

English Language Learning in a Rural Multigrade School: Challenges Strategies and Opportunities

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Abstract

This study analyzes English language learning in the multigrade rural school of Cibeles in Betulia, Antioquia, focusing on the challenges, teaching practices, and learning outcomes in a context of limited resources and diverse student needs. This multigrade setting, in which English classes are taught to students of different ages and levels, presents unique pedagogical conditions that influence language acquisition. Through classroom observations, surveys, analysis of student work, and use of Duolingo, Worksheets, and Educaplay, the study examines how English is taught and learned in these environments. The results reveal that, while limitations such as insufficient materials and uneven student proficiency levels hinder effective teaching, multigrade settings also offer opportunities for peer learning, collaboration, and student autonomy. The study highlights the importance of context-sensitive teaching strategies and targeted professional development to improve English language learning in multigrade rural schools. These findings contribute to a better understanding of language teaching in marginalized contexts and offer practical implications for policymakers, teacher educators, and professionals working in similar educational settings.

Contextualization

The Escuela Nueva model began to be implemented in Colombia in 1975, but gained greater visibility in 2003. Escuela Nueva is part of a group of flexible educational models implemented with the aim of promoting education in rural areas for children and adolescents. Ministry of National Education (March 15, 2024). Escuela Nueva Model. MEN, do not have to leave rural areas and move to urban areas to attend school. Escuela Nueva is considered a flexible model because it allows for negotiation between students, teachers, parents, and guardians on attendance and assessment strategies, among other things, so that students can continue to help with domestic and agricultural tasks, which in turn contributes to the livelihood of rural families.

Over the years, the Escuela Nueva model has been adapted to educational needs in line with the realities of rural Colombia. For example, educational levels such as Postprimaria (equivalent to grades 6 to 9 in urban educational institutions) and Media rural (equivalent to grades 10 and 11 in urban educational institutions) have been created. Another important adaptation has been the creation of the multigrade classroom, which is an educational model in which a teacher is responsible for a classroom with students from more than one grade level. In a multigrade classroom, children of different grades and ages study together, all with different learning rhythms, abilities, needs, and social and cultural characteristics. Among these, the following stand out: the creation of WhatsApp groups for each grade level to send class guides with specific topics for each grade, working with workbooks for each grade level that are classified by subject area and used by students in the classroom under the supervision of the teacher, encouraging each student to work independently.

Given the challenges, the task of teachers is to ensure that all students achieve their learning objectives so that they can successfully complete secondary education in their territory. In Colombia, there are approximately 20,000 multigrade schools, which demonstrates how widespread and relevant this model is for children and adolescents in rural areas. In fact, Article 67 of the Political Constitution of Colombia establishes that education is a human right and a public service with a social function. Furthermore, the State, society, and the family are jointly responsible for education, which is compulsory between the ages of 5 and 15 years old.

In addition, Law 115 of 1994, or the General Education Law, develops these principles by regulating formal, non-formal, and informal education for various groups, including rural communities, people with disabilities, and other specific contexts. Law 115 (Articles 64–67) promotes rural education through regionally adapted projects. Meanwhile, Decree 230 of 2002, in Article 1, exempts certain modalities such as multigrade schools and Telesecondary (distance learning secondary schools) from conventional promotion, these modalities are covered by a special regulation by the Ministry of Education. For its part, the Constitutional Court, in Ruling T-743 of 2013, currently in force, states that the departments retain their competence to administer educational institutions and define teaching positions, including those in rural or multigrade education.

The present study takes place in the municipality of Betulia. Betulia is one of the 125 municipalities of the department of Antioquia and is located in the Southwest of Antioquia, 110 km from the department's capital. Betulia has three towns (Altamira, Cangrejo and Luciano Restrepo) and 41 villages. Betulia has, according to the census has a total of 16.143 inhabitants, with 4.898 living in the urban area in or around the town and 11.245 inhabitants in the rural area.

In terms of educational infrastructure, there are four rural educational institutions in Betulia: the La Vargas Rural Educational Center, the Francisco César Rural Educational Institution, the La Guamala Rural Educational Center, and the San José Rural Educational Institution. The main campus of the latter is located in the urban area of Betulia and houses both primary and secondary schools. In addition, the educational institution has 15 other campuses in rural areas of the municipalities, one of which is the La Cibeles School, the educational setting for this research.

La Cibeles rural school is an educational space with two classrooms (one with 35 elementary school students taught by Yahjaira Chaverra Parra and the other with 15 post-elementary and rural middle school students taught by Carlos Mario Baena Moreno, author of this academic article). Equally important, this school has a library, a teachers' lounge, a school cafeteria, a playground, a kitchen, and a sports field, which is located next to the campus and serves as a place for children, young people, and the community in general to enjoy healthy recreation and sports. The multi-grade group consists of 16 students categorized as follows: six sixth graders, six seventh graders, one eighth graders, two ten graders and on two eleventh graders.

Figura 2

Sede Educativa la Cibeles en Betulia, Antioquia



Fuente: Facebook de Sede Educativa la Cibeles, (2024)

Educational services are offered from from Transition to Grade Eleven for a total of twelve grades, which are taught as follows. First to fifth grade are on the second floor, and sixth to eleventh grade are in the classroom on the first floor. The total number of students is 48, categorized as follows: 33 in primary school and 15 in post-primary school, forming what is known as a multigrade classroom where the teacher must teach several school grades at the same time, which is essential if the aim is to achieve significant progress and performance.

Undoubtedly, personalized education is fairer and it is precisely this aspect that the author of this research proposal seeks to intervene in the Cibeles Headquarters, from a rural perspective, since the population under his care is classified as multigrade. In fact, the Ministry of National Education calls this model Postprimary, understood “as that educational alternative that allows rural children and young people not to leave their immediate context when entering the Primary, Secondary and Rural High School Cycle”. In other words, it is a school grouping that is heterogeneous in terms of age, cognitive and socioeconomic conditions, with two or three teachers in the same school, each responsible for guiding two or more grades.

