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“The Impact of Virtual Educational Platforms on Interaction in EFL Virtual Classes”

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Resumen

Las plataformas virtuales en el campo educativo han conformado parte de la metodología implementada en el proceso de enseñar el inglés como lengua extranjera, permitiendo la interacción entre docentes y estudiantes de manera significativa. Por ende, la finalidad de esta síntesis de investigación es analizar el impacto del uso de plataformas educativas virtuales en la interacción durante las clases virtuales de inglés. Para llevar a cabo la presente investigación se consideraron 20 estudios empíricos, cualitativos y cuantitativos publicados desde el año 2013 en adelante tomando en cuenta el contexto de la enseñanza- aprendizaje del idioma inglés como lengua extranjera. Así mismo, las distintas actitudes tomadas por parte de los participantes y los efectos generados en la comunicación ante el uso de estas plataformas fueron analizados. Los resultados revelaron que implementar distintas plataformas educativas virtuales tiene efectos positivos y negativos en la interacción entre los participantes, tomando en cuenta el desarrollo de las habilidades de comunicación y las destrezas del idioma inglés. Además, El estudio nos lleva a encontrar posibles soluciones a futuros problemas que aparecen cuando el proceso de enseñar y aprender inglés ocurre.

Palabras clave: plataformas educativas virtuales, interacción, actitudes, impacto, clases virtuales de inglés como lengua extranjera, habilidades comunicativas



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Abstract

Virtual platforms in the educational field have been part of the methodology in teaching English as a foreign language, allowing significant interaction between teachers and students. The purpose of this research synthesis is to analyze the impact of the use of virtual educational platforms on interaction during EFL virtual classes. To carry out this research, 20 empirical, qualitative, and quantitative studies published from 2013 onwards were considered in the context of teaching-learning English as a foreign language. Likewise, participants' attitudes and effects on communication when teachers and students use these platforms were analyzed. The results revealed that implementing different virtual educational platforms has positive and negative impacts on the interaction between the participants, considering the development of communication and English skills. The study leads us to find possible solutions to solve future problems appearing when the teaching and learning process of English occurs.

Keywords: virtual educational platforms, interaction, attitudes, impact, virtual classes of English as a foreign language, communication skills



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Elizabeth Mery Capa Ramón – María Cecilia González González

Dedication

First and foremost, I would like to thank God and La Churonita, who have granted me countless blessings, strength, patience, and knowledge to accomplish each goal.

“To my Dad Apolinario Capa (+), in loving memory,” and my Mom Mélida Ramón, who have encouraged me to go on every adventure, especially this one. Thank you for your endless love, support, and encouragement. Words can hardly describe my thanks to you. You have taught me to be determined and not to give up on my dreams. It’s an honor to have you as my parents. I love you forever.

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Elizabeth Mery Capa Ramón

Dedication

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María Cecilia González González

Introduction

During this decade, learning a new language has become fundamental to developing academic, personal, and professional success; however, English is one of the most used languages worldwide. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, technological devices were implemented as didactic tools to follow the teaching and learning process of EFL, and as a result, online education replaced traditional schooling. Additionally, technological devices allow teachers to create an innovative environment where students can develop their English skills significantly and entreatingly.

Virtual Educational Platforms have become necessary in education because these tools play an essential role in developing meaningful learning by enhancing interaction between teachers and students in virtual classrooms. Different authors analyzed how these platforms affected the participants' interaction during the educational process. According to Alahmadi and Alraddadi (2020), virtual educational platforms provide many opportunities for students and teachers to interact while communicating about academic and personal situations. As Al-Qahtani (2019) stated, communication skills were also affected by using virtual educational platforms, causing different attitudes between teachers and students during online sessions. The participants presented positive and negative attitudes towards using these platforms to learn EFL, affecting the classroom atmosphere directly.

This research synthesis analyzes the impact of virtual educational platforms on interaction in EFL virtual classes focusing on how teachers and students use different platforms to communicate effectively in virtual classrooms and how teachers' and students' attitudes are influenced.

This research synthesis consists of five chapters. The first chapter includes the study description: background, problem statement, rationale, research questions, and general and specific research objectives. In the second chapter, the theoretical framework describes the main concepts, and the literature review analyzes the available information about the impact of virtual educational platforms on interaction in EFL virtual classes. The third chapter explains the methodology used to obtain this study's results. The fourth chapter contains the data analysis divided into four main sections to answer the proposed research question. Finally, the last chapter includes conclusions and recommendations for future investigations.

CHAPTER I

Description of the Research

1.1 Background

During the pandemic, due to the emergency of COVID-19, virtual educational platforms played an essential role in teaching and learning English as a foreign language. EFL learning platforms showed that using them in virtual classrooms was an excellent strategy to increase students' motivation, and it was also a good way for teachers to seek appropriate online EFL learning approaches that provided grades, feedback, and supportive communication skills. (Suharti et al., 2020)

In virtual classrooms, interaction was one of the most challenging obstacles to having good communication between teachers and students; therefore, platforms such as Zoom, Google Forms, and Google Meet were of great help in interacting during the teaching and learning process. According to the author Bailey (2022), video conference platforms in EFL classes supported interaction during the emergency of COVID-19 by providing incentives such as extra points that teachers gave to students. On the other hand, other authors, such as Castillo-Cuesta, et al., (2022), analyzed that using technology allowed teachers to create a learning environment where students and teachers could communicate effectively.

