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



TOPIC:

Benefits of Integrating Educational Tech Tools in Virtual Learning Environments

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INDEX

ABS	STRACT	3
l.	INTRODUCTION	1
II.	OBJECTIVES	2
III.	THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	3
В	Benefits of Integrating Educational Tech Tools in Virtual Learning Environm	ents.
		3
IV.	DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES	10
МО	DULE 1: Online Foreign Languages Teaching	10
МО	DULE 2: Educational Applications for Learning a Foreign Language	14
МО	DULE 3: Design of Didactic Materials for Virtual Environments	18
V.	ACHIEVEMENTS	21
VI.	CONCLUSIONS	22
VII.	RECOMMENDATIONS	24
VIII.	. BIBLIOGRAPHY	26
IX.	APPENDIXES	28
		29

ABSTRACT

In this modern era, where technology's advancement is growing exponentially, and with this growth, every aspect of human existence is changing for the better, technology has made positive impacts in developing our modern world, and the Education area is not an exception, or at least that is the purpose of integrating Educational Technology tools in virtual classrooms or in hybrid teaching modalities. Educational Technology is here to make things easier, not only for educators but for learners around the world. Thanks to technology teachers can prepare lessons and assignments more easily and quickly, they can make use of different tools to make those lessons more interactive and engaging for students, they can correct exercises automatically allowing instant feedback, they can monitor each student individually, or detect when a student is not following the pace of the course. These are just a few of the benefits that technology has brought to the classroom. Through a thorough exploration of recent studies, this paper showcases how the incorporation of educational tech tools enhances students' engagement, fosters personalized learning experiences, and boosts critical thinking skills among students. The integration of Educational Technology in education streamlines processes, empowers educators, engages students, and fosters critical thinking skills. By highlighting these advantages and providing valuable insights into the potential of implementing different EdTech tools in virtual learning environments, these abstract aims to encourage educators to integrate EdTech tools in their study plans and objectives of their courses and ultimately help learners succeed in an increasingly digital world.

KEY WORDS: educational technology, virtual classrooms, engagement, personalized learning, critical thinking.

I. INTRODUCTION

This report was created with the purpose of analyzing and interpreting the benefits of integrating educational tech tools in virtual learning environments since it has been part of the daily educational lifestyle of many students at the University of El Salvador. The process of virtualization has revolutionized the teaching and learning world in recent months; therefore, teachers need to use ungraded material to have and build a better rapport with students and supply their learning necessities by exploring a new reality including tech tools.

It is important to provide the right acknowledgment to all the tech tools that have been created to guide students and keep on learning and practicing all their skills. These tools have helped students promote the self-driven method for engaging even more in their acquisition of new topics. Students have also noted that these websites have helped them explore their learning styles since these tools offer a personalized experience providing them the enough knowledge to master their essential qualities.

Turning back the hands of time was not an option. Once the revolution of online learning started, teachers optimized their teaching strategies, and undoubtedly it was one of the best decisions ever since it changed the perspective of many theories that were one-sided, and it opened a whole new world of possibilities where learning will not stop. Numerous advantages can be mentioned about these tools, but it can be concluded that teaching has improved way better than it used to be because with tech tools, the sky is the limit, and imagination and creativity will be combined to create an endless world of knowledge.

II. OBJECTIVES

GENERAL:

Explore and present the benefits and impacts of integrating educational technology in virtual learning environments.

SPECIFICS:

- To investigate the advantages of integrating educational technological tools in virtual learning environments.
- To thoroughly describe the different activities done by students in the three modules of the specialization course.
- To comprehensively identify the academic achievements and learning outcomes of students enrolled in the specialization course, with a focus on perceived gains in knowledge and skills of the different tools that were taught.
- To understand the significant impact that the implementation of different edtech tools and strategies in virtual learning environments had on students' learning process.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

"Recent research has revealed that students used an average of 143 educational technology tools between 2021 and 2022, highlighting the increasing use of technology in education. This can be overwhelming for educators, as they must choose the right tools to ensure that the tutoring process remains efficient. Fortunately, modern ed-tech tools can provide a much-needed second wind and bring lesson plans to the next level." (Ohiri, May, 2023).

Benefits of Integrating Educational Tech Tools in Virtual Learning Environments.

Technology has become an integral part of our day-to-day, and in this modern era, technology not only has transformed education but has become a crucial aspect of modern education. Technology is here to open more opportunities for teachers and learners, and with the help of technology, they have now access to a plentiful variety of high-quality educational materials and resources on the internet and can explore beyond what is available in their classrooms, with just one click away.