Teaching English in a rural multigrade classroom presents a number of challenges, but also offers unique opportunities for the development of innovative pedagogical strategies. A multigrade context, where different ages and learning levels are mixed in the same space, and where interests in English is not always high, teaching dynamics must be adapted to the particular circumstances of the environment.

Buitrago Perez et al. (2017) explain that multigrade classrooms require approaches that support personalized learning, and this need applies equally in both urban and rural environments because it promotes greater fairness for students. It is, then, very important not to keep in mind learning style and pace of each student or each group of students when selecting or designing activities. Accordingly, this project arises as an opportunity to identify new possibilities to help rural students in a multigrade classroom learning English. In order to achieve it, the teacher researcher chose to do an action research study in the hope of exploring and using learning activities that adapt to the specific needs of his multigrade rural classroom and that can help students not only engaging with English classes but also improving their different proficiency levels. Strategies to address this phenomenon include differentiated instruction, peer teaching, and utilizing local resources. These opportunities lie in the potential for personalized learning and the strong sense of community often found in these settings as young people are curious about English.

The socioeconomic conditions of rural communities can create additional challenges for learning English, especially because students often have little exposure to the language outside of school. In this context, the multigrade model—with roots in the *Escuela Nueva* methodology and established as part of Colombia's rural education policy—aims to respond to the needs of diverse and heterogeneous populations. Despite the challenges, rural schools often have strong community relationships that can be used to support language learning. For example, teachers can invite parents to promote simple English activities at home, such as singing songs or watching children's programs in English.

Research Statement

On July 19, 2022, the Colombian Ministry of Education defined the Post-primary Education Model as the educational alternative that allowed children and young people in the rural areas to course secondary school with curricular proposals relevant to their context. Additionally, the model was intended to extend and strengthen educational services to more students in the municipality in which it is implemented. Adopting the model brought the design of guides and booklets for subjects such as Spanish Language, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, Arts, Physical Education, and Ethics along with programmes such as Healthy Eating and Nutrition, use of Free Time among others.

Due to the fact that multigrade classrooms require each grade to receive the content for all four academic periods, there are often delays in students' English levels. Although students can have some prior knowledge of English, they still need to see clear connections between English lessons and their everyday rural context. For this reason, teachers must adapt content and activities to the specific needs of the community and the characteristics of the group they are teaching.

The main objective of this research process is to consider the challenges, needs, and opportunities associated with teaching English in the multigrade classroom in the Sede la Cibeles located 10 kilometers from the municipality of Betulia, Antioquia. In this type of educational context, a single teacher is often responsible for teaching students of different levels within the same classroom, often with limited resources, basic training in English pedagogy, and little access to professional development. On this occasion, this study is an opportunity to understand how English is taught and learned in these environments, identify effective teaching strategies, and

explore ways to support the enjoyment and appropriation of the subject by young people who like it.

On the other hand, there are some challenges in the English class, for example, some difficulties with the classroom atmosphere due to the different learning paces and different curriculums happening at the same time and place. La Cibeles Rural School has students who share the same classroom but are in different grades ranging from grades six through eleven, which is the main characteristic of multigrade schools. These educational contexts often face limitations in material resources, infrastructure, and teacher training and, in many cases, a disconnection with English language trends. Despite these barriers, being able to use English is considered a key skill according to the National Ministry of Education, which creates a contrast between the importance of learning English and the challenges faced by teachers and students in rural communities around Colombia.

Multigrade teaching in rural areas is a common yet under-researched phenomenon, especially in the field of English language education. While policy reforms often emphasize English proficiency as a key skill for global competitiveness, such reforms rarely account for the realities of multigrade instruction in remote and underserved areas. These realities include mixed-age groups, varying proficiency levels, limited instructional time for English, and a lack of exposure to authentic English language use.

Many of the previous characteristics are present at la Cibeles rural school. Also, the fact that the assigned course belonged more to a multigrade classroom than to a course in the traditional terms made routinely tasks more complex for the teacher-researcher. First, the post-primary (multigrade classrooms belong to this model) teacher is in charge of the planning, execution and

evaluation of the ten areas that make up the curriculum. Second, there is not a lot of material for teaching English that has been specifically adapted for post-primary and multigrade classrooms models, which becomes an obstacle for the development of basic competencies in English started in national regulations. Additionally, planning the English lessons became more demanding since for the same session it was now necessary to create multiple lessons plans according to the different curriculum for each of the grades in the class.

Starting classes in the multigrade classroom also implied carrying out a series of diagnostic activities to be able to learn about the actual language level command students had. The diagnostic was also done to help the teacher-researcher make decisions on what activities would be more interesting and what skills to promote first along with what to teach and how to teach it.

This research can help highlighting the re-signification of language learning through the design of pedagogical activities focused on listening and speaking skills with the support of digital resources. The use of different resources allows teachers to make classroom activities more dynamic, as well as encouraging a participatory and active attitude among students, who become involved in their own learning process. Traditionally, English classes have been developed from a unidirectional position where, in the teacher's opinion, the methodology and strategies have been the best from the point of view of compliance with the effective class time, but the interaction and communication in class has been very intermittent, while the students show nervous laughter, little participation because they do not understand the vocabulary that the teacher uses in English and

who, to unblock the class, many times must resort to the mother tongue showing that meaningful and real communicative processes in English are limited.

Research Question

How can listening and speaking skills be enhanced through Tasks Based learning in a multigrade rural classroom?

General Objective

Identify how students' listening and speaking skills in a multigrade rural classroom can be enhanced through Task Based Learning.