Virtual educational platforms were essential for participants to share material resources, information, and knowledge using English to improve communicative skills. Collaborative work in virtual classrooms appeared when students worked with their partners using authentic material that engaged and motivated them to discuss and share different ideas with the participants. (Castillo-Cuesta et al., 2022). According to Souheyla (2021), students believed that using Zoom increased collaborative work and speaking in the classroom by implementing interactive activities such as discussions or dialogues.

Students' and teachers' perspectives differed during the pandemic because each reality was affected differently. According to Al-Qahtani (2019), teachers' and students' attitudes influence the development of communication skills during virtual classes. For most students, virtual classes helped them feel more comfortable enhancing their speaking abilities and practicing dialogues without feeling shy or embarrassed. On the other hand, teachers agreed that virtual classes created a motivational environment in which students implemented technology to communicate using the language through discussions, blogs, and even chats.

In contrast, Jalilinia (2021) mentioned that online learning was not entirely-desirable because interaction was poor, and students had many limitations in getting-involved in the process.

Meşe and Sevilen (2021) agreed that online education harmed students' motivation due to the lack of social interaction, a mismatch between expectations and content, and organizational problems in learning environments.

While teaching and learning EFL in online classes, teachers dealt with many difficulties when teaching the language. As stated by Meirovitz et al., (2022), a significant number of teachers didn't have enough knowledge about how to use digital tools, so they did not feel confident in using different apps because they did not have enough experience using them as interactive tools. In agreement with Meirovitz et al., (2022); Nugroho et al., (2021) stated that preparing online platform teaching and learning material was time-consuming for teachers. Because of it, teachers were not motivated enough.

Furthermore, the key finding of this study is to determine how interaction can be improved during virtual classes to enhance teachers' and students' communication in learning and teaching English as a foreign language.

1.2 Problem Statement

This research emerges from the necessity to determine how the interaction between teachers and students was affected during online classes when using virtual educational platforms. The research problem focuses on the participants' limitations in online classes. The most common restraints were slow-internet connection, students' different conditions, and particular situations that affected interaction and the learning-teaching process. According to Al-Qahtani, M. (2019), technical issues affected the online classes negatively, especially when all the users were connected simultaneously to the platform. The saturation of virtual educational platforms did not allow students to complete their tasks on time. It caused drawbacks for some of them when they had to upload the given tasks.

On the one hand, Nugroho et al., (2021) stated that one of the challenges encountered by the teachers was unstable internet connection and limited quota. In some cases, teachers had technical issues spotlighting unstable internet connection, so they could not develop the classes properly and effectively. Additionally, Meirovitz et al., (2022) mentioned that teachers did not have experience using technology as a teaching strategy, so many avoided using it in the classroom. For most teachers, the Zoom platform became one of the most popular in the online teaching process of English as a Foreign Language. Teachers learned through tutorials the use of it, allowing them to communicate with their students more effectively by sharing information and class material. Also, it promoted better interaction among participants. Some

teachers feared using other educational virtual platforms because they weren't trained enough.

On the other hand, Rakaj (2022) argued that the significant problems that some students experienced during the educational process during the pandemic were the lack of proper interaction and concentration and the lack of computer skills. Students' attention was affected because many students had distractions in class. The most common distractions for students were social media, texting, television, and family. All these caused a lack of attention and participation during virtual sessions.

In addition, Souheyla (2021) noted that the lack of interest, the lack of knowledge in the use of different applications, and in some cases, anxiety on the part of the students were significant obstacles during virtual education, resulting in a lack of motivation to learn English.

For these reasons, the research will focus on determining the impact of Virtual Educational Platforms on the interaction between teachers and students by considering the development of communicative skills due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Considering the problem, this study may help identify the best solutions to face the limitations presented during the online educational process.

1.3 Rationale Justification

Virtual Educational Platforms are new tools to improve communication skills among students and teachers worldwide. During the COVID-19 pandemic, platforms were used to continue with the educational process of teaching and learning English as a foreign language among the participants. Due to the use of these platforms, some studies have analyzed the positive and negative effects of the interactive environment in virtual classrooms.

Most studies on how interaction was affected during online classes obtained findings through questionnaires such as Google Forms, surveys, interviews, and observations. These findings had negative and positive effects on the learning-teaching process by showing that teachers and students felt comfortable having online virtual classes anytime and anywhere. Participants' main obstacles to interact were slow-internet connection, students' socio-economic condition, and other particular situations.

According to Suharti et al., (2020), students' and teachers' engagement in EFL online classrooms took into account behavior and emotions during the learning process. These authors show that virtual educational platforms helped students feel confident in using English to communicate and interact with peers. It provided positive effects during the emergency of COVID-19. Furthermore, they also showed that teachers felt motivated to use different tools

to assign homework, create motivational environments for students, and share material with colleagues to continue teaching EFL.

