



“When we talk about quality as a human right, we talk about an inclusive, equitable, participative education in the context of community”

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Education in Nicaragua is a constitutional right and a revolutionary principle for the elimination of poverty and empiricism. The country’s public policies led by the Government of Reconciliation and National Unity (Gobierno de Reconciliación y Unidad Nacional, GRUN) establish education is free in all levels and aims for the holistic learning of all Nicaraguans, fostering values and principles including peace, social justice and sovereignty, enabling the protagonists’ quality in intellectual, scientific, and humanistic evolution.

Quality in education is a transversal process targeting at the formation and growth of essential learning for kids, youth and adults to successfully address life’s challenges, while protagonists aid the country and

community’s progress. Hence, educational subsystems: Ministry of Education (Ministerio de Educación, MINED), National Technical and Technological Institute (Instituto Nacional Técnico y Tecnológico, INATEC), Regional Autonomic Education Subsystem (Sistema Educativo Autonomo Regional, SEAR) and National Council of Universities (Consejo Nacional de Universidades, CNU) cooperate to reinforce citizen skills, integrating research, innovation and development of educational projects applying a model centered on people, families and communities.

On Índice, Education Journal of Nicaragua sixth edition, we chat with Dr. Maribel Duriez González, president of the National Council of Evaluation

and Accreditation (Consejo Nacional de Evaluación y Acreditación, CNEA), sharing with us about quality in education on the National Educational System.

**Laleska Gutiérrez (L.G.):** Good afternoon, doctor. **How are you?**

**Maribel Duriez (M.D.):** Good day. Thank you so much for the invitation, sharing about quality control in the National Educational System, relevant and crucial in the educational revolution's present context.



**L.G.:** How is quality incorporated in the national legal system: Political Constitution; **General Law of Education and National Plan to Fight Poverty and for Human Development?**

**M.D.:** In our country's Political Constitution, on chapter *Education and Culture*, it establishes education is an invariant State function, with the objective the of full and integral education of all Nicaraguans, grow their personality, and nobility of spirit to assume country's tasks. Similarly, Constitution outlines education as a unique, democratic, and participative process merging theory with practice. It promotes protagonists' participation: family, community, and people in the educational process. On this Revolution's second stage, we celebrate having free technical and higher

education, as restoration of the quality in education right. Thus, when we talk about quality as a human right, we refer to an inclusive, equitable, participative education in the Nicaraguan community and society context.

Within the framework of laws, quality is retrieved in Law N° 582, General Law of Education, defined as: transversal criteria of Nicaraguan education related to academic results and relevance to students' life learning. Also, it is established quality in education aims for the construction and development of relevant learning to enable students to successfully face life's challenges and each one becomes a positive subject-actor for the community and country. Responsibilities are established for each subsystem, Ministry of Education, National Technical Institute, Regional Autonomous Education Subsystem, and National Council of Universities.

In this same law, article 116 states the National Evaluation and Accreditation Council's creation (MINED, INATEC, and CNU), forms this organ to ensure quality in the educational system. It is new, a start-up, as result of the second stage of the Revolution and, thus, we believe the General Law of Education articulates quality in the National Educational System.

Regarding the National Plan to Fight Poverty and Promote Human Development (2022 - 2026), quality in education is clearly stated in the guidelines:

- More inclusive, equitable, and quality education in early childhood, and presenting options for baccalaureates to get a medium technical title or similar upon graduation.

- Enhancing technical and technological education, prioritizing technologies and production.
- Growth of human talents for national development with more higher education.

Therefore, the National Plan to Fight Poverty and Promote Human Development and our country's educational laws have at their core quality in education at all levels, task we are assume and accomplish from different state organisms.

**L.G.: What are the strategies or mechanisms implemented to secure quality in education in basic, technical, professional, and regional autonomous education?**

**M.D.:** In the National Plan to Fight Poverty and Promote Human Development 2022 – 2026 is established a revolutionary model to flourish human talents and enable participation to protagonists: person, family, and communities. Thus, when talking about our educational model focused on the person, we refer to an education based on learning, in the human being; an integral education on various educational levels, contributing to the development of a society in revolution with shared principles like peace, equity, inclusion, and insertion of the protagonist to the country's economic progress.

Considering the stated on the National Plan to Fight Poverty and Promote Human Development guidelines as specific educational policies, the National Council of Universities has created actions for the construction of a Higher Education Strategic Framework 2022 – 2030, a regulatory compendium establishing the actions to be achieved by all higher

education; in its role, the National Evaluation and Accreditation Council has executed assessment and accreditation processes at university institutions and evaluation mechanisms at university degrees. MINED and INATEC have built their quality control strategies in the National Education Commission's work framework, which worked aspects related to curricular transformation and the Learning Evaluation System; everything on track of quality in education on all educational subsystems. In education, these policies allow us to have more protagonists on classrooms, so no one remains without studies, and we can push society to grow the revolution and meet all goals, such as free education, solid economy, creative and innovative economy we boost as Government, as State for our people to go beyond.