Specific Objectives

1. Identify the Listening and speaking skills level of students in a multigrade rural classroom.
2. Characterize the learning activities designed for listening and speaking skills designed for a rural multigrade classroom.
3. Explore the effectiveness of the designed tasks for improving students' proficiency in listening and speaking skills in a multigrade rural class.

Literature Review

In this section, the constructs that support the present research and are considered significant for its development are presented. They appear in the following order: Multigrade Classrooms Model in Colombian rural education, Rurality, English Language learning in multigrade classrooms, and Task-based learning. Definitions, characteristics and their relevancy for the present research will be stated in the following paragraphs.

Multigrade Classrooms Model in Colombian Rural Education

Multigrade education models are used as a support strategy for classroom teaching, serving students who live in small, diverse communities, a phenomenon that is particularly evident in rural areas of Colombia. In fact, rural areas are complex enough to offer research opportunities, in this context education has important aspects that can be used to explore the communities realities. Education is proposed as a phenomenon in which the different members of the educational community take an active role in the teaching and learning process. (Molina, 2020).

Multigrade education is a feasible option for rural areas, because as stated by Feu (2008), teaching and learning processes in rural environments lead to greater dignity in the countryside and in the teaching profession. In rural life, as in urban life, tools, materials, and various supplies are needed to aid academic work; however, very often many rural schools do not have access to the latest equipment or technologies usually due to their cost. This should not mean this communities can be labeled as backward; on the contrary, it becomes a source of admiration for

their creativity and determination to meeting their own needs (p. 58). For instance, these schools integrate a curriculum adapted to the particular needs and realities of the social environment and provide the foundations for building an individual and community life project. Also, teaching in this type of schools means not only a close cooperation between students and teachers, but also making the effort to seek, learn and use teaching strategies that stimulate and promote learning among students, without losing sight of the fact that in rural areas, learning takes on new meaning every day, given the diversity of thought and needs found in a multigrade rural classroom.

Within the Colombian legal framework regarding multigrade classrooms in rural areas, Decree 1090 of 1990 establishes that the *Escuela Nueva* methodology has to be guided by principles such as active learning, flexible promotion, strengthened school–community relationships, complete schooling, and responsiveness to the challenges of rural education. The decree also indicates that the *Escuela Nueva* methodology should be a priority in basic education in rural zones of the country, with the objective of improving educational quality and access.

Efforts to meet learning needs in the best way possible, in Colombia, led to particularly flexible proposals that fit very diverse rural contexts. According to the Ministry of National Education (2015), the *Escuela Nueva* model, implemented in Colombia since 1975 and gaining greater visibility from 2003 onward, is part of the flexible educational models designed to promote education in rural areas. This model allows negotiation among students, teachers, and families regarding aspects such as attendance and assessment, making it possible for young people to

continue supporting household and agricultural tasks while continuing with their elementary school studies.

One of the most significant adaptations and evolutions of *Escuela Nueva* has been the creation of multigrade classrooms, where a single teacher works with students of different grades, ages, and learning levels in the same classroom. Multigrade classrooms do not only refer to elementary school, the concepts Post-primary (grades 6th to 9th) and Rural Upper Secondary (grades 10th and 11th) have been developed to expand educational coverage in rural areas. The structure of multigrade modality, as part of rural education policy, is included within the basic and secondary education system, in order to provide education to heterogeneous populations along the Colombian territory with rurality characteristics and even including marginalized urban sectors.

Multigrade classrooms present challenges and difficulties, but when teaching in this type of environment, the teacher's example, daily interaction, promotion of good relationships, community work, and educational projects carry more weight than cognitive training. In other words, being, knowing, and doing are constantly intertwined in both curricular and extracurricular activities.

Multigrade classrooms give teachers the opportunity to shape their practice based on their initial or in-service training and with the creativity inherent to professional survival, when they are required to attend to administrative matters and, at the same time, respond pedagogically to groups of students of different ages and with specific learning needs.

La Cibeles rural school, the setting for this research, perfectly fits the structure of a multigrade school in Colombia. It is a structure usually composed of an easily accessible building in the countryside. It has classrooms, and dining rooms; exterior walls adorned with national symbols,

phrases, or images that speak to its educational mission; surrounding vegetation, and a basketball court that serves as both a playground and a place for community gatherings. Inside the classrooms, the scene of old display cases containing teaching materials such as books (whole, fragmented, new, or old), traditional half-sheet prints alluding to the systems of the human body, geography, or the cycles of nature; some equipment received from state entities or through the teacher's own management; chairs and tables for students, arranged either in rows or in groups (by grade or cycle).

With all this in mind, Multigrade schools' scope in terms of context and realities require pedagogical approaches in which the activities proposed by the teacher acknowledge, incorporate and take advantage of the characteristics of the local context. This becomes essential not only to meet educational policies requirements but also to make learning meaningful and useful for students while meeting their needs since as stated by the Ministry of Education (2023) in a multigrade classroom there are students with different learning paces, abilities, needs, and social and cultural characteristics.

Along the years Escuela Nueva model has been adapting to the education needs according to the rural realities in Colombia, for example the creation of educational levels such as called *Postprimaria* (equivalent to 6th to 9th grade in Urban Educational institutions) and *Media Rural* (equivalent to 10th and 11th grade in urban educational institutions). Another important adaptation has been the creation of the Multigrade classroom that corresponds to an educational model in which teacher is in charge of a classroom in which there are students of more than one school grade. The Escuela Nueva model in Colombia works in rural areas by adapting to multi-grade schools, where a single teacher serves students from different grades in the same classroom,

although it is worth clarifying that each student has his or her own physical or digital guide. It focuses on active learning, teamwork and the relationship between the school and the community. The model uses learning guides that allow students to progress at their own pace and encourages the participation of the local community in the educational process. The *Escuela Nueva* model serves as a compensatory measure aimed at addressing the particularities of small and diverse, and sometimes isolated, communities, offering meaningful and contextualized education.

