was the hardest thing." Karla said that if you were late to class, you had to give your excuse in English and that it was very difficult for her and all the other students. Two other students, Dalia and Daisy, confirmed that this happened in 8th grade, but then not again after that. When asked why they no longer only spoke English in English class, Karla was not entirely sure, but said that "it was probably something the MINED told her to do, it seems like it might have been like a practical class. They trained her to teach the class like that, but maybe later, it changed." Neither Profesora Andrea nor Director Antonio mentioned attempts in previous years to exclusively use English in class, but I did not

observe either teachers or students utilizing English for most instructional activities.

Fidelity to the curriculum and MINED provided resources. According to Profesora Andrea, the MINED provided a complete English curriculum and accompanying textbooks for student use. The MINED also provided time for her to collaborate with other English teachers to plan for instruction and create materials. She reported that she also used her phone to search the internet when she could not find what she needed in the curriculum or in the textbooks. After analyzing the MINED English curriculum, the English textbooks, and observing 32 English classes, I concluded that Profesora Andrea very closely followed the prescribed English curriculum, with minimal variations between her lesson delivery and the content areas and achievement indicators listed on the curriculum. In fact, I determined that she likely followed the curriculum too rigidly and did not account for missed instructional time, students who needed additional instruction and practice, or opportunities to spiral back to reinforce previously taught concepts.

Profesora Andrea consistently utilized the MINED curriculum and accompanying textbook to plan for instruction and then to implement her plans. Her daily plans were guided by the long-range plans that were completed in collaboration with other English teachers who were also using the same curriculum and textbooks. She adhered to her previously established planning schedule, even when students did not complete prior assignments. At the beginning of each class, Profesora Andrea copied the day's agenda directly from her plan book and did not refer explicitly to previous class lessons. On most occasions, she presented a brief expository lecture-style lesson and then assigned a group assignment using the English textbook. The curriculum covered more topics than

the textbooks, so sometimes, Profesora Andrea did not have MINED provided examples of activities to support each curriculum area. She noted that, although the textbooks are helpful and appropriate for each level, "sometimes in the curriculum, there is a content area that we do not find in the textbooks, that is, there are no exercises for the students to work on." In those cases, she consulted with other teachers or searched the internet to come up with appropriate activities to support the curriculum.

There was no indication of a system for re-teaching and reassessing students if they did not demonstrate mastery after the first lesson. I did not observe any space on her planning calendar for make-up sessions or re-teaching, nor did I observe her teach any lessons that were explicitly in response to student needs. It was unclear how absent students were expected to make up any missed assignments or tests, but one observation seemed to imply that students would just be missing those points from their final grade. In 7th grade, Profesora Andrea was giving an end of unit test, worth 30 points, and remarked, "Just imagine those who did not come today, how many points are they missing?" All the students responded in unison, "30!" I did not observe any make-up testing as the next class session with that 7th grade section began a new unit of study.

There was also no indication of planned and purposeful spiral reviewing that referred back to previously taught concepts with the goal of providing multiple opportunities for students to be successful. Especially with language learning, students are unlikely to fully grasp a new concept after just one exposure, but if they are presented with multiple learning experiences, they have more opportunities to demonstrate mastery. I did observe her remind students that they should know something already because she had taught it before: "Remember, in English the adjective comes first. You should know

this, we've studied it before." These reminders were not followed by additional examples to provide greater clarity.

My analysis of Profesora Andrea's planning documents and my observations confirm that she followed, with great fidelity, the MINED English curriculum. My only criticism of her adherence to the curriculum is that it was not flexible enough to account for schedule changes, variations in student achievement, and the need for multiple exposures to truly master concepts in a foreign language.

Summary

Overall, the teacher used the MINED curriculum with fidelity and made some attempt to incorporate instructional strategies aligned with a communicative approach to language learning, but was not always consistent. Both the principal and the teacher were well-versed in constructivist pedagogy and expressed a belief in the importance of student engagement in the creation of knowledge; however, it was inconsistently implemented. Spanish was, by far, the most frequently used language during all instructional activities, both by the teacher and by students. Students received far less than the MINED required three hours of weekly instruction in English. The high rates of teacher and student absenteeism had a negative effect on English acquisition.

Since 2009, the MINED reformed its English curriculum to be focused on developing communicative competence. There are, however, some structural limitations in the rural school of San Ramón that limit the effectiveness of a communicative approach to language instruction, including large class sizes, limited access to instructional technology that could be useful in modeling dialogues, videos, etc., and limited training for teachers as to how to implement interactive, communicative strategies

given large class sizes and limited beginning language proficiency. The school infrastructure was in poor condition and reflected an overall low level of investment in this rural school by the Ministry of Education. Although the school recently received a new computer lab, computers were not yet connected to the internet and students and teachers had limited access to computers for instructional purposes. It was difficult to establish whether students were overall meeting established goals due to the lack of defined proficiency levels and no centralized expectation of testing.

In relation to the conceptual framework of Spolksy's theory of language policy, findings indicate that English language was rarely incorporated into participants' regular language practices. In the few cases when English was used as the medium of instruction or was spoken in the classroom by students, it was always the result of a language management policy and language enforcement by the teacher. English was never used spontaneously in the classroom, rather, it was used in carefully prescribed circumstances designed and managed by the English teacher. Student interviews indicated that they did not engage in English conversations outside of the school and only in some circumstances they listened to music in English, but all daily language use with family, friends, community members, and other teachers occurred exclusively in Spanish.

In relation to language management practices, findings indicate that the MINED has made significant improvements to better support the existing English language policy and encourage more consistent and improved implementation of the language management policy. Improvements related to language management include the revision of a complete English curriculum, the distribution of English textbooks, the

provision of technological resources, and the establishment of regular professional development opportunities and collaborative planning structures for English teachers. Language management policies, however, were not implemented due to large class sizes, poor infrastructure, and time management practices that resulted in limited time for English instruction.

Stakeholders' Conceptualization of the Purpose and Utility of English Instruction in Rural Nicaragua

The second research question explored stakeholders' perceptions of the purpose and utility of English instruction in rural Nicaragua. Data to address this second question was gathered through interviews and focus groups with seven 11th grade students, five 10th grade students, parents, the English teacher, and the high school principal. Additional insight regarding student motivation and engagement was taken from classroom observations. Whenever possible, I included direct quotations from stakeholders to develop a thick description of their motivation and perception of the usefulness of English instruction with their own words. As an additional layer of analysis, stakeholders' beliefs were contrasted with official MINED policy statements about the purpose of English instruction and examined via the conceptual framework of linguistic imperialism.

Motivations for Learning English

Student motivation. When asked why he studied English, Julio laughed and replied, "Well, it is not optional. We can't just say that no, we don't want to take that class." Julio was not the only one to answer this question in a frank and honest manner. English was a required class and all students had to take it for five years, regardless of

their personal motivation. During interviews, when asked about their favorite subjects to study, no student chose English as their preferred area of study, even though they acknowledged that it was useful. Students more often mentioned literature or sociology as their favorite classes and math as their least favorite. Karla noted that it was not a question of liking the subject matter, but rather, engaging with the teaching style of different teachers that determined whether she liked a class or not. When explaining why she liked her sociology class the most, she said she liked "how the teacher expresses herself. It is not the class itself, but rather, how the class is given. I like the way that she explains everything well. I like her personality, how she treats us, and how she talks to us." Maria said that she overall liked English class, but that she was disappointed that they did not teach her what she really wanted to know about English. "Sometimes, we want to know the meaning of a word, but sometimes, the teacher does not specifically tell us what it is. Sometimes we don't understand her and she does not understand us either. But, yes, I like English." Dalia said that she liked English class, but that "sometimes, what they teach us here is just the basics. Even though it's just the most basic stuff, I like it."

Some students at San Ramón School demonstrated an additional commitment to English learning by enrolling in Saturday courses in Chinandega. David was one of the students who said that he did not learn much English at the high school, but that he thought English would be very important in the future, so he took a Saturday English class. David said "sincerely, here at the high school, I have not learned much. I have learned more by taking a course at INATEC on Saturdays. For the past three years, I have taken English classes and there, yes, I have learned a lot of English." David noted

two main advantages of the Saturday English course: extended time and focused classmates. Each Saturday, David went to his English class from 7:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., with an hour break for lunch. Classes only focused on English and they participated in a variety of activities. He also noted that at his regular high school he can hardly hear the teacher due to other students' misbehavior whereas at INATEC, the other students are "serene…listening and analyzing things." He noted that students were only at the Saturday courses because they wanted to be there, so they were all highly motivated to learn English and he did not have to "deal with badly-behaved students." Some students were paying for the course, while others, like himself, received a full scholarship because of high academic achievement.