This research will help describe how the interaction was affected between teachers and students by using these platforms to learn and teach English. It will highlight the positive and negative effects on interaction, communication skills, and the participants' attitudes in EFL classrooms to find possible solutions to future challenges that virtual educational platforms will contribute to EFL's learning and teaching process.

1.4 Research Questions

- 1) How does using virtual educational platforms influence interaction in EFL virtual classes?
- 2) How does the use of virtual educational platforms affect the development of students' communicative skills?
- 3) What are students' and teachers' attitudes on the influence of virtual educational platforms in EFL classrooms?
- 4) How to face future challenges that virtual platforms will arise when using them in the learning and teaching process of EFL?

1.5 Objectives

General Objective

To determine the impact of virtual educational platforms on interaction in EFL virtual classes.

General objective

To determine the impact of virtual educational platforms on interaction in EFL virtual classes.

Specific objectives

- To analyze how the use of virtual educational platforms affects interaction in EFL classes.
- To determine the changes in students' communicative skills development when virtual educational platforms are implemented in EFL virtual classes.
- To evaluate students' and teachers' attitudes about the impact of virtual educational platforms in EFL virtual classes.
- To find possible solutions to face future challenges that virtual educational platforms will cause in the learning and teaching process of EFL.

CHAPTER II

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

2.1 Educational virtual platforms

According to Alahmadi and Alraddadi (2020), during the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual educational platforms helped to continue the educational process by including some online learning approaches such as virtual classrooms, video conferencing and blended learning to supplement the traditional method with technology and online resources. Virtual classes implemented different educational virtual platforms that were useful for sharing content, reinforcing interaction between teachers and students, and giving feedback immediately during the teaching and learning process of EFL. Souheyla (2021) says that virtual educational platforms, incredibly Zoom, allow students to have asynchronous learning, which means they can learn at any time of the day using online material. As a result, platforms helped students to face the different challenges during the virtual classes of EFL.

Suharti et al. (2020) mentioned that online language learning platforms (virtual educational platforms) were an effective method in the learning and teaching process of EFL by focusing on specific points of students' engagement, such as behavior, emotion, participation, and perception. Castillo-Cuesta et al. (2022) stated that virtual educational platforms, also known as virtual workspaces, are helpful for teachers and students. Additionally, these platforms enhance collaborative work among students and allow teachers to create positive environments in the virtual classroom. Virtual educational platforms are technological tools applied during the COVID-19 pandemic to provide information and make an excellent communicative and interactive environment between teachers and students (Ly et al., 2021).

2.2 Interaction

According to Xhaferi and Xhaferri (2021), interaction was the principal element in teaching and learning EFL in virtual classrooms because it helped to increase students' motivation by promoting communication between teachers and students. Castillo-Cuesta et al. (2022) found that interaction allowed students to have interpersonal and accessible communication that helped them fearlessly share their thoughts and knowledge. Likewise, interaction focused on collaborative work through different activities in virtual educational platforms, which allowed students to engage with the classes.

Danial et al. (2021) stated that interaction in EFL virtual classrooms helped students to notice the development of their English skills to create a better communicative environment with their teachers by using the language and feeling confident. Interaction was a critical element in virtual classrooms that contributed to English learning by allowing students and teachers to communicate effectively through body language or speaking activities to share ideas, thoughts, and new knowledge (Alahmadi & Alraddadi, 2021).

2.3 Teachers' and Students' Attitudes

Learners' attitudes refer to how they perceive the learning environment in EFL virtual classrooms taking into account their achievements when students are learning the language (Hodges et al., 2020, cited in Cancino & Avila, 2021). Rachmah (2020) stated that students' attitudes toward their learning preferences in EFL virtual classes are focused on the communicative environment and engagement among participants. Rakaj (2022) analyzed that students' attitudes in EFL classrooms concentrated on technological and communicative skills, personality, and motivation. Famularsih (2020) analyzed students' attitudes toward using virtual educational platforms during the pandemic, classifying these attitudes in positive and negative responses. The positive reactions were observed in the proper use of learning tools and interaction. In contrast, the negative reactions significantly impacted the number of tasks and the problems caused by the internet connection.

Ly et al. (2021) claimed that teachers' attitudes focused on the perception they had when they used virtual educational platforms to provide information and create a collaborative environment in which students had the opportunity to use English during the class. Teachers' attitudes were also influenced by the different platforms they used. Meirovitz et al., (2022) explained that teachers' attitudes refer to the beliefs that teachers had in their knowledge about the use, advantages, and disadvantages of educational virtual platforms in EFL virtual classrooms before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.4 Impact

The COVID-19 pandemic occurred in a sudden and completely unprepared situation, and as a consequence, teachers and students had no other option than online learning. Modern education replaced traditional education; teachers and students were trained on how to use the new technologies and platforms. Even though the transition from face-to-face classes to virtual classes followed a process, EFL students negatively and positively impacted learning development due to the pandemic (Mabrook, 2020).