This transformative impact of technology on education has not only revolutionized the way knowledge is shared. but also, has come to enhance the learning-teaching experience. To the same degree, with the correct use and integration of technology in the design of educational material for effective learning; -from choosing a learning framework that is suitable for the students' needs to lesson planning, selecting materials and resources that are relevant to their

learners, to feedback, and assessment, - teachers can rest assure that learning goals would be reached. After all, there is no doubt that the integration of Educational Technology in Virtual Learning Environments is a must when it comes to the effective delivery of online courses.

Now, it's clear that the rapid advancement of technology has undoubtedly brought numerous challenges not only for students but also for teachers, such as keeping up with the latest tools and methods, the need for continuous training and professional development to guarantee that they are equipped with the knowledge and skills to effectively integrate EdTech tools into their online courses. However, alongside these challenges, there are even more plenty of benefits of integrating them that are more worthy of highlighting. Let's delve deeper into these benefits:

Rich Content Presentation:

Integrating EdTech tools allows educators to choose from a wide range of content to create visually appealing, dynamic, and engaging lessons. This variety of content includes text, images, audio, video, and interactive elements. Teachers must choose the most appropriate content formats that accommodate the diverse learning styles of their students and of course the learning objectives. The use of diverse multimedia formats helps not only to engage learners in lessons but also can help increase the retention of information. Santosh Bhaskar K (2013) states that "technology upgrades the classroom teaching with numerous presentation techniques to make teaching efficient and effective and also to provide students with a great learning experience. Creating presentations and slideshows is one of

the necessary skills for both educators as well as students of Gen Y. Especially educators who must know the importance of presentation tools".

Educators are now well-equipped with different resources and tools to deliver their lessons, they are no longer limited to using PowerPoint Presentations, they have a handful of options to present their lessons, such as Genially, Prezi, Google Slides, Canva, and plenty of others.

• Resource Availability:

EdTech tools provide learners with a vast array of digital resources, including ebooks, online journals, and diverse research databases, allowing them to choose from extensive learning materials beyond traditional textbooks.

The U.S. Department of Technology (2017) stated that "Technology access when equitable can help close the digital divide and make transformative learning opportunities available to all learners. An adult learner with limited physical access to continuing education can upskill by taking advantage of online programs to earn new certifications and can accomplish these goals regardless of location." Indeed, technology is a powerful tool that has made learning experiences more accessible and inclusive. As a result, learners can overcome barriers, pursue many educational opportunities, and benefit from this variety of online resources to enhance their skills and knowledge.

Immediate Feedback:

Many EdTech tools incorporate interactive activities and assessments to provide learners with opportunities to practice and **receive instant feedback** on their progress. For instance, Instant feedback on interactive activities, quizzes, assignments, and any other type of assessment is of paramount importance when it comes to having the students engage and be motivated in live classes; since it is more likely that students are going to be more attentive, and they will participate more actively in the activity if they know they'll receive immediate reinforcement or correction.

Ohiri (May 2023) said "By using platforms like Kahoot! or Mentimeter, educators can create quizzes and polls that students can answer in real-time using their devices. This not only makes the learning process more fun and engaging but also allows educators to get instant feedback on student comprehension."

Adaptability

Tech tools can be updated and adapted more easily than traditional printed materials, allowing teachers to incorporate the latest information and respond quickly to changing educational needs.

Mirplay (2023) said 'Teachers play an important role in the education of students, and it is essential that they adapt to the changing needs of their students. In today's classrooms, teachers are constantly retraining and can adapt to a variety of learning styles and abilities, as well as constant technological and curricular

changes. It is a reality that adaptability in the classroom is essential for teachers to be successful in their roles.

Moreover, it is very important for students to adapt themselves to how to use these tools. Furthermore, it is essential for teachers to learn how to use these technological tools because these apps catch the attention of students and transform Virtual Learning Environments. The goal of many teachers is to improve student performance, and technology can help them accomplish this aim. For this reason, the technological tools are adaptable in any online classroom, there are many apps that you can adapt to your students also, for any class you like to teach.

Inclusion and Accessibility

Online classes can be designed with accessibility features, such as closed captions, screen readers, and alternative formats, ensuring that a wider range of students can participate effectively. First, it is important to know what digital inclusion is and how to apply it in our classes.

The site Improve (2023) states "Digital inclusion is the act of making the web and other digital technologies barrier-free for everyone who wants to use them. Digital inclusion involves providing accessible content for people with disabilities, but it has a broader definition too. Other obstacles also contribute to the digital divide by preventing certain groups from enjoying equal access to the internet and digital technologies."

If teachers integrate Educational Tech Tools in Virtual Learning Environments, they will have better results with their students because they are willing to make use of many options to create material for different types of students. Moreover, teaching students with accessible material is a very good way to empower them to learn by themselves, to be critical, and to have their own opinions. Students have the accessibility to the tools at any time they want. In the beginning, students don't know how to use them, but with time they get familiar with every tool that the teacher uses in the classes.

