**UNIVERSITY OF EL SALVADOR**
**SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES**
**FOREIGN LANGUAGE DEPARTMENT**

**TÍTULO**

# EDUCATIONAL TOOLS FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING IN VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENTS

# HERRAMIENTAS DIDÁCTICAS PARA LA ENSEÑANZA DE IDIOMAS EXTRANJEROS EN ENTORNOS VIRTUALES

**PRESENTED BY:**

| **ESTUDIANTE:** | **CARNET:** |
|---|---|
| XIOMARA MARILYN AVALOS MARROQUIN | (AM08074) |
| KAREN FIDELINA ACEVEDO ALVARADO | (AA09107) |
| ERIKA YESENIA GUADALUPE ORTIZ | (OO09017) |

**INFORME FINAL DE CURSO DE ESPECIALIZACIÓN: "ADMINISTRACIÓN DE AMBIENTES VIRTUALES PARA LA ENSEÑANZA DE IDIOMAS EXTRANJEROS EN ENTORNOS VIRTUALES".**

**IN ORDER TO OBTAIN THE DEGREE OF:**
BACHELOR OF ARTS IN MODERN LANGUAGES WITH A MAJOR IN FRENCH AND ENGLISH.

**LIC: BLANCA ALICIA MENJÍVAR GONZÁLEZ, MSE**
SPECIALIZATION PROFESSOR.

**LIC: MIGUEL ANGEL CARRANZA CAMPOS, MSE**
GENERAL COORDINATOR OF THE GRADUATION PROCESS.

CIUDAD UNIVERSITARIA, MAY 2ND, 2022

**AUTHORITIES OF THE UNIVERSITY OF EL SALVADOR**

MSC. ROGER ARMANDO ARIAS ALVARADO
**RECTOR**

PHD. RAÚL ERNESTO AZCÚNAGA LÓPEZ
**ACADEMIC VICE RECTOR**

ING. JUAN ROSA QUINTANILLA
**ADMISTRATIVE VICE RECTOR**

ING. FRANCISCO ANTONIO ALARCÓN SANDOVAL
**SECRETARY GENERAL**

**AUTHORITIES OF SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES**

MSC. OSCAR WUILMAN HERRERA RAMOS
**DEAN**

MSC. SANDRA LORENA BENAVIDES DE SERRANO
**VICE-DEAN**

MSC. JUAN CARLOS CRUZ CUBÍAS
**SECRETARY**

**AUTHORITIES OF THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE DEPARTMENT**

MSD. ANA GRACE GÓMEZ ALEGRÍA
**HEAD OF THE FOREIGN LANGUAGES DEPARTMENT**

LIC. MIGUEL ÁNGEL CARRANZA CAMPOS, MsE
**GENERAL COORDINATOR OF THE GRADUATION PROCESS**

LIC. BLANCA ALICIA MENJÍVAR GONZÁLEZ, MSE
**SPECIALIZATION PROFESSOR**

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## ABSTRACT

This report is the product of the activities carried out during the course entitled "Specialization course in the Administration of Virtual Environments for the Teaching and Learning of Foreign Languages". It was developed with the purpose of preparing future language educators to master the work in the virtual classroom by using different platforms to engage students and teachers at the same time. The course was carried out in three different modules. It started in August, 2021 and finished in February, 2022. It was developed exclusively on line due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This course is a new option that substitutes the traditional graduation report. The participants learned about theoretical and practical issues on the matter. They learned to design a virtual classroom, as well as the most useful technological tools used in the teaching and learning of foreign languages. The course, experiences, achievements, and conclusions are presented in this report.



Key words: Digital platform, Educational platform, Independent learner, Interactive video, Learning Analytics, Online assessments, Specialization Course, User feedback, Virtual learning environment.

# I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years and specifically in 2021, the Covid 19 pandemic changed the way students continued their education. Virtual education positioned itself as a new option and this new modality opened and created the spaces of merely traditional education to an education of a virtual nature; in which new technologies and tools offered by the virtual world are used. Technology in language teaching is not new. Indeed, technology has been around in language teaching for decades. The virtual world and technologies have made significant progress in recent years, becoming and positioning themselves in the daily life of human beings as essential for their use and benefits in all activities and areas of human. The educational area is not an exception and great efforts have been made for the significant implementation of education in virtual environments.