Rurality

The socioeconomic context of rural communities in Colombia presents multiple challenges for formal education. These communities often face conditions of vulnerability, with shortages in human, pedagogical, and economic resources. In addition, students have limited exposure to English outside the school environment, which makes language a more difficult. In this scenario, rural education requires flexible models that respond to the specific needs of each community.

On the other hand, a positive aspect of educational processes in these contexts, as noted by Restrepo Flores (2020), is a closer relationship between school and family. This connection tends to be stronger than in urban areas, allowing teachers to rely on parents to support the educational process. As a result, teaching can become more personalized compared to urban settings since there is an opportunity to customize contents and learning activities.

Learning takes place due to the connections students make between their previous knowledge and experiences and contributions brought to class by teachers. This is no different for learning a foreign language as his own experience is crucial in the process as it increases the interest for

another language. This dynamics also makes learning more relevant within the academic, social and occupational contexts.

Being born in a rural area is a fortuitous event, but one that strongly determines the type of education that can be accessed at some stages of life and, therefore, this circumstance can condition some of the opportunities obtained by those who live in these areas. It is worth noting that rural education and its realities in Colombia is an opportunity to carry out research that can contribute, even if only minimally, to the development of the Colombian countryside and seeking the well-being of a community that the teacher-researcher feels as his own. This view and interest is shared by many teachers of different subjects around the country since the diversity and drive of rural communities is an inspiration for teaching innovation. According to Unesco (2022)“ As highlighted by the (2022), many rural schools tend to have a single teacher who must teach different subjects to students of different ages and in many cases that come from ethnic groups. This instead of becoming an obstacle, becomes a challenge to adapt the development of the curricula and the classes in order to foster respect and maintain their customs and traditions.”

English Language Learning in Multigrade Classrooms

Education in rural areas is a reality that becomes an opportunity for hundreds of children and young people who do not have the resources or ability to attend schools in large cities. Therefore, it is a priority that education be equal in these areas, since being enrolled in school favors the construction of that social identity.

The students who attend daily, and who often belong to the same family, sometimes arrive tired from long walks and many hours of work due to the morning farm chores they perform. The

school day usually begins with morning prayers of the catholic faith. When planning classes and engaging in the teaching process, teachers must make several key decisions. These include selecting the content to be covered, designing appropriate activities, organizing student distribution, choosing effective instructional methods, identifying suitable resources, and defining assessment strategies. Classroom management, in this sense, encompasses a wide range of actions aimed at creating an environment conducive to learning. Such actions go beyond instructional design and content organization; they also involve fostering peaceful, collaborative interactions among students. As Brophy (2006) notes, classroom management includes all measures that help establish and maintain a learning environment where instruction is clear and purposeful. This involves structuring the physical classroom, setting rules and procedures, and implementing practices that sustain student attention (Pardo, 2018).

Multigrade classrooms can strongly support language learning because students of different ages and levels learn together and help one another. This creates a collaborative environment where they can practice new language skills in a natural and supportive way. These schools must constantly adapt their teaching strategies, since their activities cannot rely on repetitive routines; instead, they need ongoing variation to meet the needs of mixed-grade groups. It is also important to recognize that multigrade classrooms exist not only for organizational reasons, but because certain communities require educational spaces that respond to their unique social realities. In these contexts, teaching must reflect the diversity of the community and address its specific pedagogical needs (Gonzales, 2022).

Research on teaching English in multigrade rural classrooms in Colombia is still scarce. Only a few studies have explored this topic, focusing on issues such as the challenges teachers face

when working with several grade levels at once, how students experience learning English in this this mixed setting, and the resources or support available in the community.

Students in multigrade classrooms display significant diversity in different aspects previously mentioned. This heterogeneity requires personalized and equitable educational attention (Monterrey, 2024). In order to promote the learning of English, it is essential to consider learning styles and rhythms when designing activities so that all students can participate actively and benefit from the learning activities.

The collaborative environment that characterizes multigrade classrooms can support language learning as students learn both from and with one another. However, it is not uncommon that some students show a lack of interest in academic life. This situation highlights the need to connect learning with their real-life context and personal aspirations.

Task Based Learning

Task-based learning (TBL) is not really a new approach in education, nor is it new in the field of language teaching. Its origins can be traced back to vocational practices carried out in the 1950s (Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 225). TBL includes “analyzing real-life situations, transforming them into specific task descriptions, designing tasks, and sequencing them. Several of these aspects have been adapted to the field of language teaching with the necessary changes and additions” (Contijoch Escontria, 2024, p. 1). Van den Branden, K. (2006) mentions that this approach focuses

student's attention on performing meaningful tasks, similar to real-life communication situations, rather than the isolated memorization of grammar rules.

This approach is related to what was done in the English learning sessions with the group of students of Sede la Cibeles in Betulia, Antioquia. In fact, the incorporation of Duolingo, Worksheets, and Educaplay responded to the use of English in oral and written communicative situations not as a means but as an end, while the teacher assumed the role of facilitator, prioritizing cognitive, procedural, and attitudinal fluency.

Duolingo, Worksheets, and Educaplay are interrelated with TBL, in that they generate an observable result (an oral or written product), while students gradually learned English by using it, through guided practice from each of the apps with the corresponding vocabulary and grammar, generating meaningful corrections based on real errors, emphasizing clear premises specific to Task-Based Learning and Teaching English in a Multigrade Setting, such as:

- Student-centered
- Focuses on real communication
- Active and meaningful learning
- Authentic tasks
- Integration of skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing)
- Flexible and adaptable to different levels
- Encourages collaborative work

In conclusion, by focusing on meaningful tasks based on real-life situations, TBL allows students to engage in collaborative activities that promote communication and authentic language use. In multigrade rural settings, tasks can be adapted to students' cultural contexts and everyday experiences, allowing students from diverse backgrounds to participate according to their abilities while working toward a common goal. This flexibility supports differentiated instruction and encourages peer learning, as older or more proficient students can assist younger ones. As a result, task-based learning not only improves English development but also fosters inclusion, cooperation, and respect for local customs and traditions in multigrade rural classrooms.

