Virtual Platforms and its Use to Teach and Learn English Online

Las Plataformas y su Uso para Aprender y Enseñar Inglés en Linea

Plataformas virtuais e seu uso para ensinar e aprender inglês online

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Resumen

El objetivo principal de este estudio fue determinar los beneficios de la aplicación de las plataformas virtuales para la enseñanza-aprendizaje del idioma inglés. La metodología utilizada para su realización fue cualitativa y cuantitativa, apoyada en métodos exploratorios, descriptivos, explicativos, históricos y analíticos. Los principales resultados mostraron que las plataformas virtuales fueron sin duda una herramienta fundamental en la enseñanza de un segundo idioma, debido a los recursos que estos poseen para una interacción comunicativa entre docentes y estudiantes. El enfoque principal fue el de promover un ambiente de enseñanza y aprendizaje que favorezca el desarrollo del talento, la creatividad y la inteligencia, de acuerdo con las diferencias individuales y las necesidades educativas de cada estudiante y que logre un aprendizaje significativo con el fin de que se use el idioma inglés de forma más eficiente y se promueva la comunicación más fluida.

Palabras Clave: Plataformas virtuales; Recursos; Estrategias; Online.

Abstract

The main aim of this study was to determine the benefits in the application of virtual platforms for English language teaching-learning. The methodology used was quali-quantitative, supported by exploratory, descriptive, explanatory, historical and analytical methods. The main results showed that virtual platforms were undoubtedly a fundamental tool in teaching a second language, due to the resources they possess for communicative interaction between teachers and students. The main focus was to promote a teaching and learning environment that helps the development of talent, creativity and intelligence, according to the individual differences and educational needs of each student and that achieves meaningful learning in order to use the English language efficiently to promote a fluent communication.

Key Words: Virtual platforms; Resources; Strategies; Online.

Resumo

O objetivo principal deste estudo foi determinar os benefícios da aplicação de plataformas virtuais para o ensino-aprendizagem da língua inglesa. A metodologia utilizada para sua realização foi qualitativa e quantitativa, apoiada em métodos exploratórios, descritivos, explicativos, históricos e analíticos. Os principais resultados mostraram que as plataformas virtuais foram, sem dúvida, uma

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ferramenta fundamental no ensino de uma segunda língua, devido aos recursos que possuem para uma interação comunicativa entre professores e alunos. O foco principal foi promover um ambiente de ensino e aprendizagem que favoreça o desenvolvimento do talento, criatividade e inteligência, de acordo com as diferenças individuais e as necessidades educacionais de cada aluno e que alcance uma aprendizagem significativa para que a língua inglesa seja utilizada de forma mais eficiente e fluida comunicação é promovida.

Palavras-chave: Plataformas virtuais; Meios; Estratégias; Conectados.

Introducción

During the first half of March, when the first cases of COVID-19 began to be detected in Latin America, the state of Ecuador made a decision that had already been made elsewhere in the world to deal with the wave of pandemic contagions: calling for confinement and suspending face-to-face classes in private and public entities.

Due to the emergence of COVID-19, the closure of schools being one of the first steps that all nations take (reaching global confinement to stop the uncontrolled spread), is accelerating a process of digital transformation that has gone from unstoppable, to totally necessary to avoid disruption in routines.

While many countries, especially in Latin America, were unprepared for these changes, the coronavirus pandemic has tested the preparedness of centers to deal with a crisis that requires online and remote action in adapting innovative methodologies for learning.

For this reason, the development of digital technologies such as audio, video, animations and the combination of all of them in a single medium (Multimedia), have led to the rise of new educational modalities, which, supported by technology, have managed to bring students not only static content but also interactive learning experiences in which a true interaction with related entities has been achieved in the different learning sessions.

The increased penetration of connectivity in previously unconnected places has also played a major role, and this has led to the emergence of more appropriate learning and collaboration platforms. These platforms have "tools to facilitate learning, communication and collaboration, tools for maintenance and / or modification of the course, and for the design of the user interface.

Methodology

Methodological Framework

Type of Research

This work is a descriptive research, aimed at providing information on the advantages of virtual platforms according to our means caused by the current covid 19 pandemics. The data obtained are the product of research on the Internet, bibliography and surveys through the web.

Descriptive research

According to descriptive research, "it includes the description, registration, analysis and interpretation of the current nature, and the composition or process of phenomena. The approach is made on dominant conclusions or on a group of people, group or things, driving or operating in the present"(Tamayo & Tamayo)

Research approach

The approach to apply in this research topic is the quantitative approach. In this approach, the analysis of information is based on quantities and/or dimensions. That is, the numerical element has prominence.