Likewise, The University of El Salvador is part of the institutions that are in process of implementing new virtual environments using technological tools in the teaching process; that is why the Department of Languages of the Faculty of Sciences and Humanities promoted the implementation not only of giving continuity to Virtual Education; but also created new options such as degree projects and specializations for their students. The application of the new "SPECIALIZATION COURSE IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENTS FOR THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES" is an example of this, which has allowed students in process of graduating from the Department of Languages, not only to learn from the use of technological tools with this specialization course but also how to make the correct use of them in the process of teaching languages. This present report tells the experiences students went through while being the first cohort in taking the specialization course designed at the Department of Foreign Languages.

## II. OBJECTIVES

### General Objective:

- To get familiar with theoretical information about technological tools and design digital materials to use in teaching and learning foreign languages.

### Specific Objectives:

- To create a virtual classroom using a Learning Management System available on the Internet.
- To integrate all the tools learned in the specialization course in a virtual environment.
- To define the terms associated with technological tools for educational purposes, and for the development of synchronous and asynchronous activities.

# III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

New ways of communicating are coming across as a result of the pandemic of the Covid19. The educational field is the one that has been affected and benefitted. The current pandemic has promoted new ways of teaching and supporting the learning process; that is how the virtual learning environment appeared with the online purpose to make communication easier between teachers and students.

## Covid19 Pandemic.

A mysterious pneumonia surfaced in a Chinese seafood market in December 2019 and spread all around the world. The virus has killed more than 1.6 million people which is why the World Health Organization declared the pandemic a global problem, which was becoming severe, that it was necessary to cut off as part of the measure to avoid more people being infected by the virus. (Taylor, 2021). The global health emergency caused all the countries to work to get under control the virus. Each country has decided what measures they will take to slow the spread of the virus. Some of those measures were: no gatherings of more than 50 people, the school system closed, borders closed, and all domestic flights were halted.

In an effort to bring the virus under control new measures had appeared since the beginning of the pandemic, and El Salvador was not the exception. The government imposed restrictions on its citizens to slow the spread of the virus. One of the measures that impacted the educational field is the suspension of in-person classes, including at universities. This is how the Covid-19 pandemic created new opportunities in the education sector for virtual education programs. (El Salvador- country Commercial guide, 2021-11-05). The educational system in El Salvador showed a need to improve in the technological area which is why new ways of teaching a foreign language became

one of the priorities with the implementation of technological platforms that can make easier the learning process of students.

The virtual learning environment (VLE). has engaged a diverse set of students. Besides, all the students have different backgrounds, skill sets, and preferences for the way they learn. Additionally, students increasingly expect to use new and current technologies in their studies. In this changing educational field several technological tools have appeared to make higher education accessible for everyone overseas. Those tools make easier the learning process, with different features they have. It is easy for teachers to control and manage the learning process, however, it can be challenging to handle, not only for students but also for teachers (Sina Walleit, June- 1 -2021).

**What is a VLE?**

A virtual learning environment is a collection of software tools supporting academic administration, teaching, and research using the Internet. Those technological tools are formed by five main areas: information, content, management communication, and assessment.

It is necessary to take into consideration some of the advantages and disadvantages of the virtual learning environment. Some of the benefits of those technological tools are: communication between tutors and students is easier, delivery of learning resource support for students and materials, assessment with automated marking and immediate feedback, students are able to access these resources at anytime and anywhere; independent learning by creating a responsibility for their own learning.

On the other hand, we can mention some of the disadvantages such as independent learning still needs to be guided and supported, access to hardware can raise issues of equality, and accessibility to online materials also need to be considered.

## WHAT IS LMS (LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM)?

The LMS or Learning Management System is a software application for the administration, documentation, tracking, reporting, automation, and delivery of educational courses, training programs, or learning and development programs (Bradley, V. M. (2021).