**L.G.: What are the educational community's benefits by setting and promoting quality control?**

**M.D.:** All the National Education System has worked on the change. We are moving from a model focused on teaching, to one focused on learning. This means, before we engaged on qualifications, in quantitative scores, how many approved and disapproved. Today, with this new educational model, we talk about how much is learned, how is learned, and which competency we develop on different education and training programs on various levels. The person is the centre of learning, their family and community.

We are working on a model to flourish competencies, a curriculum allowing to take youth to the job market quickly and have continuity. We are also working in competencies to promote research and

learning in more demanding spaces. All this is quality, therefore, by teaching professionals, each time more competent, to answer the community and the country's development. Hence, we are securing quality of life and families' wellbeing. The restitution of the right to education is an important factor for people's wellbeing. Here I highlight the access to free education, special programs such as the school snack, scholarships for young university students, better infrastructure, creation of universities in the Caribbean Coast. Even in this second stage of the Revolution, we see how our Government watches over education, declaring free universities with quality so nobody remains without studying.

Similarly, we can't stop mentioning emblematic programs like countryside high school, technical education in the countryside, trade schools, and Countryside University (Universidad en el Campo, UNICAM); spaces enabling protagonists to stay in their communities, and surroundings, get higher education closer to great majorities unable to access it before. We must keep boosting all programs, expanding the registrations. They have been successful programs because education is now in difficult access zones. We also see an educational revolution to guarantee quality for people and communities; we see inclusion, equity, social justice, restitution of a right we didn't have with neoliberal governments.



**L.G.: From which perspective does quality control in all levels of education ranks the National Education System as a referent nationally and internationally?**

**M.D.:** To be referents nationally and internationally, we must go back to laws and their reforms applied in this second stage of Revolution, specifically law N°582, General Law of Education; law N°704, Law creating the National System for the Assurance of Quality and regulator of the National Council of Evaluation and Accreditation; and law N° 1176, Law of reform and addition to law N° 89, Law of Autonomy of Higher Education Institutions. All these laws and reforms are guided to the reinforcement of quality control in education in all subsystems.

The National Plan to Fight Poverty and Promote Human Development is a national and international referent as its guidelines and strategies are tied to the integral development of the family, community, and people. A new experience in Latin American and the world.

Educational subsystems (MINED, INATEC, SEAR, and CNU) are in a historical moment of changes. We are working with quality standards, universal access to education differently, going to families and communities. Regarding higher education, we have a Strategic Framework and a National Plan of Education which addresses the National Plan to Fight Poverty and for Human Development, advances we have achieved in this second stage of the revolution guarantee protagonists' quality education.

We are working in the alignment of higher education with MINED and INATEC to have

quality standards on different levels and achieve all education stages. For instance, when a boy or girl joins initial education, their competencies must be consistent with elementary, secondary, technical, and university education to achieve continuity in the education process. Of course, this continuity isn't easily achieved in other countries, which is why Nicaragua has had national and international involvement. Let's not omit Nicaragua has been an example for the international community since the 80's with the National Literacy Crusade, one of the first educational revolutions we have in the country. The National Literacy Crusade has placed Nicaragua on internationally as a country where education is an unwaivable right. It's important to mention that, with the neoliberal governments, education was privatized; access, and equity of opportunities we, Nicaraguans, enjoy nowadays are thanks to the Revolution and our Government of Reconciliation and National Unity.

In this second stage of the revolution, we have restored education's right by going back to gratuity, having access to education in the countryside, we have online programs for all levels. Therefore, we have various educational modalities enabling free access to education for children, youth, and adults, as our main principle is eradicating poverty. Then, the acknowledgment we have internationally, in Central America we are the second country to strongly push the topic of accreditation on higher education and we are the first one to perform quality accreditation on higher education institutions.

In 2024, the CNEA will start the accreditation of medicine and law degrees. We closed this 2023 with the accreditation

of minimum quality established in the law, so we are working hard in the accreditation and quality assurance on higher education. These processes of quality control are done by MINED and INATEC on different levels, allowing us to position ourselves as a country worried about their people, a country ensuring quality from the practice, actions, and makes us stand out from others and, of course, to be recognized and admired internationally.

**L.G.: We see the educational subsystems work closely together for the evolutionary transformation and full human development of protagonists; one of those great advances has been the digitization. How can we ensure quality in education on this modality?**

**M.D.:** This is a great topic. I remember when I was a student at the Preparatory Faculty in the 80's, e-learning was promoted on the first stage of revolution. I remember teachers from the UNAN-Managua travelled to the Caribbean Coast through the program PRUEDIS (Proyecto a Educación a Distancia, Project of E-Learning). In it, teachers left printed materials, question guides, and came back once a month or every two months to evaluate. That was the e-learning I knew, even when I completed my master's degree, that's how it was. Digitalization comes and bursts in years later with the Internet, and the second and third generation with the introduction to www and since then information becomes public domain.