Research Design

Methodological Design

Qualitative research focuses on understanding experiences, perceptions, behaviors, and social contexts through non-numerical data (words, observations, interviews. (*Educational Research Quantitative, Qualitative and Mixed Approaches.*” p. 562). In this type of research design, the work of rural teachers is enriched by observing how students interact with the English language in a multigrade classroom, as well as exploring and interacting with the strategies that teachers implement to meet the needs of this group of young people who are in different grades and of different ages. Then, a qualitative method with an exploratory scope was used. Also, the study was conducted with a Qualitative Researchers “prefer to study the world as it naturally occurs, without manipulating it.” In fact, Qualitative researchers view human behavior as dynamic and changing, and they advocate studying phenomena in depth and over an extended period of time. (Burke: 561).

Case study research is one strategy for conducting social research, although what constitutes the strategy is the subject of some debate (Schwandt, 2007, p. 28). Within what is possible, case study-based research, most often associated with qualitative research, has gained prominence as an effective approach for investigating complex issues in real-world contexts. Case study research is deemed appropriate when a contemporary phenomenon. Given that, "A case study or ethnographic research project may seek to answer specific questions about events and their explanations similar to those answered by quantitatively oriented researchers" (Tuckman, 1999, p. 401).

Since the objective of the study is to explore how listening and speaking skills can be improved by the use of educational activities supported by digital resources in the context of a rural multigrade school. The researcher is at the same time the teacher designing activities that best fit student's needs, the design of the intervention and the observation on its impact make this a Case study research that looks at the experiences of students in English classes in multigrade rural classroom.

The time has come to present the methodological design under which this research project is being carried out. Three references are presented: first, the methodological approach and type of research; second, the context and participants; and finally, the data collection techniques and instruments. Taking into account that the purpose of this project is to highlight English language teaching in a multigrade rural classroom, seeking in a way to redefine language learning through the design of pedagogical activities with the support of digital resources, this study is conducted using a qualitative approach, which is characterized by observing and interpreting a social context from the experience and interaction between participants.

Educational Intervention

The pedagogical intervention within this research project, was adapted to the real context of heterogeneous groups and limited resources. This is the setting for Sede la Cibeles in Betulia, Antioquia. This multigrade rural context presents an undeniable reality: the presence of young people from sixth to eleventh grade of different ages and levels in the same classroom. In addition to having limited access to the internet, which is typical of rural Colombia, there is a need for flexible and active teaching methods.

Like any educational intervention, this one was built from the teacher-researcher observations and the results provided by the Duolingo app. Initially, as the teacher of this group, I wanted to strengthen Basic English communication skills (listening comprehension, speaking, reading, and early writing) through active strategies that are contextualized and adapted to the multigrade classroom. In the end, as a teacher-researcher I decided to focus on listening and speaking skills due to time available for the development of activities and the project itself.

The intervention had three main moments: the diagnostic stage (See Annex A) , the scaffolding stage (See Annex B) and the practice and production stage that comprised listening and speaking activities (See Annexes C and D).

The diagnostic process was carried out in two phases—constructive and reconstructive—and followed four stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection. Each stage was guided by activities aimed at the main goal: improving students' English performance and strengthening teaching practice. This diagnosis was necessary because English instruction in the school is currently limited to very basic concepts, which restricts students' progress and development of language skills.

Then, worksheets (See Annex C) were used to reinforce syntax and grammar, offering different levels of difficulty according to each student's needs. Together, these activities provided a clearer picture of students' English abilities and the areas requiring further support. English worksheets play an important role in the teaching and learning of the English language, as they provide structured practice that helps learners reinforce vocabulary, grammar, reading, and writing skills.

In addition, several levelling activities (See annexes A -D) were carried out. These included recreational tasks such as a spelling bee contest (See Annex E) based on the alphabet, and an oral and written sentence contest using the board. The skipping rope game was also used to practice numbers while students jumped rope. English songs were included as well because they greatly support pronunciation and fluency.

The scaffolding methodology was applied. Scaffolding Activities (See Annexes) provided students with tools and strategies that help them solve problems on their own. This method promoted independent learning by encouraging students to take an active role in building their knowledge. Instead of giving direct answers, the teacher guides students so they can explore, think critically, and reach their own conclusions. Educaplay was another important resource for learning and practice. This platform allowed the creation of quizzes, worksheets, crossword puzzles, and word searches, (See Annex B) giving students an interactive way to practice English independently. It was especially useful in multigrade classrooms where the teacher must attend to different grade levels at the same time.

As the pedagogical intervention progressed, other teaching intentions appeared. These included developing basic vocabulary related to rural life, encouraging oral communication through simple routines such as using English commands (for example, asking to go to the bathroom) and participating in class using Spanglish. Teachers also integrated local resources—such as coffee and fruits—and recycled materials into English activities (See Annex E). A task-based approach was used to encourage participation across all grades, considering that each grade works on different topics from the English curriculum.

Teacher–Researcher Role

In this research project, the teacher also takes the role of a researcher. As a teacher-researcher, the author will observe the students in the multigrade post-primary group to understand their experiences, motivations, reactions, and behaviors. This is important because every rural school is different, and each classroom has its own reality. For this reason, the purpose of the research is not to create a general model, but to understand what these students think, feel, and believe in their specific context.