The learning management system concept emerged directly from E-learning. The first introduction of the LMS was in the late 1990s. Learning management systems have faced a massive growth in usage due to the emphasis on remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The purpose of LMS delivers and manages all types of content, including video, courses, and documents. In the education and higher education markets, an LMS will include a variety of functionality that is similar to corporate but will have features such as rubrics, teacher and instructor-facilitated learning, a discussion board, and often the use of a syllabus. (Dias & Dinis, 2014; Jung & Huh, 2019; Oakes, 2002). The LMS has some features like: managing courses, users, and roles where teachers can add, text, images, videos, pdfs, tables, links and text formatting, interactive tests, slideshows, etc. Moreover, they can create different types of users, such as teachers, students, parents, visitors, and editors. It helps control which contains a student can access, track studying progress, and engage the student with contact tools. (Jung & Huh, 2019; Watson & Watson, 2012). Teachers can manage courses and modules, enroll students or set up

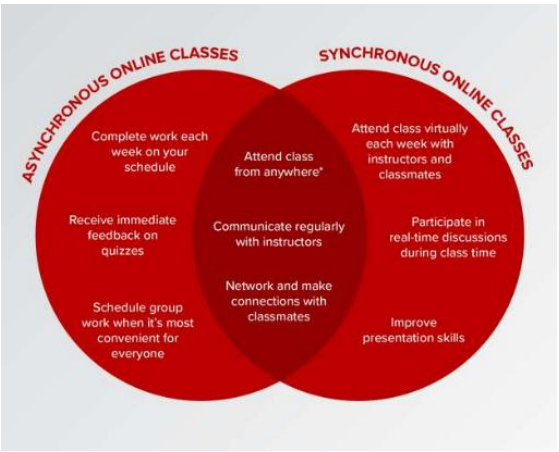
self-enrollment. Some of the concepts related to the learning management system (LMS) are:

**Online assessments:** in which instructors create automatic assessments and assignments for learners, which are accessible and submitted online. Most platforms allow a variety of different question types such as multiple-choice answers; ordering, free text, matching, essay, true or false, fill in the gaps, agreement scale, and offline tasks.

**User feedback:** where students can exchange feedback with teachers and peers. Teachers may create discussion groups to allow students feedback, share their knowledge on topics, and increase the interaction in the course. Students' feedback are instruments that help the teachers to improve their work, helps identify what to add or remove from a course, and ensures students feel comfortable and included.

**Learning Analytics:** in which this system often incorporates dashboards to track student or user progress. They can report on key items such as completion rates, attendance data, and success likelihood.

## SYNCHRONOUS VS ASYNCHRONOUS LEARNING.




The pedagogical knowledge on both synchronous and asynchronous learning, which was discussed online methods of instruction and how learners can adjust their thoughts for online instruction was proposed by (Bonk and Zhang, 2006).

Synchronous vs. asynchronous learning refers to different types of online courses and degree programs. Both options have a few things in common. Both are primarily delivered online, accessible via online course

modules from your own computer or laptop (Asterhan & Schwarz, 2010). Both could be completed from anywhere. Both are flexible options, designed to help all kinds of different students earn their degrees on their own terms. Both synchronous and asynchronous learning options, in some cases, might even be offered by the same program. However, beyond that, they can be a little different.

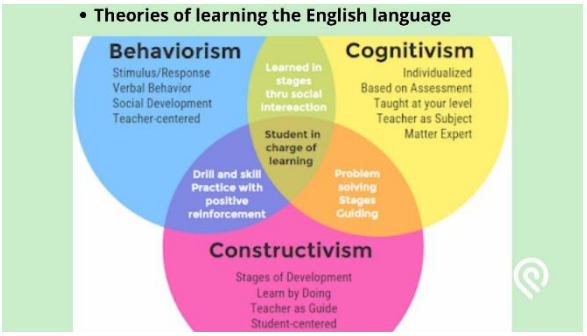
## WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SYNCHRONOUS AND ASYNCHRONOUS CLASSES?

Online learning allows people to study in new and exciting ways, but the best type of online learning comes down to personal preference. Synchronous virtual classrooms operate much like traditional classrooms, with set study schedules and live discussions. Asynchronous classrooms look a little different, as students digest the instruction and communicate with each other on their own time. Fadde, P. J., & Vu, P. (2014).