When a quantitative approach is used in an investigation, the researcher's hypotheses are subjected to numerical measurements and their results are statistically analyzed. This is an objective and rigorous investigation in which the numbers are significant. This approach allows to achieve a very particular and verifiable knowledge of the object of study, in addition, it is a sequential and deductive work in which the verification of hypotheses is usually faster.

Qualitative approach

(Blasco & Perez, 2007)"they point out that qualitative research studies reality in its natural context and how it happens, bringing out and interpreting phenomena according to the people involved."

It uses a variety of tools to collect information such as interviews, images, observations, life stories, describing routines and problematic situations, as well as meanings in the lives of participants

Theoretical Framework

Virtual Education

The world is currently in a global crisis. The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared a global pandemic for COVID-19, also popularly known as coronavirus for its family of viruses, which

originated in Wuhan, China. This disease has spread in more than 190 countries around the globe and governments have decreed a generalized quarantine to avoid social contact and that there are more confirmed cases.

This outlook has not been positive for the economy, since miles of businesses or ventures have been affected by the lack of contact between workers. For this reason, company leaders have looked to remote options to make teleworking work, with video calling applications being the first to become popular in this State of Emergency.

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What is a Virtual Platform?

Virtual platforms are Internet-oriented programs, are used for the design and development of courses or teaching modules in the international network. They allow to improve communication (student-teacher; student-student) and develop individual and collective learning.

(Diaz, 2009) it defines them as "a computing environment in which we find many tools grouped and optimized for teaching purposes. Its function is to enable the creation and management of complete courses for the Internet without requiring in-depth programming knowledge."

(Victoria, 2008) defines it as "educational scenarios designed according to a remote accompaniment methodology" or "web page-based tools for the organization and implementation of online courses or to support face-to-face educational activities"

(Pardo, 2009) defines virtual platforms as "a flexible, individualized and interactive proposal, with the use and combination of various materials, formats, and media for easy and immediate updating"

Features of virtual platforms

The basic components or characteristics of any virtual learning environment, which must also be strongly linked and interconnected, so that they influence each other and are retroactively synthesized in the following:

- **Flexibility.** The platform can be adapted to both the institution's curriculum and the contents and pedagogical style of the organization. It also allows you to organize courses very easily and quickly.

- **Interactivity.** The person becomes the protagonist of his own learning through self-service and self-guided services.

- **Standardization.** This feature allows you to use courses taken by third parties, customizing content, and reusing knowledge.

- **Scalability.** These resources can work with a variable number of users based on your organization's needs.

- **Functionality.** Features and features that make each platform suitable (functional) according to the requirements and needs of users.

- **Usability.** The ease with which people can use the platform in order to achieve a specific goal.

- **Ubiquity.** The ability of a platform to generate peace of mind for the user and give them the certainty that everything they need will be found in that virtual environment.

- **Integration.** Virtual platforms must be able to integrate with other business applications used by human resources and accounting, which allows measuring the impact, efficiency, and above all, the cost of training activities.

How a Virtual Platform Works?

A virtual platform is an easy-to-use software with a user-friendly graphical interface; users can take on a role as a student, teacher, administrator, and others.

A clear example is the Moodle virtual platform where the following roles exist for the user:

- **Administrator:** Administrators can usually do anything on the site, in all courses.

- **Course Creator:** Course creators can create new courses and teach in them.

- **Teacher or Tutor**: Teachers can take any action within a course, including changing activities and qualifying students.

- **Teacher without editing** permission: Teachers without editing permission can teach in courses and grade students, but they cannot modify activities.
- **Student:** Students generally have fewer privileges within a course.
- **Guest:** Guests have minimum privileges and are not normally authorized to write.
- **Authenticated** user: All authenticated users. The teacher or student is given a username and password in order to access the virtual platform; the teacher or tutor gives their students a password for the course they teach.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Virtual Platforms

Advantages

- **Promotion of teacher/student communication:** The teacher/student relationship, in the course of class or the eventuality of the use of tutoring, is greatly expanded with the use of the tools of the virtual platform.
- **Facilities for access to information:** It is a potential tool that allows you to create and manage subjects in a simple way, including a wide variety of activities, and closely tracks the work of students. Any information related to the subject is permanently available allowing the student to access it anytime, anywhere.
- **Encouraging discussion and discussion:** Extending teaching beyond the classroom using the apps provided by the platform encourages student participation. It allows remote communication through forums, mail and Chat, thus favoring cooperative learning.
- **Skills and Skills Development:** This educational model promotes the space for the transmission of knowledge as well as the development in students of skills and competencies that train them as good professionals. At the same time, it is also possible for the student to become familiar with the use of computer media, an aspect of great importance in the current information society.
- **The playful component:** The use of technologies such as instant messaging, forums, Chats in many cases, acts as an incentive for students to consider the subject interesting. In short, it gives the teaching a format closer to the language of the new generations.
- **Promoting the educational community**: The use of virtual platforms is expanding the possibilities of connection between teachers. Its extension of use may in the future drive the

creation of educational communities in which teachers share materials or collaborate on joint educational projects.