According to Castillo-Cuesta et al. (2022), this teaching and learning modality produces different challenges among the participants, such as isolation, lack of confidence, and self-learning skills. Consequently, the shift from conventional learning to online teaching causes a lack of social interaction in the online environment. Jalininia (2021) refers to the impact of EFL classes as a discouraging environment due to the effects of the pandemic on teachers' and students' life and mental health.

2.5 EFL virtual classes

According to Gonzalez and Louis (2018), EFL virtual classes are an online learning process assisted by electronic devices requiring an internet connection. Since the onset of COVID-19, virtual classes provided a wide range of tools to facilitate and develop learning, teaching, and communicative processes. According to Nugroho et al. (2021), one of the primary needs to conduct online EFL virtual classes is internet access and network connection. During the process, participants face communication issues due to many problems, such as connectivity, platform issues, difficulty accessing class, and problems downloading materials.

Teachers urged students to use various virtual learning resources to apply synchronous and asynchronous classroom interaction to deal with pandemic challenges. There were numerous online video conference platforms such as Google Meet, Cisco Webex Meetings, and Microsoft Teams. Nevertheless, Zoom was the primary tool used during the COVID-19 pandemic for online teaching. "Zoom offers various compelling features for teachers, such as live audio and video chat, a digital whiteboard, screen sharing, and uploading instructional materials" (Al-Samiri, 2021).

In a recent study conducted by Al-Qahtani (2019), EFL virtual classes enhanced learning communication skills, particularly in the following aspects: confidence increase, better communication skills, and more chances to participate in class. Jalilinia (2021) mentions that online classes were not as useful as face-to-face classes because participants lacked interaction and motivation.

2.6 Communication Skills

Gikandi et al. (2011) stated that communication skills in virtual EFL classes refer to the messages passed between the learner and the instructor through electronic media. Bailey (2022) claimed that learner-learner participation is critical to achieving learning goals such as target language and communication skills. Even though online learning

helps students improve their language skills, the teachers' presence is still considered an indispensable factor in acquiring communication skills (Nugroho et al., 2020).

Souheyla (2021) claimed that students recognize the benefits of Zoom sessions in an EFL environment, such as allowing teachers to design activities that fit with the students' needs in distance learning; thus, the participants can improve language skills such as writing and speaking.

According to Suharti et al. (2020), students achieved 21st-century communicative skills such as translating, problem-solving, and sharing information among participants during the pandemic. Similarly, Souheyla (2021) mentioned that students became autonomous and successful learners by developing their language skills through EFL virtual classes. Therefore, students reveal positive attitudes when they use technological devices instead of when students write.

Wright (2021) stated that EFL teachers nowadays can teach online, deliver presentations, provide online practice for students, use electronic versions of coursebooks, and carry out assessments. On the other hand, the listener's loss of the speaker's visual input in an EFL language is a disadvantage since face-to-face communication is necessary to develop communicative skills (Al-Samiri, 2021). Likewise, participants feel drained and exhausted due to extensive exposure to the screen of technological devices after their classes (Wiederhold, 2020).

Literature Review

This section presents a review of twenty studies considered in this research synthesis. They address the impact of virtual educational platforms in EFL virtual classrooms focusing on the influence of these platforms on interaction, communication, and teachers' and students' attitudes. To explain these issues, this chapter has been divided into four sections.

3.1. The influence of virtual educational platforms on interaction in EFL virtual classes.

Many virtual educational platforms are used during virtual classes to follow the process of teaching and learning English as a foreign language. According to Alahmadi and Alraddadi (2020), using virtual educational platforms improved the interaction between teachers and students because they feel more confident in using the language in online classes. Teachers and students could face the fear of interacting in English, so they feel motivated to use the language to communicate and share ideas with others. The authors mentioned that shy people could overcome the obstacle of interacting using the language academically and for personal purposes.

On the one hand, Bailey (2022) mentioned that interaction through videoconferences in virtual classes is not the same as in regular classes since students only interact when there is a reward, such as extra points for their participation. Furthermore, Xhaferi and Xhaferri (2021) showed that assessing interaction in virtual classrooms helps students to practice the language and develop their skills. As a result, they feel motivated and confident in using English to share information, ask questions, and even talk to their peers.

Souheyla (2021) mentioned that students lack human interaction when using virtual educational platforms due to the lack of knowledge about using technology to learn. Despite the lack of experience with technology to develop an excellent teaching-learning process, students and teachers feel motivated to interact in the virtual classroom orally or in writing through chat.

3.2. The effects of virtual educational platforms on developing students' communication skills.

Some research has focused on how using virtual educational platforms helps create a communicative environment in EFL virtual classrooms. Hence, Al-Qahtani (2019) says that virtual platforms facilitate and improve the development of communication skills in students. The author mentioned the perspectives of two sides: teachers and students, taking into account the use of virtual platforms to help students to develop the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and the creation of an environment in which students feel confident to communicate their ideas and discuss with their partners using English.