Population

The school is located 3.5 kilometers from the urban center of Betulia, Antioquia. The group has seventeen students—nine boys and seven girls—who live in a coffee-growing area. Most families work in agriculture, especially coffee, but also in livestock and products from family gardens. The group consisted of 15 students from the La Cibeles campus in the municipality of Betulia (Antioquia): 7 women and 8 men, aged between 13 and 18, studying at the levels offered by post-primary and rural secondary education.

The students at Institucion Educativa San Jose – Sede La Cibeles have different academic levels. Many come from families that have had some access to education and now participate in productive projects with crops like coffee, avocado, and lulo. The school serves 37 families, and many of them are victims of the armed conflict. Understanding this context helps the teacher-researcher make better decisions and support students' learning in a more meaningful way.

Data Analysis and Discussion

The first tools used to collect data were the diagnostic activities (See Annex A) introduced in a previous section. In the multigrade rural classroom at the Cibeles campus, three diagnostic activities were implemented. First, a Personal Presentation activity (See annex B) was used to build a personal and pedagogical connection with each student. Then, the Duolingo application was introduced to assess basic grammar and vocabulary and determine each student's level (Pre-A1, A1, or A2). The Educaplay platform was also used to evaluate language proficiency by practicing vocabulary and grammatical structures aligned with the curriculum for each level. This provided students with an alternative learning method beyond traditional pencil-and-paper activities and helped bring technology into the rural classroom.

During the diagnostic assessment (See Annex A) of English skills in the multigrade classroom for grades 6 to 11 at the La Cibeles campus, it became clear that the students' English level is still too low to use the language in a functional way. This happens even though they are happy and enthusiastic during English classes. Because of this, more focused and committed work is needed. First, it is important to identify each student's level using clear and appropriate assessment strategies. After this, the progress and achievements of the students were shared and made visible.

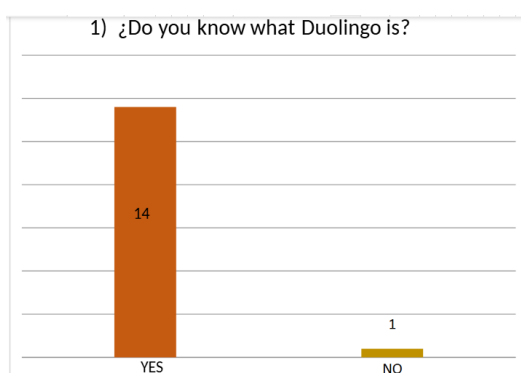
The information was also collected from a survey (See Annex A) administered to the population attending the Institucion Educativa San Jose – Sede la Cibeles selecting 15 students. Three sixth-grade students, four seventh-grade students, five eighth-grade students, one ninth-grade student, and two eleventh-grade students aged between 13 and 18, five women and ten men.

The following questions were asked to students in grades 6 through 11 at the Institucion Educativa San Jose – Sede la Cibeles, with the aim of analyzing the degree of impact that English language teaching has in a multigrade classroom on the daily lives of this group of students. This survey is part of the research project “English Language Teaching in a Multigrade Rural School.”

Mark the option you consider with an X. Please fill it out as seriously as possible.

1) Do you know what Duolingo is?

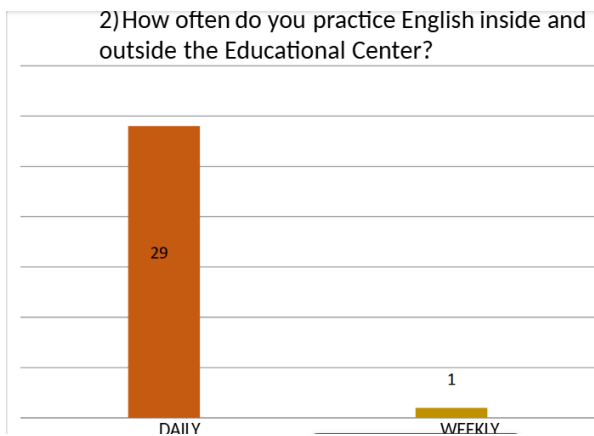
Yes ____ **No** ____



It is an application that enhances prior knowledge, is easily accessible, and serves as entertainment in your free time. It is very popular among teenagers, young people, and adults, as it allows them to stay up to date.

2) How often do you practice English inside and outside the Educational Center?

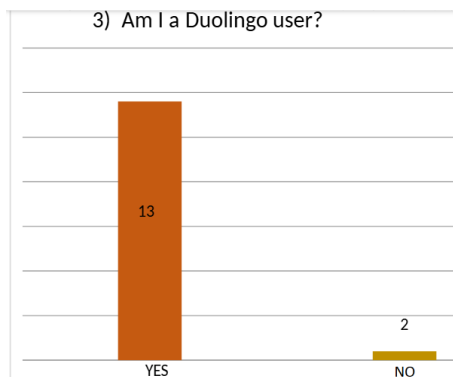
Daily ____ Weekly ____



It is evident that access to Duolingo is continuous, with most students using it daily.

3) Am I a Duolingo user?

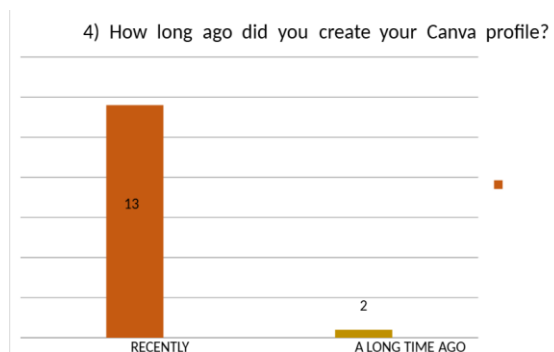
Yes ____ No ____



The students have created profiles on Duolingo with the aim of establishing new interactions.