Overall, students expressed a strong motivation to continue learning English more for the potential future economic benefits of job creation rather than enjoyment of the class itself. Many students echoed Julio's sentiment that they were taking English in high school because they were required to do so in order to graduate, thus they did not really have much choice. Although the students in the focus group and interviews were interested in learning English and highly motivated, they did not think that their peers were uniformly as motivated. They pointed to lack of engagement and discipline concerns amongst their peers as evidence that not all students felt that English class was important, even though they did.

School staff perception of student motivation. Although students consistently expressed strong motivation to learn English, with some even enrolling in additional courses, both the principal and the English teacher viewed most students as largely unmotivated to continue studying English.

Profesora Andrea indicated that most of her students were unmotivated to learn English and most would not continue studying it after high school graduation.

> It is the minority [of students] who are motivated by the language and continue studying it as part of their university major after graduating high school. There are other students, most of them, who do not motivate themselves so much. It is the cruel reality here. Most students look for a job after graduating, only the minority will continue studying. I know that you've only been here a little while, but I have been here so long, I can tell you that students are just waiting to get their piece of paper [diploma] from fifth year and then they go work in the cane [sugar cane fields]. 'What is this?' I ask my students. Eleven years lost, six of primary school and five of secondary, and for what? So they can go to work cutting cane! But, they just aren't motivated.

Profesora Andrea stated that for students who did not continue to college, they were most frequently employed in a nearby sugar cane factory, a shrimp factory, or as vendors in informal markets. She shook her head with frustration, and evident disdain, as she described the attitude of students towards continued university study: "Most of them are just ready to graduate high school, get married, have children, and work. It is only the minority that continue studying. Yes, of course, there are those who continue studying, but it's the minority."

Director Antonio confirmed that most students will not continue studying at the university level after graduating high school. "The majority of those graduating do not continue [studying] for several reasons. Some get married and once married, they're dedicated to working." Both Director Antonio and Profesora Andrea emphasized the

importance of personal responsibility and effort as determinants of students' ability to make it to college, but Director Antonio also considered the economy and lack of parental support as factors that could negatively affect students' opportunities. There was certainly some level of incongruence between students' declaration of interest in learning English compared to my observations of student discipline issues and lack of participation. Observations suggest that it was not an issue limited specifically to English class, rather it was a larger consideration of students' non-engagement with academics in general. Non-college bound students did not connect themselves to academic work across most subject areas, not just specifically English class, which led to low levels of participation, inconsistent attendance, and discipline problems. Students interpretation of academics as an unimportant and uninteresting component of their lives is a major risk factor for dropouts in Nicaragua: "22% of out-of-school boys and girls aged 10 or 11 years state that they are in this situation because they have no interest in studying. This percentage jumps to 38% in adolescents aged 15 to 17 years who also provided this reason for their disengagement with the education system" (López et al., 2017, p. 22). The school principal and teachers were clear that, for many of San Ramón's students, English is only one of many subject areas that did not capture their attention and added that the lack of connection between academic instruction and real-world life skills was detrimental to student motivation.

Parents' perception of student motivation. Parents agreed with Profesora Andrea and Director Antonio that students who did not attend college would find little use for English in the workforce. I asked the parent focus group to respond to the question, would graduating students use English if they did not go to college? Carlos

responded, “No, I don’t think so. Those that just graduate from high school, no, it’s rare that a student who only graduated from high school would be able to get a job that required English . . .no, they’d have to keep studying if they want to use English.” Other parents readily agreed, commenting again that, “they would have to keep studying.”

All parents reported that learning English was important, but there was a variety of motivations for learning English, ranging from “it is just required” to “it can lead to a better job.” Jacinta reported that they were seeing “more visitors lately, some from Canada or other countries. Sometimes we get visitors from medical brigades who come to the health center, but we don’t really know English.” Parents revealed that not all students were equally motivated to learn English and noted that both “teachers and students had to do their part because the teacher has to teach and the student had to be willing to receive the class” (Isabel). Marisol, mother of an 11th grader, reported trying to motivate her daughter because “she had to learn that this class [English] is important. If they think of it as less, I have to make her understand that it is an important class.” Isabel commented that English, math and Spanish literature were the three most essential and important subjects for academic success because “English is part of all majors in college now.” Jessica agreed that the most important subjects were “literature, mathematics and English . . . the most important thing is to know English. For jobs or really whatever you are going to do in school, people are asking for English. All majors in college really need English now, so that’s the most important.”

Parents, teachers, and the principal all agreed that parents were the greatest source of motivation and support for their own children. Jessica noted that, “if the children show initiative and are studious, it is because the parents have transmitted these values to

them. There is a saying that 'children are the reflection of their parents.' Our daughter looks to us as an example because we finished college, we are hard workers. We instill these values in our children." Thus, parents who valued the importance of English instruction were more likely to motivate their children to continue studying English.

Student engagement: Are all students motivated to learn English? The focus group of five 10th grade students had a frank and open discussion about how student engagement and discipline issues had a negative effect on their ability to learn, not just in English class, but all subject areas. They remarked that a majority of their classmates consistently did not pay attention in class and that it had been that way throughout high school. Although English class was not the only area where students did not pay attention, students said it was especially distracting in English because they needed to focus to understand. One student said that it impeded her progress in English class because "sometimes I'm paying attention and other students start bothering me or other students and then they don't let the teacher finish the lesson." Another student said simply, "some want to learn and others don't." One student was careful to mention that the teacher always tried to teach, but that sometimes students just did not put forth any effort to participate: "each year, the teacher explains things well to us, but, my classmates, well, when she says something, they just ignore her. Some classmates just talk to each other and leave English off to the side. Some of us, well, we are just not interested because we ignore the teacher."

Only one student, Julio, admitted to not studying very much at home or at school. He said that, at home, he dedicates, "very little time to studying. I get really distracted with my phone – I watch videos and other stuff." At school, Julio said that, "lately, I've

been a little distracted, but I do like school, if I'm paying attention in class and not playing around with my friends. Sometimes, I do not pay attention to the teacher." Julio was very explicit that he was even more distracted in English class because he did not understand: "the truth is that I distract myself doing other things. Since it is English, I get even more distracted instead of paying attention to the teacher. I feel frustrated, it is a very complicated and difficult language. I like it, but it is complicated."

David was particularly bothered by his classmates "lack of discipline." David did not have much support from his family and noted that the only reason he was still studying and not working is because of his own personal dedication. Even though the English teacher often assigned group work, David preferred to complete his assignments individually whenever possible because "it is really hard to get my classmates to work, some are just bothering others, so it's better alone. If no one searches me out to be in a group, it's better individually." When asked about challenges or obstacles to learning English, David replied that one of his greatest "obstacles is to motivate my classmates to keep fighting to learn more English because it is an important subject, as a student and as a professional." He noted that English was not difficult for him, but that it was for many of his classmates because they were only motivated by "acting foolish or playing around, so it's hard for them. They don't put forth much effort. […] They dedicate themselves to bothering others, they don't pay attention. If the world were full of good students, everyone would learn English easily and quickly. But, as there are more *necios* [badly-behaved] students than good ones, sadly, that's the way it is." David further elaborated that he took steps to separate himself from distracting students: "Sometimes my classmates' behavior is detrimental to my learning because they don't let me hear the

teacher's explanation and then I can get confused. Because of this, I always sit in the front of the class so that I can hear better."

Although most students who participated in focus groups and interviews expressed high levels of self-motivation and valued the importance of English for their future studies and employment, the selection bias indicated that they were not completely representative of their classmates. Classroom observations also indicated that many students were not actively participating or openly engaged with the learning process in the English classroom, certainly not to the extent that interview participants were. Parents and school staff indicated that there would be little benefit to English instruction for those students not pursuing higher education. Director Antonio also declared that only a small minority of students would move on to college, therefore, it was a reasonable assertion to suggest that students' lack of engagement with English instruction stemmed from their perception that it would not be useful or important for their immediate future.

Perceptions of the Utility of English

In all cases, students, parents, and school staff, expressed a strong belief that learning English would be very important and potentially useful for them in the future. Students identified four areas where English would potential be useful in future social, academic and economic activities: 1) university study, 2) employment, 3) intercultural communication, and 4) immigration.