Educational virtual platforms improve teachers' and students' communication in EFL virtual classrooms, allowing them to have a space where they can practice English and use it to interact with each other anywhere and anytime. Learners show positive responses when using virtual platforms to develop their communicative skills. Still, in some cases, the poor connection is a limitation in creating a sociable environment (Alkathiri et al. 2021). Additionally, Bawanti and Arifani (2021) claimed that virtual platforms, especially Zoom, allow teachers and students to create a space through video conferences to continue teaching and learning English communicatively. This space helps pupils to gain more confidence to face their fear of using the language in different contexts. On the contrary, Souheyla (2021) concluded that during Zoom sessions, the atmosphere is not communicative due to the lack of experience with the platforms, so teachers' pay more attention to the operation of their devices than their students.

3.3. Students' and teachers' attitudes about the influence of virtual educational platforms in EFL classrooms

In this next section, this synthesis will emphasize the comparison of different attitudes that students and teachers had in EFL virtual classes; subsequently, it will analyze the influence of these platforms in EFL classrooms.

According to the quantitative study researched by Erarslan and Topkaya (2017), students did not spend quality time in front of their electronic devices to complete certain activities that online virtual platforms demanded. This study used the COMPLEQ (Comparative Learning Environment Questionnaire) to investigate students' different attitudes. As Wright (2017) specified, students did not believe online classes were helpful. Thus, the participants preferred face-to-face classes because they lacked interaction with their classmates and teachers, making them feel incurious and disinterested in the online tasks. Evidence illustrates that weak textual interaction among the participants induced the origin of students' negative attitudes about Zoom. Ambiguity and misinterpretation when students used instant messages to communicate were the main factors that changed the participants' optimistic beliefs about EFL virtual platforms.

On the other hand, some students adopted a positive attitude towards online classes. These participants believed virtual platforms were more convenient because self-paced learning allows flexibility, especially when completing assignments within a specific time frame. As stated by Srichanyachon (2014), students who had a positive attitude about using the Internet for learning were more optimistic at the moment they had to learn how to use virtual platforms to keep studying.

Furthermore, chat texts increase interaction among the participants improving writing skills. Therefore, EFL virtual platforms such as Zoom helped students to develop autonomous learning and to boost their attitude toward managing their studies (Thumnong, 2020).

In the same way, other virtual platforms such as Google Meet, Cisco, and Webex allowed teachers "to display class objectives, activities, and assignments in an orderly, focused, a productive and transparent manner for students, teachers, and administrators" (p. 11). McCloskey et al. (2013) considered that EFL classes in Zoom sessions were for teachers because they could create different types of activities appropriate for students' needs.

Cabangacala et al. (2021) conducted a study on the different attitudes college learners adopt towards online learning; the results showed that participants' perception of online education was related to their skills and abilities in technology.

It is essential to state that participants who had developed technology skills interacted and exchanged more information than students with basic communicative skills, leading them to post on EFL platforms without problem. Accordingly, these participants were one step ahead and felt satisfied using EFL virtual platforms.

3.4 Possible solutions for facing interaction problems among students and teachers in EFL virtual platforms

Bundick et al. (2014) stated that EFL virtual platforms motivated and engaged students to learn in a more entertaining way. This motivation leads to respectful relationships and interaction among their classmates and teacher. However, one of the main issues that participants faced during the COVID-19 pandemic was interaction problems. Therefore, in this last section, the study will show different scenarios of how EFL students perceive interaction and how teachers could improve it.

A study by Xhaferi and Xhaferri (2021) mentioned that one factor that leads to significant interaction is leaving the camera on; this way, students are obliged to interact in class. On the other hand, teachers could observe if they were paying attention or not. Teachers used many strategies to boost student interaction, such as different activities during all stages of learning (beginning, during, and at the end of the class). Teachers should use varied online activities at different lesson stages to keep interaction among the participants. First, teachers should frequently call students by name and try to keep them involved during class.

Moreover, discussion and analysis by using online videos were essential tools. Students watched the video, discussed it with peers, and analyzed the main idea. Consequently, face-to-face learning was changed into online learning, where teachers acted as facilitators.

Indeed, online presentations were beneficial. Teachers played an important role because they had to teach their students how to share and present material. Eventually, students had the opportunity to deal with different challenges teachers had when they taught a course by using online virtual platforms.

By contrast, due to poor or lack of internet connection, teachers recorded the lesson and sent their students the recording. In this way, students with technological problems had the facility to watch the class whenever possible. According to Xhaferi and Xhaferri (2021), providing seminars and training to teachers is one of the essential elements that should be considered to improve online teaching interaction.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

To carry out this research, the methodology used was research synthesis which is defined by Cooper et al. (2009) as "the conjunction of a particular set of literature review characteristics" (p.6). A literature review was completed by analyzing 20 articles to obtain specific information related to the topic. The academic databases used for this research were Google Scholar, Redalyc, Research Gate, Semantic Scholar, iJET, CORE, Academic Search, SCOPUS, Zotero, ProQuest, Scielo, and JSTOR.

The articles used to support this research synthesis were chosen considering the following inclusion criteria. First, the studies included empirical evidence, which contains information about the impact of virtual educational platforms on interaction in EFL virtual classes. Second, these studies could be quantitative or qualitative. Finally, the articles included in this research must be published from 2013 up to now, and they should be written in English to answer the research questions focused on EFL virtual classes.