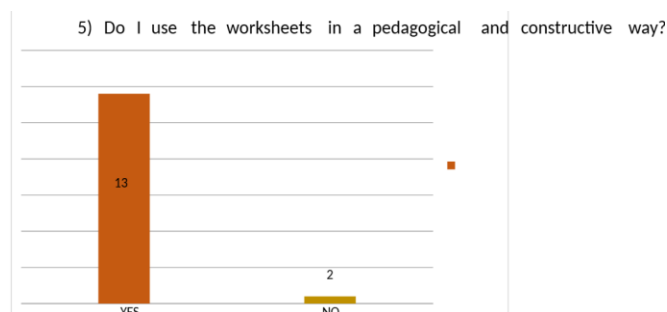
4) How long ago did you create your Canva profile?

A long time ago _____ Recently _____



It is evident that most students have been using Canva for a long time.

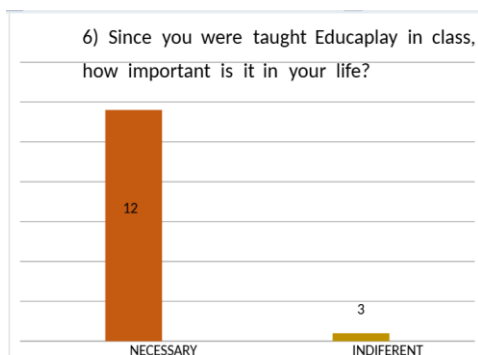
5) Do I use the worksheets in a pedagogical and constructive way?



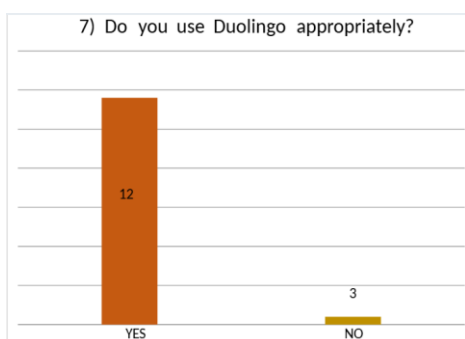
When a classmate misses class, classmates communicate what they have done through this medium, which is useful for carrying out tasks between two or more people. It helps with topics not covered in class by contacting classmates who understand them. It is useful for acquiring new knowledge.

6) Since you were taught Educaplay in class, how important is it in your life?

Necessary ____ Indifferent ____



7) Do you use Duolingo appropriately?



To do homework, study, because it does not do any harm, to look at photos, quotes, it is used out of necessity rather than addiction, because it knows the consequences of proper use, to learn, to have fun, to keep up to date.

Findings

The findings show that Duolingo, Educaplay, and worksheets help students improve their motivation and participation in English class. These tools make the class more active and enjoyable, and students use them to learn and communicate in a more personal way. They also help students feel more confident when expressing themselves. Because of this, students have a more positive attitude toward using technology, both in school and at home.

For many students, these tools also give emotional support. They see Duolingo, Educaplay, and worksheets as a safe space where they can practice English at their own pace. This is important in rural areas, where adults are often busy with work and students may not receive academic help at home.

The results also show that teaching English in a multigrade classroom needs flexible and contextualized strategies. When teachers use vocabulary and tasks connected to rural life, students understand better and feel more interested. However, the lack of resources and the short time for English classes still make it difficult to develop stronger communication skills.

In this type of classroom, where students of many ages and levels learn together, Duolingo and worksheets help personalize learning. Duolingo lets students practice listening, reading, writing, and speaking at their own pace. The app gives immediate feedback, which helps the teacher see where students are having problems. Worksheets support the practice of all four skills and can be adapted to each level.

Overall, the experience shows that even with the challenges of a rural multigrade classroom, there are good opportunities for task-based learning. When teachers use active strategies, connect learning to the local context, and create a safe and supportive environment, students feel more confident. This helps them participate more and improve their listening and speaking skills—the main goal of this research.

Conclusions

The implementation of this research project helped improve teaching practices and the overall quality of education in the community. The use of digital tools supported the development of many skills beyond English, such as creativity, investigation, critical thinking, reflection, and autonomy. These tools also encouraged students to become more resilient and make better decisions in academic, personal, and social situations.

The development of listening and speaking skills in English, combined with the use of technology, proved important for improving students' performance in the multigrade classroom. To use these tools effectively, both students and teachers needed new strategies and resources. This made it easier for them to build new knowledge that connects with their rural context and with current educational demands.

The inclusion of Duolingo, worksheets, and Educaplay helped reduce the gap between traditional teaching and more innovative, inclusive education. These tools offered students new opportunities to achieve better academic results, especially in listening and speaking activities. They also helped students become more familiar with ICT and other technological resources.

The results show that the project is in line with the recommendations of the Ministry of Education which invites educational institutions to renew the teaching–learning process. This includes updating curricula and integrating technology to prepare students to be competent and active participants of their community.

In the English classroom, the use of Duolingo, worksheets, and Educaplay brought positive changes. Students pointed out that classes became more dynamic, interactive, and enjoyable. Their participation increased, and their attitudes toward group work, respect, and collaboration improved, creating a better learning environment. In general, students expressed a positive perception of these tools. They believed that Duolingo, Worksheets, and Educaplay made English lessons more entertaining and useful, even though some students sometimes felt that certain activities were a bit difficult and less relevant.