## IV. DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTIVITIES

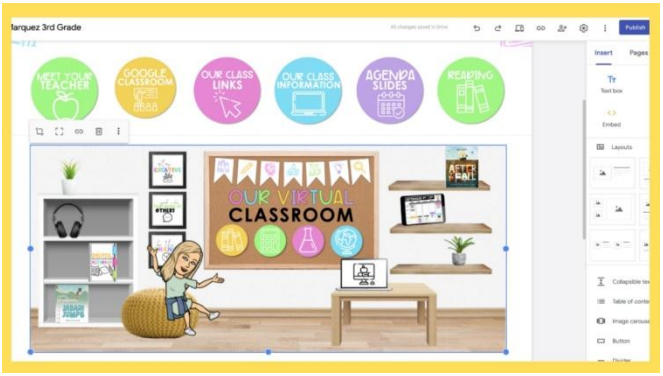
## MODULE 1: ONLINE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING.

In this module, students learned about the fundamentals of online education and its application to English Language Teaching; specifically, the virtual or online teaching approach, like using a LMS (Learning Management System) to set up a virtual classroom and develop asynchronous activities, for instance, Moodle; and use platforms like TEAMS or Meet for synchronous activities.




This module provided participants with the experience of creating virtual classrooms in Learning Management Systems available on the internet. Besides, students analyzed and identified the importance of learning theories for the development of English language teaching methodology in virtual learning environments.

For the development of the academic activities, the teacher promoted the participants to take an active role in the analysis and discussion forums, as well as in the rest of the course activities. The use of tools related to web 2.0 is with the purpose of involving students in their tasks with a change of roles as learners and as facilitators in their virtual classrooms.




The activities of this module were developed online and by using cooperative learning ideas. Interaction and feedback took place between the facilitator and the participants, as well as between participants to participant. An exhaustive reading and content analysis allowed the participants to identify the importance of learning theories and their direct impact on the teaching methodology of the English language in virtual learning environments. Finally, students worked on the creation of a virtual classroom using a Learning Management System from those available on the internet; in addition, they scheduled and carry out synchronous work sessions in TEAMS or MEET.

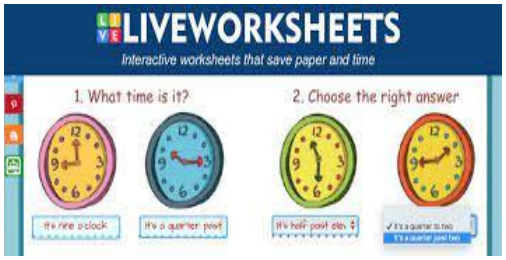
## MODULE 2: EDUCATIONAL APPLICATIONS FOR LEARNING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE.

In this module, students learned the use of different platforms to teach a foreign language. They learned how to communicate in an online environment, which is really important to keep the same standards of behavior online as in real life.

There are several platforms that can be used for a better learning process of a foreign language. Some of the platforms learned during the course: Flipgrid, Edpuzzle, Powtoon, padlet, kahoot, classroomscreen, Nearpod, liveworksheets, and flippity. Those platforms are highly important in a virtual learning environment.

Students were able to create their own accounts where they created prompts called topics, and post video responses to the prompts and replies to each other's videos. This tool can also be used to explain a topic in a short time.

This web-based animation platform allowed students to create animated videos to introduce a topic in the course in order to highlight its relevance. This is a great platform for creating short video presentations including animation, images, designed backgrounds, soundtracks, and voiceover.




Students learned how to use Liveworksheets, which is a tool that allows you to create interactive worksheets for students. These interactive exercises have different formats such as multiple-choice, drag and drop or join the arrows with self-correction. This tool is a good way to motivate students to keep learning.

Students learned the use of the interactive board where they can share images, links, and videos all collated on a virtual wall. This tool is very useful for collaborative work where learners can share their opinion about a topic.

Students learned how to create interactive videos for assessments with immediate feedback, where is possible to add questions along the way of the video. This interactive resource allows learners to engage on their devices on a single screen in the room.

Students learned how to create interactive online videos by embedding multiple-choice questions, or comments on a video. This tool has the option to send the video assignments to students' email addresses by providing either an access code or a link. It also allows you to keep track of how many learners watched the video.

## MODULE 3: DESIGN OF DIDACTIC MATERIALS FOR VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT.

### MODULE DESCRIPTION.

In this module, students learned how to use at least four Web tools for the design of educational materials, and will elaborate materials such as podcasts, online presentations, and videos, among others. As a fundamental part of the culmination of this specialization, students will complete an integrative task through which they will apply the competencies acquired during the three modules.

**PODCASTS**.

Students learned how to put into practice the theory and were able to create a podcast online in order to share educational material in the classroom with the students and help them, teach or illustrate an educational concept in a virtual environment.