Utility of English for university study. All stakeholders universally agreed that exposure to English instruction in high school was a prerequisite to academic success in college. Karla said, "English is useful for whatever major you might choose, because if

we stop and think, in each one, English has to be part of it. You just have to know English, so you have to learn it." In each interview and focus group, all students repeated Karla's message that taking English in high school would be useful in their future because it is a required course in college, regardless of your chosen major. A 10th grade student noted that "now, in the majority of college majors, they are requiring the English language as a foundational skill." Profesora Andrea and Director Antonio confirmed that English was increasingly a required area of study, even if the student majored in something different. They noted that it had not always been that way, but that universities were becoming more "modern" and their requirements were changing too. Parents were also in agreement that English was useful for college. Isabel, a parent, noted that, "all majors in college really need English now, so that's the most important, that they learn English now."

Employment. As noted earlier, English proficiency was not necessary to find employment within the community of Villa Bella Vista. This community was not connected to a tourist industry and only infrequently received English-speaking visitors in the form of NGO volunteers and medical brigades, whom were often proficient in Spanish. English proficiency was not required for the most common forms of employment on farms, ranches, factories, or small businesses in the community. For students who do not graduate from high school or even those who complete high school and directly enter the workforce, English served little real professional purpose.

Students, however, noted that English would be an essential factor in getting a *good* job that paid well and could potentially be less physically taxing. A 10th grade student expressed that he was motivated to study English partially because of increased

future employment prospects: “in the future, English could be useful if I could get a job, maybe like a computer operator or maybe in the airport, then it would be good to know English.” Another 10th grade student enthusiastically agreed and further elaborated, “for me, it [English] would be fundamental to get a job, to have a good life, and to get ahead.” Julio said that English could be useful for future employment and pointed to an example about a friend who got an “easy” job because he spoke English: “I have a friend who studied English for a long time and now, he is working at the airport, I think as a translator, something like that. You know, the job is not that hard and he earns good money. That is the result of studying English, but the thing is, English is really hard to learn.” David said that English could be useful to get a good job as a “teacher or a tourist guide.” Thus, students recognized that English proficiency was not essential for employment, but it could be a key factor in accessing jobs with greater earning potential, higher prestige, and better working conditions.

Intercultural communication. Many students expressed an interest in studying English as a way to open the doors to communicate with different people. A 10th grade student pointed to the importance of being able to communicate with others as a reason to continue studying English, “learning English is interesting. If you speak English, you can communicate with other people, not simply people that speak your own language, but also you can communicate with people from other countries.” Maria liked studying English because, one day, she’d like to travel to another place and still be able to communicate with other people. She said, “there are many people who do not know Spanish and I’d like to learn English to be able to communicate with those people.” Axel wanted to learn English because he would like to “be able to communicate with different

people."

Both Maria and Axel planned to study medicine after graduating from high school. Although these two students were interviewed separately, they both provided a similar answer when asked about how they might use English in the future. They both responded that they wanted to learn English to be able to help more people as a doctor. Maria noted that she might need English to treat patients one day. If she had an English-speaking patient, she would be feel bad if she couldn't use English to help her patient. Axel also said that "if, one day, a foreigner has an accident and he cannot speak Spanish, then I'll be able to speak English to him so he understands."

Immigration. There were three students who specifically mentioned leaving Nicaragua as a reason that English could be useful in their future. David had family members living in both the United States and in Costa Rica. Although he was a dedicated student and top of his class, he was uncertain if he would be able to continue studying because his family had very limited financial resources. Of all participating students, David was the one to frequently and repeatedly refer to the benefits of English for immigration purposes. David said that, of course, English would be extremely useful "if we go to another country where they speak English. If you don't learn English, what's the point of that? No one will understand you there. You have to study and study and even take an extra course to study more English if you want to get a good job in a foreign country." David also stated that studying English will be beneficial to him, "being here or in another country. For example, if I go to Costa Rica, there, English is used frequently. In the United States, English is used a lot. Those are the two places I want to get to know. If I have children someday, here or there, I will always motivate

them to study English because it is very important to learn English." Axel said that English is very useful because someday he might be able to "travel to the United States and then I would know how to express myself and talk to other people. For example, if someone asks me something in English, I would know how to answer and not remain quiet." Maria did not specifically mention leaving Nicaragua with the purpose of living and working abroad, but she did say that she would like to travel and be able to use English to communicate with other people.

Stakeholder Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Current Instructional Practices

All stakeholders stated, unequivocally, that students were not proficient in English after studying it for all five years of high school. Stakeholders could not articulate a clear standard established by the MINED that would indicate whether students achieved an "appropriate" level of English in high school. Parents and students expected that students would be able to speak and understand English after taking classes for all five years, but they were unclear if that was a realistic expectation. Parents and students reported being disappointed that they could not really speak English, even those who were dedicated students and consistently made good grades in English class. Profesora Andrea, on the other hand, claimed that English proficiency was never the goal of high school instruction, rather, it was only meant to equip students with basic English skills. Director Antonio claimed that the MINED's goal for English instruction was that all students could communicate in English, but admitted that there was no objective measure for that goal. He pointed to students' good grades as evidence that they were learning English, but did not consider any other factors in language proficiency. These conflicting perceptions of the effectiveness of English instruction were the result of two factors: 1)

the MINED did not establish a clear standard for English proficiency, including all four modalities of language learning, nor develop an objective measure of English proficiency; and 2) students, parents, and teachers had a drastically different understanding of the purpose and goals of high school English instruction.

MINED did not establish proficiency standards or objective measures.

Interviews with parents, students, Profesora Andrea, and Director Antonio revealed that no one knew exactly what level of English proficiency was expected of students by the end of the 11th grade. Parents and students were mostly focused on the oral communicative aspects of language learning, indicating that they thought students should able to understand spoken English and hold a brief conversation with someone else. After five years of study, few students could hold conversations or understand much spoken English, therefore, most parents and students judged that English instruction had not been effective. In the focus group, all parents said that their students had not learned much English and that existing instructional practices were not effective at equipping students with language proficiency. As part of the focus group, Carlos, an 11th grade father, commented that "it's not enough, not sufficient. They can't have a conversation. They can't greet each other. They can't sit down and converse. They just can't. They don't have that fluency in English." None of the parents referred to their student's ability, or inability, to read or write in English, but they all focused on spoken English.

Two 10th grade students agreed that they had not learned much English during their four years of study: "No, we don't know how to use English very well because we lack practice. Also, many times, we don't pay attention to the teacher. Sometimes, the

teacher is talking and we don't pay attention." When asked if the instruction that they had received thus far had been sufficient for them to learn how to speak and understand English, all five 10th grade focus group students said no, they had not learned enough English in school. Maria clearly stated that "no, instruction has not been very effective at this moment." She further elaborated that, "I can't speak [English] very well because I basically do not understand the teacher. Sometimes she tells us one thing and then later something different and we do not understand. Yes, I would like to learn it, but I think that the teacher does not explain it well to us." When asked about suggestions to improve English instruction, Maria focused immediately on teacher quality: "well, I would like it if they would put a different teacher who would be more understanding and who would help us with what we don't understand." Many students and parents expressed frustration because they thought they had not been taught enough English.

Although most students expressed a negative view of the effectiveness of English instruction, a few students indicated that they had made some progress. Axel expressed a cautiously optimistic view of his English abilities, saying that English class "has served for something because I'm starting to understand. I don't understand very much, some words, but it's better than before." Karla also said that she had learned some things in English that she did not know before, but she went on to explain that "I know it is not what we should have been taught, rather it is very basic, but, yes, we have learned some words that we did not know before."

As discussed in the previous section, *Assessment of student learning*, Profesora Andrea estimated that only about 10% of students would become proficient in English through regular high school instruction. She further noted that students developed greater

skills in reading and writing than they did in speaking and listening. She maintained that her role was to develop basic English skills so that students could go on to college to continue developing language proficiency. She consistently said that advanced English proficiency was simply beyond the scope of high school instruction.

Director Antonio and Profesora Andrea both confirmed the information in MINED policy documents stating that students were not required to take any cumulative examinations to graduate from high school. In order to be promoted between grade levels, students had to pass all of their courses, but all classwork and exams were teacher-created. Profesora Andrea created all of the assignments, quizzes, and exams for her English class. She consulted the curriculum and referenced the "achievement indicator" to determine the subject matter of her tests. Other than the curriculum, she did not have any other guidance from the MINED as to how to evaluate her students' English proficiency. High school students were not required to take any national or international exams, in English or in any other subject.