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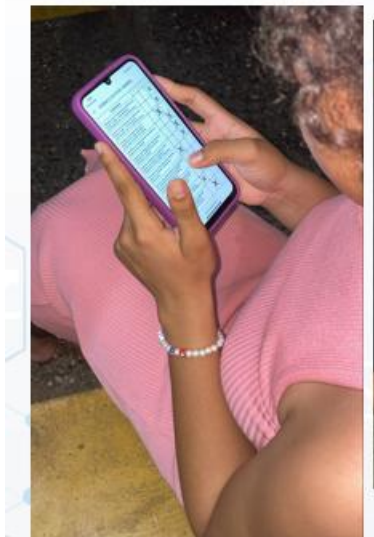
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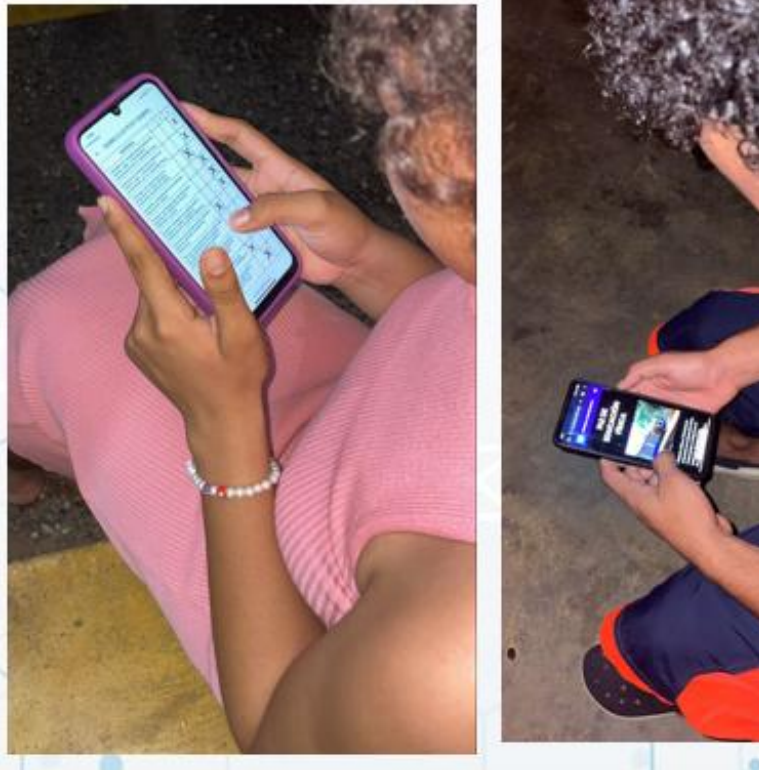
Appendices

Appendix A Students Survey of Sede la Cibeles Multigrade Students

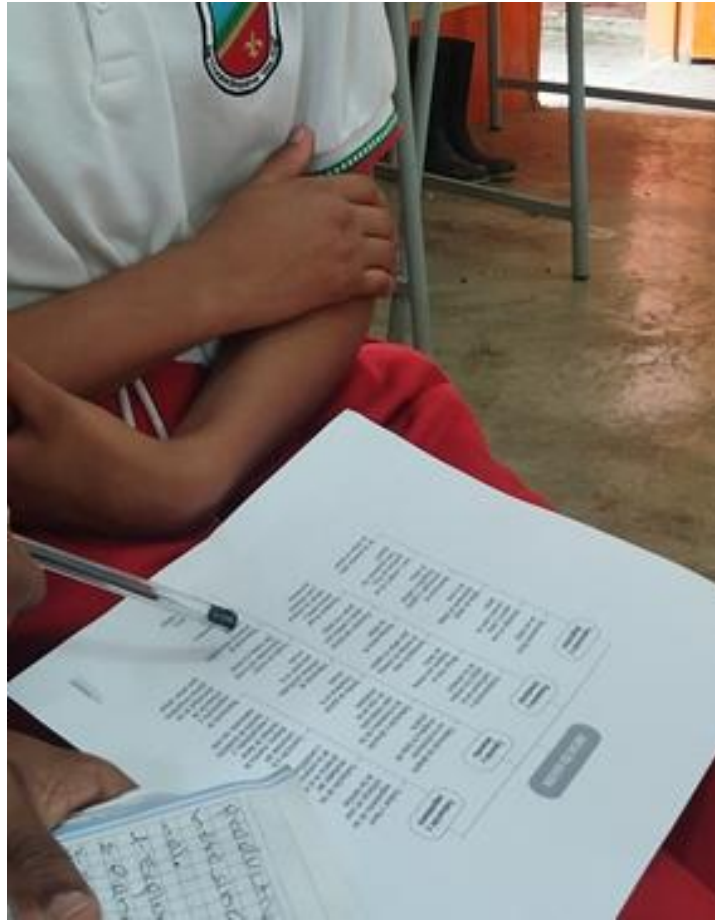
DESCRIPTORES	Siempre	%	Casi siempre	%	Algunas veces	%	Nunca lo hago	%
1. ¿Durante los ratos libres aprovechas para leer libros o ver videos que sean de tu agrado?	X							
2. ¿Elijes el salón de clases como lugar especial para jugar con tu celular?					X			
3. ¿Al momento de buscar tus tareas eliges textos escritos o te ayudas con el internet?			X					
4. ¿A través de la tecnología has podido resolver situaciones de la vida cotidiana?					X			
5. ¿Para la construcción del conocimiento en las diferentes áreas del saber consideras que la tecnología ha sido de gran importancia?	X							
6. ¿Dedicas diariamente algunas horas especialmente para entretenerse con la tecnología?			X					
7. ¿Antes de conocer este proyecto sobre uso de los RED tenías el hábito de usar recursos tecnológicos en tu vida escolar?			X					
8. ¿Qué es más fácil para ti usar un texto escrito o uno virtual porque has logrado interpretarlo?					X			
9. ¿Compartes con tus padres, hermanos o amigos aquello que consultas en internet?					X			
10. ¿Utilizas el internet como herramienta de la investigación de temas que te agradan?			X		X			



Appendix B Educaplay Appropriation



Appendix C Worksheet Interaction



Appendix D Duolingo App Exploration



Appendix E English Worksheet Test