**ONLINE PRESENTATIONS**

In this activity, participants were able to learn how to create presentations in different tools such as: (PowerPoint, Google Slides, Canva, Genially,Prezi, Powtoon) putting into practice the theory and their creativity in their PPT creations.

**INTERACTIVE IMAGES.**

In this activity students practiced how to create interactive images with educational purposes and in a creative way; they learned that it was possible to add information, images, links to the different apps, etc. inside of the image, just using the interactive icons inside of the image. This is a new form to present the information in a creative way and engage the students in a virtual environment.

**INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEO.**

In this activity, participants learned how to put into practice the theory and then how to create instructional videos with educational purposes in a virtual environment; for this activity, it was necessary to record the video, upload the video on YouTube, create a channel on YouTube and then share the link in a virtual app.

## V. ACHIEVEMENTS

The specialization ended successfully and covered the goals expected in the specialization course. All the participants were able to understand theoretically and practically all the fundamentals of online education and its application to English Language Teaching**.** Here are presented the achievements, which the participants were able to gather:

- The team learned how to communicate in an online environment, and how to keep a professional interaction with their students or participants, where it is necessary to keep the same rules as in traditional classes such as: punctuality, participation, and respect for other's opinions.
- Participants now can use the different LMS online to create a proper learning environment for different types of needs required by some students. Students at the end of the specialization were able to know what the different LMS are. An LMS allows a teacher to upload assignments, calendars, gradebooks, learning resources, videos, and more.
- The team learned how to manage different technological tools, and how to use them properly in an online environment. How to choose the correct tools according to the activity to develop in each class. Some of the features of these tools were: assessment, feedback, review of the material, and practice.
- The participants were experts in the use of technological tools inside virtual classrooms, in order to facilitate foreign language learning. Students put into practice each of the technological tools learned during each course such as: Google Classroom, Moodle, and google site, among others. Practicing, students mastered each technological tool.

- The team learned how to keep their students engaged in each online class by selecting the correct technological tools according to the type of activity to develop in each session, in that way students were motivated.
- The participants learned how to create and develop the Design of Didactic and educational Materials for Virtual Environments needed to provide excellent synchronous learning. The creation of didactic materials helped the students to have a better idea of which tool was better to use for each level of teaching online; some of the didactic materials were for educational purposes such as: videos, rubrics, podcast, etc.
- The participants learned how to develop original content according to their classroom needs, in order to facilitate the comprehension of specific topics inside of the virtual modality. Students learned how to create didactic materials such as: videos, infographics, podcast, interactive images, etc. In addition, students took into account their age, level, purposes, goals, etc., at the moment to teach in a virtual environment.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

- This course has been useful to challenge conventional ideas to teach a foreign language. The team noticed that education technology can improve the learning process of students and that is why it is important to invest in this type of education. On the other hand, we also noticed the limitation that this can cause in a middle income like our country. Taking into consideration the limitations of some of the learners it is important to consider that not all students will have the same accessibility to those platforms.
- This course of virtual specialization demonstrated that the participants can use all the knowledge acquired in their professional lives and contribute to and help the future generations in virtual environments as a new option in educational areas.
- Updating in a virtual environment is necessary for all areas of our lives, but especially in the education area that involves changes on a daily to facilitate the learning process for both teachers and their students.
- It is important to learn how to manage the time and the information when using technological tools; this can be a key point to make a topic easier to understand.
- The creation of a Google site or any website can support and assure the learning process and provide extra information to learners, to speed up the learning process.
- The use of technological tools can be a good way to motivate students and guide them to be independent learners.

## VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

To the competent authorities of the University of El Salvador from the Department of Foreign Languages these recommendations are suggested in order to help the students in their process of graduation.

- To keep offering the specialization courses in order to help the students to complete their graduation process as soon as possible
- To continue with six- months specialization processes, and to add other courses such as tourism and translation
- To assure students a certificate showing the competence acquired during the specialization in teaching a foreign language in a virtual environment.
- Revise and approve all the processes require to culminate the specialization courses in the Foreign Language Department.

- To keep and share information related to the pedagogic area by the facilitators in the specialization courses in order to help the students of modern languages in how to create lesson plans, rubrics, evaluation systems, and syllabus, among others.