Real-World Preparation

Many tech tools used in online classes mirror the technology and tools used in various professions, providing students with practical experience that aligns with the demands of the modern workforce.

Incorporating tech tools into online classes can significantly enhance the educational experience by fostering engagement, customization, and collaboration while preparing students for success in an increasingly digital world.

In a busy life full of activities to do, tech tools are useful when it comes to flexibility and accessibility. Thanks to this, students can access course materials that can allow them to practice and increase their knowledge. They can also participate in class discussions from any part of the world without struggle, the only thing they need is an internet connection, and if they have it, they can have a whole new world with just a click. This flexibility is especially beneficial for those students who have duties to do, such as jobs or family responsibilities.

It is well known that learning is not a flat process, hence tech tools can help students to have a better understanding and engagement to their activities. Various tech tools, such as interactive simulations, virtual labs, and multimedia presentations, can make the learning process more engaging and interactive. These tools help students maintain their interest and encourage them to actively participate in the classes and activities provided by the instructors.

Technology enables educators to help and assess students' necessities in a very individual way; therefore, to help students understand the topics in an easier way based on their own learning styles teachers can use many tools and guide them through a new learning process. This also facilitates students to promote a self-taught in students based on experience with online tools. Besides that, thanks to this, students may check their progress through online activities and scan their new skills they have acquired during the course or topic.

Collaborative learning has been improved in such an incredible way thanks to tech tools. Online tech tools facilitate communication and collaboration among students and their instructors. Practicing with each of the tools, it will promote active dialogue and teamwork. Even if students are in a totally different place, they can still interact and connect with each other in an easy and interactive way. Incorporating tech tools into online classes can significantly enhance students' educational experience and even increase their engagement, customization, and collaboration while preparing students for success in a world completely managed by technology resources.

IV. DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES

MODULE 1: Online Foreign Languages Teaching

The academic purpose of this Module was to cover the basic principles of online education and how these can be applied in Teaching English. The focus was on the virtual or online teaching approach -which concerns the use of Learning Management Systems (LMS) to set up virtual classrooms- and exploring different platforms to carry out both synchronous and asynchronous activities. Students had the opportunity to navigate LMS platforms and build virtual classrooms through different activities carried out throughout the Module.

DISCUSSION FORUM

The activity involved answering the question *Do you think that the same learning is generated in an online teaching modality as in a face-to-face teaching modality?* and posting an entry in a Discussion Forum on Moodle. To answer this question students had to make sure they incorporated a learning theory from the ones covered in class in their answer, the one that they felt would justify their opinion. After having posted the entry, they had to comment politely on one of their classmates' entries.

The purpose of this activity was to foster engaging and meaningful discussions among students, to encourage them to share their points of view, to enrich their insights and perspectives by exchanging ideas with their peers, and to help them tap into their understanding of the learning theories studied in class and how these can be applied in Online Foreign Language Learning.

INFOGRAPHIC



This activity involved creating an Infographic in Canva. Students had to investigate about 5 Platforms and add this information to the infographic in an organized manner. Each included Platform had to have five important features added. Three of these five Platforms had to be Learning Management Systems (LMS): therefore, students had to select and carefully analyze the distinctive features that qualify these Platforms as LMSs. This activity mainly aimed to help students identify the specific features of a Learning Management System and evaluate and highlight the different features of online platforms.

CREATING A VIRTUAL CLASSROOM



This activity involved creating a Virtual Course in Google Classroom in groups of four. The students would choose a subject, for instance: Grammar, and they would select a topic they liked about this subject. After having decided which topic, they would post it in the Virtual Classroom; then, each one of the members of the group would have to add 1 resource about their

topic, for example: they could add YouTube videos, links to web pages, and images, among others. Additionally, each one of them would have to add 1 activity of the features that Google Classroom provides, for example: one of the members had to post a Forum, another had to post an Assignment, another had to create and post a Quiz, and the last one would upload some Material to the platform. There would be 4 resources and 4 activities in total included in the virtual classroom. After setting up the Virtual Classroom with all the resources and activities required, students would present their Virtual Classroom in a live class.

The purpose of this activity was to have the students collaborate in teams to develop a virtual class and have them explore the different features that the platform includes.

DEMONSTRATIVE CLASS ON GOOGLE MEET



This activity involved working in groups of 4 to plan a class to be conducted through Google Meet. Students would use different resources such as short videos, images, short readings, PPP, or Google Slides, among others, to present their topic in class in an established time of 20 minutes, which was divided into 5 minutes per group member. Alongside the resource they would choose to use, each student would also choose 1 activity to carry out in the class, for example,

they could choose to use a tech tool such as Jamboard, or Padlet to have the class participate.