MINED's failure to establish clear and objective frameworks to determine language proficiency resulted in the conflicting evaluations of the effectiveness of English instruction. As the literature revealed in previous chapters, many national education agencies based their foreign language curriculum and evaluations on the CEFR, a widely-accepted framework using six reference levels (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, and C2) to describe the progression of language learners' competencies from beginner to advanced. As part of the CEFR framework, there are specific "can-do" statements that clearly describe what a student should be able to do in each language modality. When the Chilean Ministry of Education reformed their English curriculum, they

simultaneously increased the standardization of evaluation procedures, largely coinciding with the European CEFR, so that they could objectively measure students' progress with English language acquisition on a national scale.

The MINED curriculum included achievement indicators as general statements, related to each thematic unit, of what a student can be expected to do. An example from the 11th grade, Unit 1 curriculum is that "The student identifies relevant information such as events, people and places in biographical texts." While these achievement indicators could be useful as mastery objectives for teachers when planning instruction, they were not comprehensive enough to be evaluative of overall proficiency levels. Another weakness of the MINED's achievement indicators was that they did not equally address speaking, listening, writing, and reading, which should be given equal consideration as integral parts of building language proficiency. A review of 11th grade achievement indicator revealed that they mostly focused on demonstrating understanding via reading and writing, but rarely asked students to listen or speak.

Mismatched expectations of English proficiency. Profesora Andrea clearly stated, on multiple occasions, during our structured interview and in informal conversations, that the goal of MINED's English instruction for high school students was for them to learn "the basics." Profesora Andrea stated that, "We, here in Nicaragua, we teach the basic English so that you can go to the university and it will not be so difficult." The goal was that they learned enough basic English to go to the university and keep studying at a more advanced level. Those that do not continue to the university after graduation would stay at the most basic level. Profesora Andrea noted that, "It is difficult to say that high school students will come out speaking English because we do not

practice it. We do not practice it because we speak Spanish. Students do not practice it at home either, it's hard for them. Here, there is no one to talk to, converse with, or practice. It is difficult, very difficult for them. We are fooling ourselves that they would leave [high school] speaking English." Although Profesora Andrea stated that she was successfully fulfilling her job duties by developing basic English skills with her students, parents and students consistently used the same word, "basic," in a disparaging way to describe the lack of depth of English instruction.

Jessica, a mother of an 11th grade student, was not satisfied with the overall level of her child's education: "I feel that they need to have more in-depth classes in English and computer skills. It is true that they receive these classes now, but they need to deepen their knowledge. Always, students from this school, when they go to universities, they always go with this problem. They do not give students the reinforcement they need, so they are very poor in these areas." Jessica noted the need for additional support for English because "here, they only teach the basics, just the basics. Like I said, here they need a lot of help in English." Overall, Jessica did not think that English instruction had been effective for her daughter:

> No, I've always had the idea, and I've told my husband, that she needs to go to an English course because here it's always just the basics. I've always had the idea that she should go to an English school, but we haven't put her in one yet so as to not overwhelm her with too much school work. I think that the children here need additional support with English, because like it or not, English is becoming very important at this moment.

Jessica's comments were supported by parents in the focus group, who also said that

students could not really speak or understand English and did not seem able to productively use the language for communicative purposes.

Students consistently complained that they had only learned "the basics" and that they could not really speak or understand English even after studying it throughout high school and getting good grades. Julio thought that "the English instruction that we get here is very basic. It is just answering questions, reading sentences." Karla affirmed that she liked English class, even though "our teacher only teaches us the basics." Students hoped that they would be able to use their basic English skills in college and build upon them to become more advanced English speakers.

Summary

The second research question addressed perceptions of the purpose and utility of English instruction in rural Nicaragua. As an extension of this question, I also explored how stakeholders evaluated the effectiveness of current instructional practices in meeting expectations for English proficiency. All stakeholders stated that students were not proficient in English after studying it for all five years of high school, but they were less certain about what level of proficiency would be considered typical. This confusion stemmed from MINED's failure to establish a clear goal for English proficiency and the differing expectation from students and teachers regarding the purpose and goals of high school English instruction. Students, parents, and school staff consistently expressed a strong belief that learning English would be very important and potentially useful in the areas of university study, employment; intercultural communication, and immigration. There was some indication that non-participating students might have expressed different

opinions regarding personal motivation and beliefs regarding the utility of English instruction if they had participated in focus groups and interviews.

Spolky's (1994) language ideology describes beliefs about language. Language beliefs were examined via parent and student focus groups and stakeholder interviews and the language ideology of the state was examined through official MINED policy statements and curriculum resources describing the reason behind the English-language mandate. The selected participants of this study expressed a language ideology largely in agreement with the official MINED expression of language ideology with respect to the privileged position of English as a global language of economic dominance. This finding also coincides with the conceptual framework of linguistic imperialism and the hegemonic acceptance of English as an uncontested necessity for social mobility and economic stability among all participants.

How does the question of power penetrate the teaching of English as a foreign language in rural Nicaragua and affect stakeholders' perceptions of the purpose of English instruction? Students consistently expressed a high level of interest in learning English and did not connect the English language in a negative way to overarching issues of political power, language dominance, or global inequality. Students, teachers, and parents echoed the MINED's official position that English could be a key factor in social mobility and economic development. Stakeholders adopted the language ideology that English was an important language to learn, with many potential benefits, even though they acknowledged that it was very difficult to incorporate English into language practices after five years of study. Throughout all classroom observations, focus groups, and interviews, none of the stakeholders even mentioned the inclusion of indigenous

languages in schooling and all issues of language focused exclusively on English and Spanish. English language instruction in their rural high school was simply an unproblematized reality for all participants.

Chapter 8: Discussion and Conclusions

At the conclusion of this qualitative inquiry, I am faced again with the same basic question: Should the Nicaraguan Ministry of Education continue to require English as a mandated subject of study for all five years of secondary school? The existing literature paints a bleak portrait of the quality of English instruction in rural schools and highlights system-wide constraints including inadequate school infrastructure, low enrollment and completion rates, and poor quality outcomes. Previous research invites the question, "English for What?" (Coelho & Henze, 2014) – why is the MINED dedicating resources to teaching English when there are many other educational priorities that could benefit from increased funding and attention? As Coelho and Henze (2014) note, "the teaching and learning of English is in many ways a luxury that teachers and students can ill afford to prioritize when families are struggling to meet basic survival needs" (p. 156). Given the constrained teaching conditions, why is the Ministry of Education requiring the "luxury" of English language instruction?

Before beginning data collection in Villa Bella Vista, I was firmly entrenched in the "English for What?" camp of thought. While conducting literature reviews and examining country level education indicators, I deeply questioned the utility of dedicating scarce resources to English instruction for students in rural Nicaragua. Much in line with previous research, I assumed that English would hold little meaning for rural Nicaraguan high schoolers and it would be a waste of scarce resource in a system plagued by poverty and low educational outcomes for much of the population. The most recent publication, Coelho and Henze (2014), had thoroughly documented all of the elements that were lacking in public schools with respect to English education. There was little publicly

published information to indicate significant changes to English language policy between its publication in 2014 and my fieldwork in 2017, thus I was uncertain as to how English instruction had evolved in the intervening years but hypothesized that it was unlikely to differ significantly from previous research.

While living in Villa Bella Vista and interacting with students on a daily basis, my opinion on this large question slowly began to shift. As an outside observer first entering San Ramón School, I, along with many foreign visitors, was first struck by the poor condition of the physical environment and the lack of instructional resources. My initial impression was one of poverty and struggle. As I sat in overcrowded classrooms equipped with only a whiteboard and filled to capacity with 50 students, I continually thought back to my research questions regarding the effectiveness and purpose of English instruction, especially given the conditions of scarcity. Profesora Andrea was an experienced teacher, with a university degree and specialized training in English instruction, who implemented the English curriculum with fidelity and yet most of her students did not acquire basic English proficiency.

As I continued to observe classes, I noticed teachers implementing promising instructional practices that deviated from the stereotypical reliance on teacher-centered lectures with students being regulated to the role of passive receptors of knowledge. Profesora Andrea regularly utilized a variety of student grouping strategies, with students frequently working in collaborative groups. She also organized paired dialogues and some group presentations so that students would have some practice with speaking in English. Although there were certainly many shortcomings of the implementation of the English language policy, I also observed a much more dynamic educational process than

had been previously described along with indications that continuing reforms would further strengthen instructional processes.