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## GLOSSARY

**Digital platform:** is any electronic tool for communication includes desktop, mobile, social and email software this covers websites and social media.

**Educational platform:** It is a virtual program whose function is to create virtual spaces to share information.

**Independent learner:** is one who can take responsibility for their own learning.

**Interactive video:** is a video that you can interact with. Users can perform some action.

**Learning Analytics:** in which this system often incorporates dashboards to track student or user progress. They can then report on key items such as completion rates, attendance data, and success likelihood.

Learning Management System (LMS): is a software application or web-based technology used to plan, implement and assess a specific learning process. It is used for eLearning practices and, in its most common form, consists of two elements: a server that performs the base functionality and a user interface that is operated by instructors, students, and administrators.

**Online assessments:** in which instructors created automatic assessments and assignments for learners, which are accessible and submitted online. Most platforms allow a variety of different question types such as: one multi-line answer; multiple choice answer; ordering; free text; matching; essay; true or false/yes or no; fill in the gaps; agreement scale and offline tasks.

**Specialization Course:** it is a course of study or major at an academic institution or may refer to the field in which a specialist practices.

**User feedback:** in which students can exchange feedback both with teachers and their peers. Teachers may create discussion groups to allow students feedback, share their knowledge on topics and increase the interaction in course. Students' feedback are instruments which help the teachers to improve their work, helps identify what to add or remove from a course, and ensures students feel comfortable and included.

**Virtual learning environment:** is an online-based platform that offers students and professors digital solutions that enhance the learning experience.

# IX. APPENDIXES

## A. FIRST MODULE: ONLINE TEACHING OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE G01

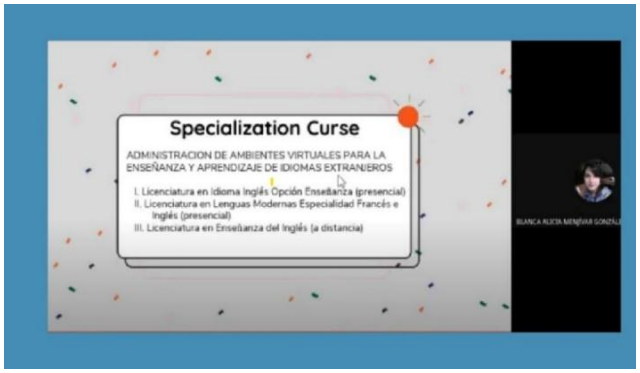
UNIVERSITY OF EL SALVADOR
SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES
FOREIGN LANGUAGE DEPARTMENT

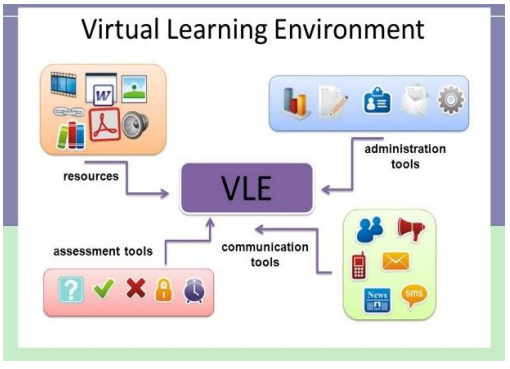
**Module 1: Online English Language Teaching**

**PROGRAM**

**1. GENERAL INFORMATION**

| | |
|---|---|
| 1.1 Module 1: | |
| 1.2 Code: | **EDII114** |
| 1.3 Pre-requisite: | **None** |
| 1.4 Academic Credits: | **3** |
| 1.5 Target Population: | **Students who have concluded their academic process** |



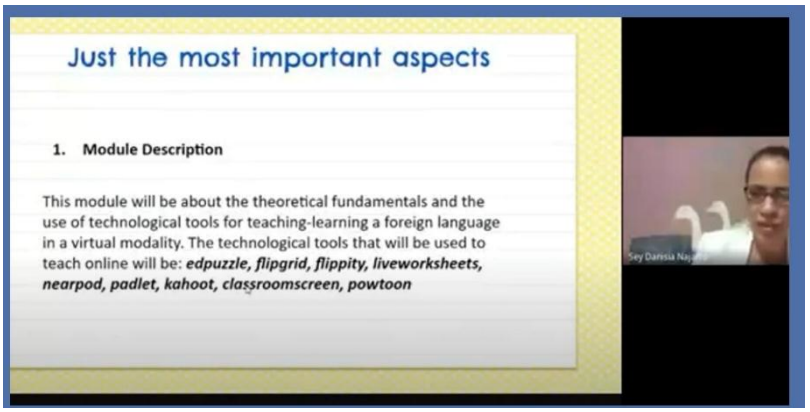
## B. SECOND MODULE: EDUCATIONAL APPLICATIONS TO LEARN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE G01