The selected keywords for this research are a) educational virtual platforms, b) interaction, c) attitudes, d) impact, e) EFL virtual classes, and f) communicative skills. These words facilitated access to the information needed to complete the research.

CHAPTER IV

Data Analysis

To analyze the twenty articles used in this research synthesis, chapter four is divided into four main sections that attempt to answer the following research questions: 1) How does using virtual educational platforms influence interaction in EFL virtual classes? How does the use of virtual educational platforms affect the development of students' communication skills? 3) What are students' and teachers' attitudes on the influence of virtual educational platforms in EFL classrooms? and 4) How to face future challenges that virtual platforms will arise when using them in the learning and teaching process of EFL?

4.1 The Influence of virtual educational platforms on Interaction in EFL virtual classes

To answer the first question of the research synthesis. Table 1 contains the number of articles analyzed to determine the influence of virtual educational platforms on interaction in EFL virtual classes according to the participants and the positive or negative effects on teachers' and students' interaction.

Table 1

Influence of virtual educational platforms on interaction in EFL virtual classes

Authors	Participants		Interaction effects	
	Teachers	Students	Positive	Negative
Alahmadi and Alraddadi (2020)		X	X	
Bailey (2022)	X	X		X
Danial et al. (2021)	X		X	X
Oraif and Elyas (2021)	X		X	
Souheyla (2021)		X	X	X
Xhaferi and Xhaferri (2021)	X	X	X	

In this research synthesis six of the twenty studies are analyzed to answer the first research question: in three articles, teachers and students were participants of the research (Bailey, 2021; Xhaferi & Xhaferri, 2021; Danial et al., 2021), and in the other two, only the students were part of (Alahmadi, & Alraddadi, 2020; Souheyla, 2021). Each study used different methods to collect the obtained information, and as a result, researchers showed that interaction during EFL virtual classes had positive and negative effects.

Alahmadi and Alraddadi (2020) carried out their research in a preparatory school with three classes of English A2-level by using a questionnaire that helped them show the impact of virtual educational platforms during teaching and learning English. The questionnaire includes questions that focus on how interaction occurred in EFL virtual classrooms, and the results demonstrate that students are satisfied with using virtual educational platforms to interact. One of the reasons could be that they have enough time to share ideas or information with their classmates and teachers. Alahmadi and Alraddai (2020) concluded that the impact of virtual educational platforms is positive due to the confidence that virtual platforms create when students use the language to communicate their ideas, answer questions, and talk to their classmates.

According to Bailey (2022), who used a cross-sectional survey for his research, the interaction during EFL virtual classes is not entirely positive because the students did not communicate with each other for any matter, and most of the time, they interacted only with the teacher to obtain good grades. Additionally, Xhaferi and Xhaferri (2021) conducted research in which they used an online questionnaire to analyze students' and teachers' opinions about interaction in EFL virtual classes. The authors stated that teachers and students think interaction is an essential factor during the teaching and learning of English, not only to raise grades or obtain them but also to create a motivational environment in which learners develop the language communicatively and entertainingly.

Moreover, Danial, et al., (2021) analyzed how virtual educational platforms affect interaction in EFL virtual classrooms, and they stated that interaction is a factor that should always be present in English classes because interaction helps to create a communicative environment in which teachers encourage students to use and develop language significantly. According to the authors, using these educational platforms also had certain challenges when teachers and students tried to interact. The problems focus on students' fear of using the language, lack of vocabulary knowledge to express themselves in specific situations, and even students' fear of being able to demonstrate their skills and weaknesses in English.

According to Oraif and Elyas (2021), teachers create an interactive environment by using virtual educational platforms entertainingly. The participants, especially shy beginners, feel confident using English to participate inside and outside the classroom. Additionally, motivation effectively enhances students' participation and communication with their teachers and classmates when they share ideas about the topics taught in the class and topics of different interests. Interaction is also higher if students' emotions are considered in the classrooms.

Souheyla (2021) designed structured interviews and semi-structured questionnaires for his study. He focused on how teachers and students react to virtual educational platforms especially Zoom, to create interactive ways to follow the teaching and learning process. The results of Souheyla's study show that using virtual platforms in EFL classrooms benefits teachers and students when interacting, even though some participants affirm that the lack of training for using these platforms affects them to follow the process correctly.

4.2 The effects of virtual educational platforms on developing students' communication skills.

In this research synthesis, four of the twenty analyzed studies focused on the effect of virtual educational platforms on the development of students' communicative skills. Each study examined teachers' and students' perspectives based on the development of communicative skills using EFL.

Table 2

Effects of virtual educational platforms on the development of students' communication skills

Authors	Participants		Communicative skills	
	Teachers	Students	Positive effects	Negative effects
Al-Qahtani (2019)	X	X	X	
Alkathiri et al. (2021)		X	X	X
Bawanti and Arifani (2021)		X	X	
Souheyla (2021)		X		X
Ta'amneh (2021)		X	X	

The studies applied different methods to obtain their results showing positive and negative effects on creating a communicative environment in teaching and learning English (Al-Qahtani, 2019; Alkathiri et al., 2021; Bawanti and Arifani, 2021; Souheyla, 2021; Ta'amneh 2021.)