Nicaragua comes evolving from a very long time ago in some public institutions, as it is the case of the UNAN-Managua, UNAN-León. Now we have a guide

on E-Learning, degree of educational informatics, specialists in educational informatics. I remember the first specialty we had on 1996 with UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). Subsequently, the movement of educational informatics came, the degree was created at UNAN-Managua and after the Direction of Virtual Education began to be created, reaching the digitalization. I believe COVID-19 pandemic came to teach this part of the hybrid model; how physical attendance also works with it. Nowadays we face the phenomena of digitalization, and it must also be planned, organized and evaluated. Personally, I am convinced this modality helps many people who can't access in-person modality, but asynchronous, as it is called, so they can take a Saturday answering a forum, working or reading and turning in a task next weekend with the time each one has.

This modality is based on the independent students' work. Therefore, when we have a pedagogical mediation in a virtual classroom with qualified professors and, above all, if we have technological resources, we can take advantage to have higher numbers of students in the technical degrees, university degrees or specialties. An example of the progress we have in Nicaragua is having the first University Online (Universidad Abierta en Línea de Nicaragua, UALN), a space we must keep enhancing from the collaborative work. This program is a great example of access and gratuity in education. UALN has already transcended because it serves a population who wants to continue their studies, aspires to keep on preparing themselves from where they are, be it national or international, giving

access and coverage to people because it has a wide range of careers.

All modalities are essential: on-site, hybrid or blended modality, and virtual. Therefore, between the CNU and CNEA, we evaluate virtual programs because it is not the same assessment program applied in on-site modality and virtual. This modality is already offered in all National Educational System from INATEC to MINED and is one of the guidelines of the National Plan of Fight Poverty and for Human Development.



**L.G.:** Which were the obstacles and challenges on the second stage of the revolution for quality control?

**M.D.:** Challenges are a lot, obstacles too. The most important part of quality is the curriculum, heart of the educational systems. The biggest obstacle is to have curriculum quality, as well as teacher quality. Teachers must make a transformation. Additional to generational change, us teachers must update ourselves every day. Institutions must also offer education options on new technologies of information and communication. For example, in the 80's I was a student assistant and started to give classes in the 90's, when chalk and blackboard were used. Now, teachers have to make more interactive and practical classes because we have IT tools, we also have virtual



classes in hybrid modality, so teachers must specialize to virtual learning environments, pedagogical models, pedagogical mediation to achieve quality education and facilitate learning, evolutionary transformation, of our educational model.

Another challenge I believe is very important are student protagonists, the ones who have to learn strategies, enabling them to have a meaningful learning, one built every day, not memorized. We must eradicate memorization; learning are all those topics of interest which motivate us, excite us, and makes us grow every day. Learning is not just academic, is emotional, social, knowledge, abilities and all of them transcend motivation. If I am motivated as a person, with family, and community for the wellbeing and quality of life. Teachers must contribute to integral learning, but for teachers to do it, they have to learn how to make evolutionary transformation and we are working on it in teacher training.

The other obstacle has to do with quality related to the capacity of starting investigations and innovating from preschool levels where inquiry is promoted through games. Then, when we have boys and girls working on a pedagogical inquiry model, we can develop a higher number of investigations, higher number innovation to allow social and economic growth of the country and, in this sense, it is also a challenge of quality promoting more each day the investigations, innovations and publications in all areas of knowledge. It is an agenda topic we are working at the different educational subsystems.

There are more challenges for quality at institutional management of schools,

universities, everything has to do with institutional administration, administration of human resources. All are relevant topics, but, to me, we must focus or prioritize the curriculum; it is the heart of the school and, together with revolutionary values, promotes the quality of life on the person, family, community; a model focused on the creation of learning, on protagonists' learning needs.

**L.G.: To finish, would you like to share some other information?**

**M.D.:** Quality control is very important because it allows education to continue being inclusive, equitable, and engaging; it allows us to be better every day. Quality is an attitude, not only a compromise, but an attitude, while being a militant each teacher's compromise. We can't talk about a model focused on the person, family, a revolutionary model, if we do not compromise with quality.

We are all compromised with quality; thus, I talk about a militant attitude. Quality is made day by day, built day by day and every day we have to be better because it is not achieved completely, we must keep working to reach that quality to enable education to be the core of our country's students and protagonists. Education is the core of our country's youth and protagonists. Therefore, it is something we must take care of, of its quality, and is a priority for this country. We must keep working all educational subsystems and we must leave a legacy for revolution to continue, for the model to be maintained; we must work hard, and we must keep going beyond for more educational victories.

**L.G.:** We are thankful for sharing with *Índice, Education Journal Nicaragua* about the tasks and vision of the quality national system in education in all levels, as an essential basis for the enhancement of our educational model focused on the person, family, and community.

**M.D.:** Thank you all for this opportunity.



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