Most importantly, students expressed that they were *highly motivated* to learn English and perceived English to be very important to their future studies and economic prospects. There was a small group of dedicated and highly-motivated students who viewed English as a vehicle for social mobility and a potentially life-changing subject of study. The utility of English instruction in rural Nicaragua was highlighted by a key moment of reflection during an interview with an 11th grade student, Karla. She acknowledged that she had not learned much English during her five years of high school, but she aspired to attend college in the future and knew that she would need English. She said, "even if I've only learned a little English here, *very little English,* it's something more than I knew before and I need all the help I can get, to be as prepared as I can be, if I am going to do well in college." All students acknowledged that English was a requirement of university study and could lead to increased employment opportunities. The reality of higher education in Nicaragua is that all students, regardless of their chosen major, will have to continue taking English classes. Students with no prior access to English instruction would enter college at a severe disadvantage. For these high-achieving students growing up in rural Nicaragua, they would not have had a source of free English language instruction without the public-school English mandate. Without publicly provided English-language instruction, these students' chances for success at the university would have been precluded before they even took the entry exams. Thus, the MINED's English language mandate serves a very real purpose for the minority of students from San Ramón School who were college-bound. For a select

group of highly-motivated and high-achieving students in rural Nicaragua, English instruction in secondary school opens the door to university study and employment opportunities with a genuine potential to change their life trajectory.

In spite of the challenges and difficulties of English instruction in rural Nicaragua and the clear need for additional resources in rural areas, the Nicaraguan MINED is responding to regional trends and global patterns of language dominance and attempting to equip all students with at least an introduction to and basic knowledge of a globally powerful language. Since the latest pedagogical reform in 2009, the Ministry of Education has provided increased support to English teachers via the creation of a complete English language curriculum, the distribution of new English textbooks for all grade levels, increasing access to computers, enhancing their collection of electronic resource in a well-designed educative portal website, and developing a system of regular collaborative planning meetings (TEPCE/EPI). Although these developments represented significant improvements over previous supports for English instruction, there remain serious challenges regarding school infrastructure, large class sizes, integration of technology in rural areas, assessing student learning, and linking English curriculums to the reality of college or career readiness.

As the literature review in Chapters 2 and 3 suggest, comparative studies of language practices in the EU and Chile suggest a number of best practices that guide the analysis of Nicaragua's language management policies, ideologies, and practices. The EU developed a comprehensive system of foreign language instruction based upon clearly established curriculum frameworks (CEFR) and systems of evaluation to measure students' progress in second language acquisition. System-wide practices that supported

student success were investments in teacher training, production of a unified curriculum, dedication of large blocks of instructional time in both primary and secondary schools, and standardized evaluations of language proficiency. Classroom-level best practices in the EU included extended use of the target language, engagement in participatory and communicative activities addressing multiple modalities of language learning, and the use of multimedia support. Chile went through a series of reforms, each time drawing its own English language policy closer to international standards of best practices. Chile began its English program in much the same way that Nicaragua did, with limited resources at public high schools. Over a period of two decades, Chile has invested in teacher training, curriculum development, materials creation, evaluations of language learning, and expansion into primary school. In spite of these investments, English language proficiency in Chile remains limited and highly unequal based on existing socioeconomic and geographic divides. The Chilean system is equally troubled by large class sizes and a severe shortage of English teachers, but continues to refine its language management policies at regular intervals through curriculum reforms and professional development.

While the MINED has attempted to manage language policy via its 2009 curriculum reform to focus on constructivist pedagogy and communicative English, these language management efforts have not yet been translated into consistent language practices in the classroom. The MINED mandate to teach English by using English has not been adopted by teachers and students as a language practice. Although Profesora Andrea was an experienced and highly qualified teacher, her management of students' language choices was limited and did not produce significant communication using

English. I observed a number of instructional practices consistent with the MINED's desired constructivist classrooms, with the teacher facilitating student's own discovery of knowledge, however, it was certainly limited. The existing classroom structures, i.e. large class sizes, limited technology, and prescribed curriculum, make the complete adoption of constructivism an unmanageable goal. In a similar fashion, the MINED has established an ambitious goal of communicative language practices, which is almost impossible to effectively implement given the constrained conditions of large class sizes, limited exposure to language models, limited proficiency of English teachers, and few technological resources to facilitate authentic language use. Profesora Andrea adapted her instructional practices to meet the needs of her student population, most of whom had little to no prior exposure to the English language and were not yet equipped to hold conversations in English. She most often conducted class using a hybrid approach to language instruction, incorporating both communicative and grammar-structural instructional techniques, to equip students with basic grammar and vocabulary so that they could later apply that to speaking tasks. Large class sizes and limited language proficiency precluded consistent implementation of active and participatory communicative activities.

The MINED articulates an economic imperative as a rationale for learning English and points to the privileged position of English in the globalized economy as an incentive for teachers and students to dedicate themselves to increasing English proficiency. Although the conceptual framework of linguistic imperialism problematizes the dominance of English and questions the resources dedicated to the teaching and learning of this globalized language, this was not the reality for the participants of this

study. Everyone that I spoke to in Nicaragua as part of this study, including the school principal, teachers, students, and parents, readily accepted English as being useful for their future social, academic, and economic activities. No one questioned why English instruction received priority status in Nicaraguan public schools. All participants uniformly presented it as a known fact that English would be necessary for success in university study or to get a better job. At no point did any stakeholders mention the use of indigenous languages in Nicaragua; they only discussed the importance of English and Spanish for social mobility. Students expressed that they were highly motivated to learn English because they knew it would be a required area of study at the university across all possible majors and it could lead to a higher paying job with better working conditions. In spite of this expressed motivation, most students and parents were disappointed that, after five years of language instruction in the public high school, they were not able to read, write, speak, or understand much English.

After synthesizing information from extensive classroom observations, interviewing parents, students, and school staff, I reflected on possible next steps to continue enhancing the implementation of language policy in rural Nicaragua. The following suggestions for continued language policy reform are based on both previous research on English language policy in Nicaragua (Chávez, 2006; Coelho & Henze, 2014; Henze & Coelho, 2013) and the findings of this case study of one rural secondary school. While English instruction at San Ramón School represented a typical or common case in that it shared characteristics of typical English classes in MINED-supported public secondary schools in rural areas, it is still grounded in a specific location, time, and contextual experience. Therefore, some element of caution and restraint might be

appropriate when generalizing the findings of this one study to all English classes in Nicaraguan high schools. Select findings of this study are consistent with previous research documenting the challenges of implementing English language policy, such as large class sizes and limited use of target language. Some recommendations that this study suggest are the following:

Professional Development

The MINED requires all secondary teachers to be qualified professionals who graduated from a university with a specialization in secondary education. In order to strengthen English instruction, MINED could refine their existing model of in-service training, the EPI workshops, to include more input from English curriculum experts, modeled lessons, the creation of usable materials. Currently, EPI is structured more as a collaborative planning session rather than a professional development opportunity. While it is essential that teachers be able to collaborate with their colleagues, especially English teachers in rural schools who work in schools without English-speaking colleagues, it would be useful to begin the collaborative planning sessions with additional guidance from English-language experts who could tailor the content of training sessions in response to educators needs.

Additionally, both Profesora Andrea and Director Antonio noted that the MINED offered additional certifications and extensive trainings for language educators, but often at a considerable distance or inconvenience to educators. Although teachers might receive a transportation stipend, it is still a hardship to attend these training sessions on the weekend without any additional compensation. As an incentive to participate in these intensive, language-specific trainings, English teachers could receive a stipend contingent

upon satisfactory completion of the entire training module. They could also arrange to share their learning via the EPI structure.

In addition to ongoing professional development for existing teachers, MINED should dedicate resources to locate and encourage English speakers to teach in public schools. The MINED has predicted a shortage of English teachers for the upcoming school year (Argeñal, 2017), yet there are no additional incentives to recruit qualified English-speaking teachers, who often make more money teaching in private schools or working in the tourist industry. Additionally, the linguistic diversity of Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast is an under-utilized resource that could potentially be the source of English teachers for other regions of the country, but there is no organized recruitment effort by the MINED.