Al-Qahtani (2019) applied two paper-based questionnaires to fifteen teachers and fifteen students by looking for the participants' perspectives on using virtual educational platforms to enhance communication skills during EFL virtual classes. The results indicated that most teachers and students feel satisfaction when they use educational platforms to communicate interactively in English virtual classrooms due to some aspects, such as time availability, how teachers can give feedback, and creating a participative environment.

Additionally, Alkathiri et al. (2021), using a questionnaire, obtained positive and negative results on the use of virtual educational platforms when teachers tried to create a communicative environment in EFL virtual classes. The authors explained that students feel motivated when they use virtual educational platforms as a communicative tool. Still, they also think the lack of technological experience causes challenges while learning English.

According to Bawanti and Arifani (2021), using virtual educational platforms helps students develop their speaking skills. As a result, a communicative environment is created to enhance interaction between teachers and students. Conversely, one of the five articles (Souheyla, 2021) found that virtual educational platforms are not completely useful if teachers and students do not implement them meaningfully in EFL virtual classes. Informal structured interviews and semi-structured questions were implemented to obtain that students' and teachers' attitudes directly influence the functioning of virtual educational platforms in the classroom. Therefore, we may conclude that using virtual educational platforms is functional to improve students' communication skills if teachers and students implement them creatively, innovatively, and in a beneficial way.

Ta'amneh (2021) mentioned that communication skills were affected directly during EFL virtual classes allowing students to use critical thinking to share with their peers and teachers. How virtual educational platforms were used during the teaching and learning process of English improved communication during the sessions. As a result, the relationship between teachers and students was better in solving academic and personal problems.

4.3 Students' and teachers' attitudes about the influence of virtual educational platforms in EFL classrooms.

Table 3

Students' and teachers' attitudes about the influence of virtual educational platforms in EFL classrooms

Authors	Participants		Attitudes	
	Teachers	Students	Positive	Negative
Faiqoh (2023)		X	X	X
Souheyla (2021)	X	X		X
Srichanyachon (2014)		X	X	
Ta'amneh (2021)		X	X	
Thumnong (2020)	X	X	X	
Wright (2017)		X	X	

In the research by Wright (2017), which comprised 112 students, he determined that 58% preferred face-to-face lessons and only 37.5% chose online classes. According to the results of Wright's study, most students strongly agreed that they acquired an enhanced understanding and reasoning during face-to-face lessons. The classroom environment stands out because students and teachers mention they felt happier and more relaxed by being in contact with their classmates; this factor also influences focusing on the subject.

Srichanyachon (2014) conducted a study where 198 students participated in the data collection. A questionnaire with a five-rating scale was used to collect the data. This study specifically analyzed the level of attitudes toward using the Internet as an essential learning tool. It revealed that using the Internet helps learners gather more information and consider EFL platforms as positive learning tools. This study highlights an average mean of attitude of $x = 4.32$, and the standard derivation corresponds to a value of 0.62. This leads us to interpret that the Internet influences a positive attitude for students in a sensible way because there wasn't any statically significant alteration in students' attitudes between students who owned a computer and those who didn't own one.

Thumnong (2020) collected individual interviews with 11 students, in which the validity of this study was conducted by cross-checking. The findings revealed that most participants had a similar attitude when they attended online classes as in the traditional classroom. An important aspect to be considered in this study is that students showed a positive attitude because EFL virtual classes allowed students to have real-time interaction regardless of the location of each student. In this study, educational platforms such as Zoom were analyzed, taking into account an essential feature of this software known as Raise Hand. The participants well accepted this feature because it allowed the students to grab the host's attention, but the students didn't directly interrupt the teacher. In addition, Ta'amneh (2021) agreed that students consider EFL virtual classes to improve self-confidence in the participants; 19% of participants in this study agree that online classes can also be interesting and help students achieve better grades and enhance their communication skills.

In addition, a study conducted by Faiqoh et al. (2023) used a qualitative approach to analyze 30 university students' attitudes in EFL virtual classes during COVID-19 pandemic. This study in Indonesia revealed that the participants presented a positive attitude towards EFL platforms only if they were interested in the target language. Indeed, according to the author mentioned before, attitude is relevant when a student learns another language.

On the other hand, according to Souheyla (2021), findings demonstrated that within Zoom's limitations, 70% of students consider EFL virtual classes intensive; therefore, a lack of motivation and interactivity exists among the participants.

4.4 Possible solutions for facing interaction problems among students and teachers in EFL virtual platforms

Interaction problems among students and teachers have resulted in many challenges for English teachers and students when using EFL virtual platforms, so it is important to consider the different solutions to face these challenges.

Table 4

Solutions for facing interaction problems among students and teachers in EFL virtual platforms

Authors	Participants		Attitudes	
	Teachers	Students	Positive	Negative
Hansen- Thomas (2016)				X
Havwini (2019)		X		X
Meirovitz and Zur (2020)	X		X	
Nugroho (2020)	X	X	X	
Valtonen (2019)	X		X	X

As Havwini (2019) mentioned, students' engagement in virtual classes is relatively low because students instead prefer authentic learning to online learning. Even though students accepted personalized audio-lecture, the participants chose a traditional face-to-face classroom where many activities can be done to share ideas and grab their attention. On the other hand, during virtual classes, teachers mainly focused on grammar, structure, and vocabulary activities.