Disadvantages

- **Increased effort and dedication on the part of the teacher:** The use of virtual platforms for teaching implies an increase in the effort and time that the teacher has to devote to the subject since the platform needs to be constantly updated.

- **Need for motivated and participatory students:** The use of virtual tools requires participatory students who are involved in the subject.

- **Access to media and the computer gap:** The use of virtual platforms as a teaching support resource requires the student to have permanent access to computer media

The Design Function

Designing a virtual platform environment is not a minor topic within the virtual platform development and deployment process. A proper design should be attractive, retain students' attention and facilitate the possible expansion of the system. You must attend to both the presentation of the virtual environment interface and the navigation structure. The virtual platform is the result of teamwork: Developing a virtual platform requires the integration of a team of professionals, with different and well-defined roles:

- Programmers
- Web master system administrators
- Teachers, tutors and assistants Experts in content Designers of materials and teaching activities
- Editors
- Administrators of the learning process

Classification of Virtual Educational Platforms.

At present, there are a fairly large number of platforms, and given the period of time in which they have become important, their proliferation and improvement can be expected to grow at a considerable rate and in a short period of time. This applies to platforms that were born on the initiative of different educational administrations, as well as those that have done so on the initiative of private companies.

Trading platforms

They have been created by companies or educational institutions for profit. They tend to have very good reliability and effective technical assistance. They require payment of a fee, usually annual that gives access to successive updates. The most important ones have a number of different specialized modules that allow you to adapt the platform completely to your needs.

Some of the best known are:

- WebCT
- FirstClass

Free software platforms

They are created for non-profit purposes. Its main advantages are that the program is free to be used for any purpose, it is possible to adapt it to your needs or distribute copies and you do not need to pay to access the updates.

Some educational platforms for free software are, for example:

- Moodle
- Claroline

Self-development platforms

They are not intended to be distributed in bulk because they have been custom developed for a given project. The advantage is that they are totally customized to the needs of the project and respond better to the educational and pedagogical needs of the project. The main disadvantage is that they are not easily generalized to other fields and their high cost.

The use of educational platforms is revolutionizing the way we learn, opening up exciting new possibilities that exceed the limits of time and space so that training no longer has borders.

Most used virtual platforms

Moodle

Moodle is a learning platform designed to provide educators, administrators and students with a unique, robust and secure integrated system for creating personalized learning environments.

The first version was created in 2002 by Australian educator and computer scientist Martin Dougiamas, and its original name comes from the acronym Module Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment.

Moodle's first strength is that it is free software that is distributed under the GPL (General Public License). This means that anyone or institution can make use of it and adapt it to their needs without paying a penny for it.

Moodle's main advantages

Moodle's free and open character makes it a very attractive tool, which also has many more advantages:

- **Stable and trusted tool:** All kinds of organizations of all sizes rely on it to develop their online training projects.

- **Intuitive and easy to use:** Learning how to manage and use it is very simple. The user dashboard has a simple interface, drag-and-drop features, and well-documented resources.

- **Always** up-to-date: Moodle is continuously reviewed and improved to suit users' needs over time. Its development involves thousands of users from all over the world who are organized around online communities.

- **Flexible and customizable:** Being open source software, Moodle can be customized and adapted to individual needs thanks to its modular operating structure.

- **Scalable to any size: It is a platform that can serve thousands of students from a few** students, both in small and large organizations.

- **Ubiquity and accessible from any device:** Access to Moodle is done from the web, so it can be accessed from anywhere in the world, anytime and from any device. Its interface is compatible with mobiles and all internet browsers.

- **Robust, secure and** private: Moodle developers are committed to data security and user privacy, which is why the platform's security controls are constantly updated. Moodle has systems that protect against unauthorized access, data loss and misuse.

- **With expandable features:** Moodle's possibilities are limitless. Its functionalities can be extended thanks to the installation of plugins and plugins, the result of the collaboration of a large global community.

- **In your own language:** Moodle is translated into more than 120 languages. Its multilingual capacity is another of its most appreciated features.