Curriculum Revisions

The current policy orientations emphasize the importance of communicative approaches to language learning and encourage teachers to have students frequently work in pairs or small groups to complete dialogues, presentations, or practice conversations. An updated revision of the English curriculum should recognize the usefulness of grammar translation techniques when all parties involved, both students and teachers, have limited command of the English language. The revised curriculum should incorporate *realistic* suggestions for increasing communicative strategies given that many English teachers will have large classes. For example, the curriculum could suggest that teachers only choose a sample of partners to present a dialogue or conversation each day instead of having a whole class present dialogues. It could also include more suggestions for teachers to scaffold language structures according to the level of their students,

specifically with the purpose of making English more accessible for beginning language learners. For example, the curriculum could provide suggestions for sentence frames that could encourage less proficient students to participate in speaking activities.

Finally, the English curriculum is not currently engaging, motivating, or relevant for non-college bound students. In this case, it is not my place to suggest curriculum modifications, rather I would suggest engaging in a transparent process with stakeholders, particularly with those from rural schools, to determine how the curriculum could be made more meaningful for students who do not plan on continuing to the university.

Embrace Technological Changes

San Ramón School recently received new computers, but students had extremely limited access to them and teachers did not use the computers as a part of their subject area classes. Some teachers, especially those in rural schools, are technologically illiterate themselves, so MINED would need to provide additional training to its own staff to ensure that computers could be effectively used with students. As computer access and internet availability becomes more pervasive, MINED should continue teaching students basic computer skills via technology classes, but should also move towards greater integration of subject area learning using computers.

Cell phones are ubiquitous, most students and teachers constantly had a cell phone with them. Although some students mentioned using their phones to look up information, phones are currently viewed more as a distraction rather than a learning tool.

Director Antonio expressed a positive view of the potential benefits of using cell phones to find information, view relevant videos, and enhance the relevance of instruction.

Restrain Primary Expansion

The MINED announced that, beginning in the 2018 school year, English instruction would be expanding into primary school. *La Prensa*, a respected national newspaper, reported that the MINED is currently facing teacher shortage for English instructors and the English curriculum for primary schools has not been finalized (Argeñal, 2017). Although Profesora Andrea was excited at the prospect that her students would come better prepared, she did not know where the teachers or resources would come from to support English instruction in primary school. The MINED opted to expand the reach of English classes and provide increased coverage in primary school instead of focusing on enhancing quality and capacity of existing English programs at the secondary school. Why the rush to expand to primary? MINED has not ensured that there will be either a complete curriculum or trained teachers for English instruction in primary schools. As noted, the existing instructional program for secondary school could benefit greatly from additional investments in resources, training, curriculum enhancements, and developing a structure for evaluations. If the MINED is committed to English instruction in primary schools, they could more realistically begin by piloting the new program at a few select schools while continuing to build system capacity for larger scale expansion.

Harness Student Enthusiasm

Without fail, students expressed interest and motivation for learning English and they saw it as a useful subject to study, but were often bored or disengaged with

traditional lessons. Although Profesora Andrea utilized a variety of student groupings, allowing students to choose their group members, they did not actively engage with the limited scope of the curriculum and prescribed activities. By further integrating technology, students could have additional avenues for engagement.

Overall System Capacity

The MINED and the Nicaraguan government must continue to make investments in infrastructure, teacher salary, and the existing incentive systems such as cash bonuses for student attendance and graduation. The MINED depends heavily on international aid to fund new initiatives: the English textbooks were financed by EU; English teacher training was organized and facilitated by Fundación Uno, the Peace Corps, the Spanish Embassy and Ministry of Education; the 2009 Curriculum Reform was a World Bank funded project; and the upcoming National Education Strategic Plan 2017-2021 was also sponsored by the World Bank. As a reminder, secondary education is still not compulsory in Nicaragua and there are many rural areas that essentially do not have access to schools. The physical condition of San Ramón School was deteriorated, as is the case with many schools across the country.

Develop Proficiency Standards and Evaluations of Language Proficiency

My final recommendation is perhaps the most easily accomplishable of all: the MINED should immediately development a comprehensive set of language proficiency standards addressing all four modalities of language learning. This is essential in order to establish a clear description of the range of language proficiency that is expected as students progress through the grade levels. MINED English curriculum experts can look at examples from countless countries across the globe, but the most frequently cited

framework is the European CEFR, which could certainly serve as a reference as the MINED crafts its own guidelines. Once the MINED establishes proficiency statements, they can then develop an objective assessment that is administered nationally to all graduating students so that all stakeholders can better evaluate the effectiveness of existing instructional practices and establish realistic expectations of English language proficiency.

Significance

This study of English instruction in rural Nicaragua provided a more nuanced description of instructional practices in a foreign language classroom in rural Nicaragua based on an in-depth examination of classroom observations and informant statements. The analysis demonstrated that educators utilized the MINED provided resources and curriculum, but also supplemented using teacher-created materials. The MINED articulated the primary purpose of English acquisition as a catalyst for greater engagement in a globalized economy. Students consistently expressed high levels of motivation for learning English and perceived it as a valuable and useful language for their future academic and economic activities. While stakeholders agreed with that assessment by pointing to their own increased employment prospects, they also expressed different views of its importance and usefulness to their everyday realities by linking it to academic study and intercultural communication. This research also provided a vehicle to meaningfully include stakeholder voices articulating their own interpretation of policy priorities.

The primary contribution of this qualitative study is the addition of a more nuanced perspective to the existing deficit narrative by detailing how recent

developments have positively impacted instructional practices. While I was careful to fully document the reality of the challenging conditions of a rural school, which included high levels of student poverty, large class sizes, insufficient instructional resources, and a poorly maintained infrastructure, I also highlighted positive aspects of observed practices. The most recently published articles concerning English instruction in rural Nicaragua (Chávez, 2006; Coelho & Henze, 2014; Henze & Coelho, 2013) demonstrated a deficit oriented approach to questioning the utility of English instruction for rural secondary students. These three articles provided detailed descriptions of what was lacking in rural schools (qualified teachers, books, materials) and lamented the imposition of a curriculum and language that students were unlikely to use in their everyday life. Although the previous studies also utilized qualitative inquiry to study the implementation of English language policy in rural Nicaragua, the differences in findings can largely be attributed to two factors: the timing of the studies and the differing levels of rurality. Coelho and Henze (2013, 2014) were participant-observants providing professional development training to teachers in rural *multigrado* schools. As such, the teachers involved in the study were not necessarily university graduates with a specialization in English. In general, *multigrado* teachers are responsible for teaching all subject areas to multiple grade levels and may not be specialists in all secondary subjects. *Multigrado* secondary schools are located in much smaller and more remote communities. In contrast, Villa Bella Vista is a small, rural community, but is also located next to a major highway, with multiple transportation options, and a direct route to a nearby major city. Villa Bella Vista and its surrounding communities are collectively large enough to support having a comprehensive secondary school where

there are different classrooms for each grade level and teachers are specialists in their subject area. Additionally, some of the most impactful reforms, such as the creation and distribution of textbooks in 2015, the curriculum reform of 2009, and the enhancement of technology access in 2017 (and ongoing), occurred after the three previous studies were published in 2006 (Chávez), 2013 (Henze & Coelho), and 2014 (Coelho & Henze).

While acknowledging that many of the same previously documented challenges remain, such as large class sizes, limited use of the target language, and barriers in the application of technological resources, this study also demonstrated that the MINED has made impressive advances within the past five years in enhancing the curriculum, training, and resources available to implement the English language policy. The recently reformed EPI meeting structure ensured that teachers had regular access to professional development and collaborative planning time on a monthly basis. All teachers who worked at the high school were highly-qualified university graduates with specialized degrees in their teaching area. Teachers have received training on participatory methodologies and have increased interactive teaching practices, although they certainly still relied on teacher-led expository lectures as well. The MINED invested in technology upgrades for rural schools as demonstrated by the new computer lab at the San Ramón School. The MINED also published and distributed textbooks for all secondary subjects and distributed them to the schools within the past two years. In spite of these recent investments in training, materials, and curriculum, the findings indicate that there are many challenges that remain barriers to the effective implementation of mandated English language policy, including large class sizes and inconsistent instructional practices. In contrast to the previously implied futility of English instruction for rural

students, this study highlighted that many students at San Ramón high school were highly motivated to learn English and positively associated English proficiency with access to higher education, social mobility, and economic advancement. Although students in this rural Nicaraguan community wanted to learn English, they were mostly not proficient in English after five years of high school study.

Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Protocol – English Teacher

I will start by asking you some questions about your professional experiences. I will not use your name or the name of the school when I write my final paper. We will also talk about some of your experiences at school with students, teachers, and MINED officials and the curriculum that you use. All answers will remain confidential.