Hansen-Thomas et al. (2016) stated that teachers' technological development and knowledge are critical when interacting with students, especially during online sessions or in EFL Virtual Platforms. Pedagogy and technology go by hand regarding the interaction between the participants.

According to Valtonen et al. (2019), offering training courses that include digital tools to teachers is necessary to achieve success during the class. Even though instruction programs improve teachers' knowledge, these courses cannot be considered long-term solutions to challenges all facing interaction problems during class. Teachers and students should be independent and autonomous learners throughout the process.

As stated by Meirovitz et al. (2022), the use of digital tools must be taught according to learning and teaching objectives. One of the possible solutions this study provides for facing interaction

problems among the participants are that teachers should first adapt to the new tools and combine them with a pedagogical objective during the class to achieve optimal use in the online classroom. Furthermore, Nugroho et al. (2020) suggest that teachers should be able to create activities that are considered student-centered and not teacher-centered. Creating only teacher-centered activities makes students easily bored because an online session should be interactive and not tedious for participants. At the same time, teachers agree that digital learning is necessary to create outstanding material and face interaction problems during online sessions.

CHAPTER V

Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

This research synthesis aims to determine virtual educational platforms' impact on interaction in EFL virtual classes focusing on developing communication skills, teachers' and students' attitudes to achieve possible solutions. According to the data analyzed, using virtual educational platforms in EFL virtual classrooms has shown positive results on interaction among participants.

Authors like Bailey (2022), Xhaferi & Xhaferri (2021), and Danial et al., (2021) analyzed teachers and students in EFL virtual classrooms, and they realized that the use of Virtual Educational Platforms is effective if the participants are trained to use them. Therefore, the participants showed confidence and satisfaction when interacting in virtual classes because teachers have enough time to create a communicative environment where students can share with their peers to develop the language meaningfully.

Additionally, the use of these platforms not only has a positive influence on interaction but also helps to develop communication skills between teachers and students. Authors such as Al-Qahtani (2019), Bawanti and Arifani (2021), and Ta'amneh (2021) agree that time is a relevant factor when the participants are in online virtual sessions due to the possibility that teachers and students can communicate anywhere and anytime. Communication skills are enhanced when teachers and students use virtual educational platforms because these platforms allow participants to exchange ideas, information, and sources to achieve positive results in EFL classes by implementing different educational platforms creatively and beneficially.

In addition, some studies carried out by Srichanyachon (2014), Thumnong (2020), and Ta'amneh (2021) consider EFL platforms as effective learning. Positive attitudes in teachers and students are shown while interaction is developed using these platforms. As a result, students' and teachers' attitudes towards online sessions were environmentally practical because it helped them to raise their self-confidence to interact during classes when using the language. Also, these platforms motivated students to develop their academic and language skills better.

On the other hand, some authors, such as Bailey (2022) and Souheyla (2021), agree that using EFL Virtual platforms also negatively affects the interaction between the participants due to the lack of teachers training in using the platforms in the educational field. Another negative factor during virtual classes is that students only interact and provide answers to teachers to

obtain extra points, so if teachers do not motivate students properly, a lack of communication occurs.

Even though virtual educational platforms have positive effects in the learning and teaching process, negative results lead us to find possible solutions. During online sessions, it has been demonstrated that memorization is not a priority in learning and teaching English, leading teachers to implement new methods and strategies that help students develop different language skills significantly and creatively. Teachers must be aware that each student has different learning styles and should be able to find a balance between academic and personal evolution. Furthermore, training courses should be implemented in different institutions nationwide to enhance teachers' and students' technological abilities in using EFL virtual platforms in classes and promote self-learning in each participant.

5.2 Recommendations

As stated in this research synthesis, most of the articles demonstrate that virtual educational platforms could be beneficial if teachers and students know how to take advantage of these platforms to improve interaction in EFL classes, thus it is necessary to state the following recommendations for future research.

Teachers and students should consider two essential aspects to follow the teaching and learning of EFL: a) access to online resources and b) participants' reality during EFL classes. The first aspect allows the participants to feel motivated and part of the class; as a result, they can communicate effectively using the language to create a better environment. Meanwhile, by considering the second aspect, teachers and students could reinforce their relationship by understanding different realities from each other.

More studies about the reality of teaching English as a Foreign Language in Ecuadorian classrooms should be developed by researchers considering that teaching and learning English in Ecuador is not given enough importance in education as it should be. Additionally, the government should implement technological devices in schools, and they should create more spaces where students and teachers could have free access to the Internet and could be able to use different platforms to enhance their knowledge.

Furthermore, schools and high schools should provide teachers and students with training programs that include basic manuals on using different Virtual Educational Platforms, leading participants to achieve better results during the EFL teaching and learning process. This way, EFL platforms could enhance teachers and students to create a productive and interactive environment.

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