Moodle platform features

One of the main features of this SGA is that it offers the possibility to insert multimedia contents: the teacher can upload images (photos, illustrations, graphics); videos (dynamic presentations, advertisements, short films, documentaries, television, television programs, trailers, video clips); audio content (music, dialogues, radio programs). Due to the importance of sensory stimuli in teaching, the inclusion of multimedia elements in a Moodle course is essential to foster motivation.

Thanks to its customizable character, Moodle presents great flexibility: the teacher will decide how to design his course, that is, what appearance to give it, what activities to include and in what order, when to open and close the participation to each of them, how often to publish content. All this allows the tutor to adapt the platform to each group of students, and therefore to their level, interests, objectives, deficits, etc. Most of the activities Moodle proposes are interactive in several ways: between the student and the platform, as it offers immediate feedback to the student in the case of some tasks, such as in the questionnaires; between the student and the teacher, who is in charge of giving him the necessary feedback to contribute to the proper development of his learning, as in online tasks; and finally, and more importantly, among students among themselves, through social activities that drive the creation of communities of apprentices, as in the forums. Communities lead to achievements within an informal context where the playful aspect, creativity, discrepancy and humor, members of the affective dimension in learning, are evident.

As the student chooses, in some cases, the time and how he will use the platform (such as exercising the contents, as a self-assessment, as a review of the notions already learned), and when delegating to it activities such as the activation of forums, the modification of a wiki or the freedom to add one or the other entry in a glossary, Moodle promotes the autonomy of apprentices. This leads to what has been called the Personal Learning Environment (PEL), i.e., control and management in the learning process itself.

The following will explain each of the features of the Moodle platform:

- **Modern, easy-to-use** interface: Designed to be responsive and accessible, Moodle's interface is easy to navigate, both on desktops and mobile devices.

- **Custom Dashboard:** Allow to organize and display courses in the way you want and see together the current messages and tasks.

- **Collaborative activities and tools:** Work and learn together on forums, wikis, glossaries, database activities, and more.
- **All-in-One Calendar:** Moodle's calendar tool helps you keep your or your company's academic calendar up-to-date, in-course due dates, group meetings, and other personal events.
- **Convenient file management:** Drag and drop files from cloud storage services, including MS OneDrive, Dropbox, and Google Drive.
- **Simple and intuitive text editor:** Conveniently format text and add multimedia and images with an editor that works with all Internet browsers and on all devices.
- **Notifications:** When enabled, users can receive automatic alerts about new tasks and dates to deliver, posts on forums, and private messages can also be sent between them.
- **Progress monitoring:** Educators and educators can monitor progress and degree of completion with a set of options for monitoring individual activities or resources, and also at the course level.

Zoom

Zoom is a cloud-based video conferencing service that you can use to meet virtually with others, either by video or audio only or both, all while performing live chats, and allows you to record those sessions for later viewing. More than half of Fortune 500 companies reportedly used Zoom in 2019 and during 2020 reached even higher levels, accumulating 227 percent growth during the year.

This is the original software-based conference room solution used worldwide in boardrooms, conferences, meetings and training, as well as in executive offices and classrooms. Founded in 2011, Zoom helps companies and organizations bring their teams together in a frictionless environment to do more."

In short, Zoom uses Cloud Internet services to make video, audio, or both video conferencing, joining people around the world through a webcam or phone. This application uses two services called Zoom Meeting and Zoom Room, where the first is the video conferencing meeting hosted on the platform and the second the configuration of the physical hardware to program and hold conferences.

Zoom Features

These are the main features of Zoom:

1. **One-on-one** meetings: Organize unlimited individual meetings even with the free plan.

2. **Group Video Conferencing:** Organize up to 500 participants (if you purchase the "Big Meeting" add-on). The free plan, however, allows you to make video conferences of up to 40 minutes and up to 100 participants.

3. **Screen sharing: Meet** individually or with large groups and share your screen with them so they can see what you see.

4. **Recording: You** can also record your meetings or events.

Zoom plans and prices

Zoom offers four price levels (not including a Zoom Room subscription):

- **Free Zoom:** This level is free. You can hold an unlimited number of meetings. Group meetings with multiple participants are limited to 40 minutes long and cannot be recorded.

- **Zoom Pro:** This level costs $14.99/$11.99 per month and meeting host. It allows hosts to create personal meeting IDs for repeated Zoom meetings and allows recording of meetings in the cloud or on their device, but limits the duration of group meetings to 24 hours.