Question	Purpose/ Research Question
Professional Background	
1. When did you begin teaching?	Background/Description
2. When did you begin teaching at this school?	Background/Description
3. Why did you want to become a teacher?	Background/Description
4. Have you always worked in a rural secondary school or have you worked in other grade levels and/or locations?	Background/Description
5. What is your own educational background?	Background/Description
6. Do you live in the community or do you commute to work?	Background/Description
English Training/MINED Curriculum and Support	
1. When/how did you become an English teacher? a. How did you learn English? b. Describe your school experiences with English. (Did you take courses at the university?) c. Have you ever lived in or traveled to an English-speaking location?	RQ#1
2. Can you describe any additional educational/certification requirements that are needed to be an English language teacher that are different from the requirements to be general secondary teacher?	RQ#1
3. What materials do you receive from the MINED to support English instruction? a. Can you describe some materials that you've created yourself? b. In what other way do you obtain classroom materials to support English lessons?	RQ#1
4. How often do you receive MINED professional development opportunities? a. Can you describe any MINED trainings specific to English classes?	RQ#1

b. Are there any additional sources of support/training? Perhaps from an NGO or volunteer organization? c. Do you participate in trainings/classes from a local University? d. Can you describe what a typical MINED training session looks like?	
5. Can you describe any in-school professional development activities? a. Do other teachers come observe you teach? b. Do you observe other teachers? c. How do your administrators support English instruction?	RQ#1
6. What instructional support does MINED provide? a. Does a MINED supervisor/evaluator come to the school? b. If/when he/she comes, what do they do at school? • Provide trainings? • Conduct observations or formal evaluations? • Provide model lessons or instructional support?	RQ#1
7. What are your thoughts about the effectiveness of the provided English curriculum? a. What changes would you suggest to the curriculum? b. Can you describe some additional materials and/or resources that you would like to have to support English instruction?	RQ#1 RQ#2
8. Can you describe any self-initiated learning activities, trainings, or classes that you have chosen to engage in to improve your own practice as an English teacher?	RQ#1
Students	
1. What is your perception of students' motivation to learn English? a. Can you provide some examples to support this perception?	RQ#2
2. In what ways do students express a belief that English is a useful subject to study in secondary school?	RQ#2
3. How is a 7th grade student different from a 11th grade student? a. What differing expectations would you have regarding their participation in English class? b. How does the curriculum differentiate for the different levels?	RQ#1 RQ#2

c. How would you describe any differences in motivational or engagement levels of the different grades?	
4. Do students generally meet established learning targets for language acquisition? (If not, what do you think prevents them from attaining higher English competence?	RQ#1 RQ#2
Teaching Practices and Evaluation of Learning	
1. What is your motivation for teaching English in this community?	RQ#2
2. How do you engage/motivate students during English instruction?	RQ#2
3. How do you utilize the curriculum to plan instruction? a. In what ways do you modify the curriculum? b. In what ways does instruction incorporate the four language learning modalities – speaking, listening, reading, and writing?	RQ#1
4. Can you describe how you use "communicative" strategies in your classroom?	RQ#1
5. What is the goal of English language instruction for students? a. Can you describe any grade-level goals or "can-do" statements showing what students should master at each level?	RQ#1 RQ#2
6. Can you evaluate the effectiveness of the provided materials and curriculum for student language acquisition?	RQ#1 RQ#2
7. How do you evaluate student progress and achievement? a. Can you describe any evaluations or assessments that you administer to students? b. How are assessments tied to the curriculum? (End of unit, weekly, daily?) c. Are there any MINED required exams to pass a grade level or to graduate?	RQ#1 RQ#2
8. What are some barriers to language acquisition that you have noticed in this community?	RQ#2
9. Upon graduation from secondary school, overall, can you describe students' proficiency levels in English? a. Generally, are students able to speak, read, write, and understand English? b. Are there strengths in some modalities and weaknesses in others?	RQ#2
10. Earlier, we discussed the goal of English language instruction (question #5). Would you say that most students meet the goals that you discussed earlier? Can you elaborate on why or why not?	RQ#2

Appendix B: Interview Protocol – Administrator

I will start by asking you some questions about your professional experiences. I will not use your name or the name of the school when I write my final paper. We will also talk about some of your experiences at school with students, teachers, and MINED training and curriculum. All answers will remain confidential.

Question	Purpose/ Research Question
Professional Background	
1. When did you begin teaching?	Background/Description
2. What subject area and grade level did you teach?	Background/Description
3. When did you become an administrator?	Background/Description
4. When did you begin working at this school?	Background/Description
5. Why did you initially want to become a teacher? Why did you transition to administration?	Background/Description
6. Have you always worked in a rural secondary school or have you worked in other grade levels and/or locations?	Background/Description
7. What is your own educational background?	Background/Description
8. Do you have any experience learning and/or teaching English?	Background/Description
9. Do you live in the community or do you commute?	Background/Description
MINED Materials and Training	
1. Can you describe any additional educational/certification requirements that are needed to be an English language teacher that are different from the requirements to be general secondary teacher?	RQ#1
2. Can you describe the overall qualifications that are required of all secondary teachers? Do teachers in this community meet these qualifications?	RQ#1
3. Can you describe the instructional materials that are provided from the MINED to support English instruction? a. Are there any additional sources of instructional materials (teacher-created, NGOs, universities, volunteers)?	RQ#1
4. How often does the school participate in MINED professional development opportunities? a. Can you describe any MINED trainings specific to English classes?	RQ#1

b. Are there any additional sources of support/training? Perhaps from an NGO or volunteer organization? c. Can you describe what a typical MINED training session looks like?	
5. Can you describe any in-school professional development activities? a. Do other teachers co-teach, model lessons, or observe other teachers?	RQ#1
6. Do you observe and/or evaluate English instruction? If so, what qualities are you looking for that indicate effective instructional practices?	RQ#1
7. What support does MINED provide to you as an administrator and to your staff to support the effective implementation of the English curriculum? a. Does a MINED supervisor/evaluator come to the school? b. If/when he/she comes, what do they do at school? • Provide trainings? • Conduct observations or formal evaluations? • Provide model lessons or instructional support?	RQ#1
8. What are your thoughts about the effectiveness of the provided English curriculum? a. What changes would you suggest to the curriculum? b. Can you describe some additional materials and/or resources that you would like to have to support English instruction?	RQ#1
Students and Families	
1. What is your perception of students' motivation to continue in secondary school to graduation? Why?	RQ#2
2. What is your perception of students' motivation to learn English? b. Is this different from motivation in other subject areas? Why so?	RQ#2
3. Can you describe a typical student in this school? a. Which communities are they from? b. What does his/her home environment look like? c. What are their employment/college prospects after graduation?	Background/Description RQ#2
4. How do parents support their children's education at the secondary level?	RQ#2

a. Have you noticed if parents put more emphasis on achievement in some subject areas than others? If so, which ones?	
5. What is the overall graduation rate? a. How many students are entering 7th grade this year? b. How many students are enrolled in 11th grade this year? c. How many students graduated from 11th grade last year?	Background/Description RQ#2
6. Overall, how many students from each graduating class enroll in university studies?	Background/Description RQ#2
7. How do you determine if students meet established learning targets in each subject area? a. Is there an area that consistently presents difficulty? b. Is achievement in English markedly different from achievement levels in other subject areas?	RQ#1 RQ#2
Support for Instruction and Evaluation	
1. How do you directly support teachers in the instructional cycle (planning, delivering, and evaluating)?	RQ#1
2. How often do you observe and evaluate teachers? a. Can you describe a typical observation? b. Do you provide written feedback for teachers? c. Are there observation guidelines? d. Do you utilize student data (test scores, work samples) in evaluating a teacher's effectiveness?	RQ#1 RQ#2
3. How do you determine if teachers are utilizing the curriculum to plan instruction? a. Do teachers submit lesson plans? Are objectives posted that reference curriculum?	RQ#1
4. What are some characteristics that you look for in a "well-run" classroom? a. Is there a different set of criteria to evaluate the effectiveness of English instructional practices? If so, can you describe the characteristics of a "well-run" English class?	RQ#1
5. How do teachers evaluate student progress and achievement? a. Are there any MINED required exams to pass a grade level or to graduate? b. How do student assessments in English compare with other subject areas?	RQ#1 RQ#2
6. What are some barriers to student academic success, including in English, that you have noticed in this community?	RQ#2

7. What do you believe to be the goal of English language instruction for students? a. Would you say that most students meet these goals? Can you elaborate on why or why not?	RQ#1 RQ#2

Appendix C: Interview Protocol – 11th Grade Students

I will start by asking you some questions about your personal experiences. I will not use your name or the name of the school when I write my final paper. We will also talk about some of your experiences at school with teachers, school administrators, and your family. All answers will remain confidential.