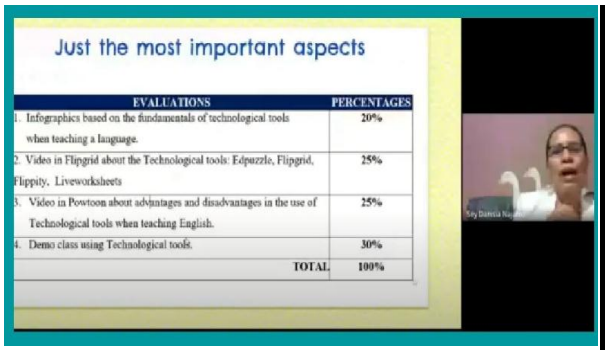
UNIVERSITY OF EL SALVADOR
SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES
FOREIGN LANGUAGES DEPARTMENT

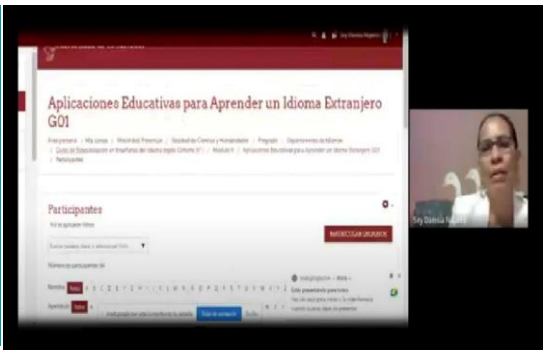
PROGRAM

1. GENERAL INFORMATION

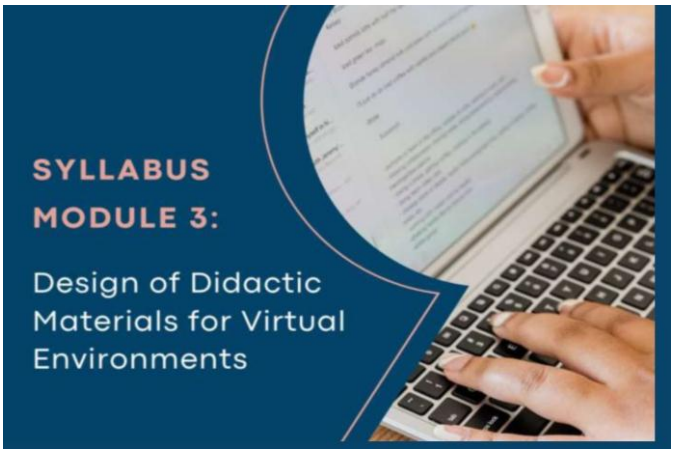
| | |
|---|---|
| 1.1. Module 2: | Educational Applications for Learning a Foreign Language |
| 1.2. Code: | APE214 |
| 1.3. Pre-requisite: | None |
| 1.4. Academic Credits: | 3 |
| 1.5. Target Population: | Students who have concluded their academic courses |
| 1.6. Month and Year: | October- December 2021 |



## C. THIRD MODULE: DESIGN OF DIDACTIC MATERIALS FOR VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENTS G01

**1. GENERAL INFORMATION**

| | |
|---|---|
| **1.1.** Module 3: | **Design of Didactic Materials for Virtual Environments** |
| **1.2.** Code: | **DIM314** |
| **1.3.** Pre-requisite: | **None** |
| **1.4.** Academic Credits: | **3** |
| **1.5.** Target Population: | **Students who have concluded their academic courses** |
| **1.6.** Month and Year: | **January- March 2022** |
| **1.7.** Major Academic Unit: | **Foreign Languages Department** |
| **1.8.** School: | **School of Arts and Sciences** |
| **1.9.** Module Term: | **8 Weeks/ 2 Months** |
| **1.10.** Hours per Module: | **60 Hours** |