- **Zoom Business:** This level costs $19.99/$15.99 per month and meeting host (10 minimum). It allows you to mark Zoom meetings with custom URLs and company branding, and offers transcripts of Zoom meetings recorded in the cloud, as well as dedicated customer support.

- **Zoom Enterprise:** This level costs $19.99/ $15.99 per month and per meeting host (100 minimum) and is intended for companies with more than 1000 employees. It offers unlimited cloud storage for recordings, a customer success manager, and discounts on webinars and Zoom Rooms.

- **Optional - Zoom Rooms:** If you want to set up Zoom Rooms, you can sign up for a 30-day free trial, after which Zoom Rooms requires an additional $49/$39 per month and room subscription, while webinars using Zoom cost $40/$32 per month per host.

Teams

Microsoft Teams is a tool that allows you to create digital spaces for collaborative work and instant communication for different groups. Teams integrates the other Microsoft 365 tools (formerly Office 365) and ensures a smooth interaction process, through channels that allow message exchange between team members.

What is Teams for?

Teams is a new type of business tool that challenges the traditional workplace model. Above all, in relation to our dependence on emails. Teams lets you create a space for chat-style conversations organized by channels or work topics. With Teams we can maintain collaboration groups large or small in many activities in real time.

Teams can be in different locations and by available time zones, so we can connect to collaborative teams with the same task and at the same time. Whether in small or large workgroups, you can talk in real time and be highly productive. In addition, you can use built-in Office/Microsoft 365 tools, such as Outlook calendars and meetings. You can share and edit documents in SharePoint, OneDrive, and OneNote.

Microsoft Teams is intuitive and easy to use. In addition, it has very good online training guides for users available at Microsoft. These materials are presented as a series of easy-to-compress videos on how to perform various functions and execute different tasks within Teams. It should be noted that much of the Teams' video capabilities have been inherited from Skype for Business, which has already been virtually replaced by Teams.

What are the features of Microsoft Teams?

- **Teams:** The central idea is that people are grouped into teams of workers in a given project or workspace. The app allows them to connect through what is known as channels. This keeps them involved in any updates or events in that workflow. This can be a project, or a departmental channel, or even one at the enterprise level.

- **Channels:** Once a team is created using a thematic area, the different channels are connected. These are conversation topics focused on different issues that allow team members to communicate without the use of email. It's almost like a real-time conversation, as users throw ideas and discuss them in depth. Depending on the context, less formal and more personalized forms of communication such as emoji's and gifs can be used.

- **Activity Feed:** Activity updates give a glimpse for each user of conversations that take place on other channels they are not part of. Through what's known as Channel Notifications, updates appear in items of interest on closed channels.

- **Chat:** The chat feature is best used as a parallel discussion forum between team members within a channel to discuss topics that are not suitable for group space. They can be small reminders

to complete tasks or things like a "I'm late." Private chats are the equivalent of two or more people leaving a physical room during a meeting break to discuss some small issues

- **Calling:** Users can call external clients and even receive or make calls from landlines and mobile phones. Note, a calling plan is required for this. The Guest Access feature on Microsoft Teams enables users to collaborate with customers outside their organizations to join internal channels for messaging, meetings, and file sharing. This facility is particularly useful for managing projects with clients.

- **Online meetings:** Online meetings can be scheduled or created within channels by using a plug-in for Outlook. This feature can be used for enterprise-wide meetings or announcements and can accommodate up to 10,000 users. Online meetings can include anyone inside or outside the company. There are additional improvements that can be found here. These include integration with a note-taking app, file upload, and private chat features in meetings. Includes call and video call feature between multiple users.

- **File Sharing:** One of Teams' main strengths compared to some of its rivals is that it has the ability to share files and collaborate on content. In your Teams window, you can perform a variety of tasks directly within that same window or browser, so you avoid having to move from one app to another. In addition, the tasks you can perform are to delete files, download new ones, move, open, copy, edit and share with others. This functionality is easy and intuitive, and you don't lose any of the fundamental features you'd have when using apps as standalone

Conclusions

- The use of a virtual campus facilitates the penetration of the student in the intensive use of new communication technologies and more specifically of media such as the Internet, research on the web, teamwork from different geographical points, technological contributions to specific user groups, exchange of knowledge and technology, and the efficient use of educational material.

- Learning through virtual education platform offers advantages in terms of the environment, flexibility of schedules, greater diversity of resources and the possibility of collaborating and exchanging experiences and the development of digital skills.

- Virtual platforms are an alternative anywhere and anytime for the education today, due to the flexibility they offer to students and teacher, who look for different ways and resources in practice teaching and learning another language.

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