Question	**Purpose/ Research Question**
Personal Background	
1. Who do you live with?	Background/Description
2. How do your parents/family support your education?	Background/Description RQ#2
3. Does anyone in your family speak English?	Background/Description RQ#2
4. How do you get to school every day? a. Which community do you live in?	Background/Description
5. How much time do you dedicate to studying after school each day? a. Do you have other responsibilities besides being a student?	Background/Description
Students' Perspectives about School and Learning	
1. Can you describe a typical day at school? a. Overall, do you enjoy school? Why or why not?	RQ#2
2. Which subject areas do you enjoy the most? Why?	RQ#2
3. Which subject areas do you enjoy the least? Why?	RQ#2
4. Can you describe your motivation to learn English?	RQ#2
5. Do you think that English is a useful subject to study? Why or why not? a. How might you use English in your future job or studies?	RQ#2
6. How do you study for English class outside of school? a. Do you have regular access to a computer with an Internet connection? b. Do you have any books about learning English or written in English? c. Do you have any CDs or DVDs about learning English or in English?	RQ#1 RQ#2

7. Do you feel that English instruction at school has been effective? a. Do you think that you are learning to speak and understand English?	RQ#2
Teaching and Learning Practices	
1. Can you describe a typical English class? a. What instructional activities do you do during class? (listen to teacher, worksheets, group activities, role plays, read-alouds, etc.) b. Who do you work with in English class? (by yourself, in partners, in groups)	RQ#1
2. Do you think that English class is engaging? a. Do you participate regularly? b. Is this different from other subject areas? If so, in what way?	RQ#1 RQ#2
3. What materials do you have available in school to help you learn English? a. Do you think you have enough materials to learn English at school? b. Are there any additional materials that you think would be helpful that you don't have access to?	RQ#1
4. Do you learn English in any other way in school or at home? (For example, TV, Internet, music, friends, Saturday school, etc.)	RQ#1 RQ#2
5. How would you evaluate the difficulty level of learning English? a. Is it easy or hard to learn English? Why? b. Is this different from other subject areas?	RQ#2
6. How is your English level evaluated? a. Can you describe any tests or assessments that you've had to take? b. How frequently do you have to take tests in English class?	RQ#1 RQ#2
7. Why do you take English class at school? a. Do you have any personal or professional goals for learning English?	RQ#2
8. Overall, do you think that English instruction in school has enabled you to speak and understand English? Why?	RQ#2

Appendix D: Interview Protocol – Parent

I will start by asking you some questions about your personal experiences. I will not use your name or the name of the school when I write my final paper. We will also talk about some of your experiences at school with teachers, school administrators, and your own student. All answers will remain confidential.

Question	Purpose/ Research Question
Personal Background	
1. Please describe your family members. a. How many children do you have in the schools? b. Which schools do they attend and what grade levels?	Background/Description
2. How does your child get to school every day? a. Which community do you live in?	Background/Description
3. Can you describe your satisfaction level with the level of education your son/daughter has received?	Background/Description RQ#2
4. What level of familiarity does the family have with the English language? a. Does anyone in your family speak English or have any experience learning English?	Background/Description RQ#2
5. How do you become involved in your child's school? a. What do you think your role as a parent is in your child's education?	Background/Description RQ#2
6. In what ways did your own experience in school affect how you perceive (or value) your child's education? How so?	RQ#2
Students' and Parents' Motivation	
1. What is your child's opinion of school? a. Overall, do you think they enjoy school? Why or why not?	RQ#2
2. Which subject areas do you think are the most important for your child's success? Why?	RQ#2
3. How would you describe your child's motivation to learn English? Why?	RQ#2
4. Do you think that English is a useful subject for your child to study? Why or why not?	RQ#2

a. How might your child use English in your future job or studies?	
5. How does English compare with other subjects in terms of your child's motivation and engagement in learning? a. Do you think there is a difference between English instruction and other areas of instruction?	RQ#1 RQ#2
Teaching and Learning Practices	
1. What materials are available in school to help your child learn English? a. Do you think the school is well equipped with sufficient materials and resources to learn English at school? b. Are there any additional materials that you think would be helpful that the school doesn't have?	RQ#1
2. How does your child study at home? a. Does your child have homework? b. What materials does he/she use to complete homework?	RQ#1 RQ#2
3. How do you, as a parent, support your child's academic progress?	RQ#2
4. How do you, as a parent, receive information about the progress of your child's learning? a. Can you describe any report cards or the results of any evaluations that you've received?	RQ#1 RQ#2
5. Do you feel that English instruction at school has been effective? a. Do you think that your child is learning English?	RQ#2

Appendix E: Focus Group Protocol (five 10th grade students in English classes)

I plan to conduct a focus group with five students from both the 10th and 11th grade to discuss their motivation and goals for English instruction. These following topics are the main focus of discussion; however, the direction of their conversation will naturally develop additional themes regarding English instruction.

Discussion points:

1. purpose of studying English
2. motivation for studying English
3. future goals for English study
4. engagement in English classes
5. perception of effectiveness of English instruction

Appendix F: Observation Protocol – English Classroom (all five levels)

DAILY CLASSROOM ACTIVITY LOG

Teacher _____ Date/Time _____ Grade Level 7th 8th 9th 10th 11th

Attendance: Total: _____ (Girls _____ & Boys _____)

Objective/Learning Goal of Lesson:

Time (duration of each task)	Classroom activities: • Whole group/small group/individual • Teacher talk – Student talk • Games, songs – Worksheet, grammar	Materials	Assessment/Evaluation of Learning

General Classroom Observation Guide			
Instructional Planning and Delivery	"Look-fors"	Examples/Checklist	Comments
	Organization and Management of Learning Environment	o Prepares resources and organizes instruction to meet instructional goals o States purpose and objectives of each lesson o Communicates high expectations by establishing standards and holding students accountable o Provides guided and independent practice o Efficiently manages class time o Manages student behavior to reduce distractions/off-task behavior	
	Instructional Strategies	o Gives clear directions, sequences tasks appropriately, provides examples and models. o Presents the content to students in challenging, clear, meaningful, and compelling ways, using real-world contexts, integrates cultural instruction into activities as appropriate o Uses accurate, up-to-date material and contextualized activities o Ensures equitable participation and elicits student responses o Uses standard speech and correct pronunciation and vocabulary	
	Assessment of Learning	o Checks for understanding throughout lesson o Provides feedback to affirm correct responses or make recommendations o Uses assessment results to re-teach, clarify, and/or adjust pace	
Foreign Language Classroom Observation Guide			
Target Language Use	"Look-fors"	Examples/Checklist	Comments
	The teacher and students speak in the target language	o Less than 50% of the time o 50%-75% of the time o 75%-90% of the time o 90%+ of the time	
	The teacher checks for comprehension frequently	o by asking individual students o by observing all students in class o by listening for responses from the whole class o by asking for translation occasionally	
	The teacher offers opportunities for sophisticated language use	o by embellishing students' basic statements o by asking a variety of questions o by inviting students to create with the language rather than simply a) repeating b) responding mainly with formulas c) memorizing dialogues	
Foreign Language Instructional Strategies	The teacher raises the level of student attention	o by involving students in storytelling (role plays, puppets, props, etc). o by talking to and/or about individual students o by referring to places/locations/people/topics known to and/or of interest to students	
	The students are actively engaged in the lesson	o by gesturing o by acting o by answering questions	
	The students are held accountable for the lesson	o by speaking the target language when asked o by helping each other o by retelling material in their own words o by translation, when asked	
	The teacher promotes grammatical accuracy	o by briefly explaining the meaning of new items o by requiring increased accuracy as students progress	
	The teacher demonstrates appropriate correction techniques	o by modeling accuracy: rewarding the student's attempts by acknowledging the content of the student's statement, but re-stating the meaning using correct grammar/syntax/vocabulary	
	The teacher tailors the tasks to individual student ability	o by asking many types and levels of questions o by expecting multiple levels of answers to questions (one-word, short phrase, complete sentence, extended discourse) o by requiring longer, more detailed, and more accurate narration from the most able students	

(adapted from Hedstrom (2011) and Auburn (2015))

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