The purpose of this activity was mainly to have students work collaboratively and implement online tools and other resources to create and present an interactive and engaging class, and also to have them navigate a synchronous platform which on this occasion was Google Meet to deliver a live class. Additionally, the purpose of this activity was to have the rest of the class participate actively in order to have a meaningful learning experience.

MODULE 2: Educational Applications for Learning a Foreign Language

For the second module, the students learned of technological tools for teaching a foreign language in a virtual modality. Students learned how to use them, sign in, and create activities for their future students. All these apps allow students to perform interactive activities like attending a test, submitting a response, creating a video, writing a text, making presentations, etc. The technological tools that the facilitator used to teach online were: Edpuzzle, Flipgrid, Flippity, Liveworksheets, Nearpod, Padlet, Kahoot, Classroomscreen, Powtoon.



To begin the technological tools of this module the facilitator started with: Flipgrid. Flipgrip is a video-based tool that allows for discussion across digital devices but in a fun and engaging way that makes it ideal

for use in education. The facilitator taught how to create videos, create groups, and add some information to the videos. Also, students developed different activities inside and outside the class to practice this amazing app. At the end, the teacher assigned a video to demonstrate how much the students had learned. In this video, students had to record a video about how to use Liveworksheet; moreover, they had to use music, backgrounds, or filters that are in flipgrip.



To continue with the technological tools the facilitator taught us about Edpuzzle, this app allows the teacher to create videos and questions at the same time, you can create open-ended or multiple-

choice questions, audio notes, audio tracks, or write on a video. In the classes, the teacher helps students create an account and teaches students how to use it in the right way.



The next app is Powtoon, which is an app to create animated videos. For this app, the teacher shows a video created by her about how to use it. Also, we had different activities in the class to learn to use the different features of Powtoon. To demonstrate what POWTOON they had learned, the students created a video on Powtoon about the advantages of using technological tools in an online class. This was a wonderful activity because the students demonstrated good use of the tools



in this app.

Padlet is an interactive tool if you need all your students to participate and write their answers. For this app, the facilitator showed us a video about how to use Padlet and the features it contains. The facilitator helped the students create their own page in Padlet and start creating their own material. In Padlet you can use all the features as Text Editing, Whiteboard, gift, images, audio, camera, and YouTube.



For this application, the teacher taught his students how to create an account and make materials as teachers. The facilitator taught about how to create a worksheet and showed us the codes for the correct and incorrect answers. This app has different features such as multiple-choice, open answers,

match, etc. The facilitator made an activity in the class, and she created groups to work collaboratively on this app. Some questions were elaborated, and the other groups had to answer them on Liveworksheets.



Nearpod is a tool that helps educators make any lesson interactive, whether in the classroom or virtual. The concept is simple. A teacher can create interactive presentations that can contain Quizzes, Polls, Videos, Collaborate Boards, video games, and more.

In this tool, the facilitator presented a video created by

herself about how to use it, and she told students about the features of this app.

She gave all the steps to create an interactive presentation in Nearpod.



For this app, the teacher showed us how to create interactive material for our future students. In this app, you can create quizzes, flashcards, a name picker, board games, matching games,

bingo, and timelines. Etc. The teacher taught the students that it wasn't necessary to sign in, and she gave the instructions to create an interactive game in the class. Each student had to create one and choose a category to make some questions for their classmates.

To end this module students developed the last evaluated activity about all the technological tools. Students had to teach a class and put into practice one or more tools. Students had to plan the class, to create the materials, and to be dynamic with their students. The purpose of this activity was to put all the knowledge acquired in the module into practice in a real class.

MODULE 3: Design of Didactic Materials for Virtual Environments

A module full of great activities and knowledge where creativity is the key factor. This module had the purpose to learn and use web tools to create innovative material to boost their online classes and enhance their knowledge about new technologies to promote students' learning process. Using podcasts, online presentations, interactive images, videos, and so much more, future teachers will be able to make their English lessons more engaging and attract more students' attention.

Creating a podcast

Since podcasts have been on trend recently, teachers must know how to level up their classes to the next stage. Using Audacity and Soundcloud, students could create their own podcasts to increase their engagement with their students, even from long distances. It is important to emphasize that activities like podcasts are revolutionizing the teaching world since technology is part of students' lives. Therefore, this activity helped students become more familiar with this strategy, especially because each student could have their own feedback and improve their experience using podcasts even more.

• Interactive images

Genially is well known for its amazing user-friendly website, many people use it to create many gripping activities such as presentations and gaming activities, but during the course, a new way of interacting with students was introduced thanks to interactive images through Genially. Each student had the opportunity to test their knowledge about this tech tool by creating an interactive image based on the topic chosen by the students. This activity combined creativity and knowledge all in one, so the learning took place in a very innovative way.

Color Theory Basics

Choosing colors is an essential part of designing didactic material. Most of the time teachers should know about the organization of their visual content so it can be easy and clear to understand. Using the theory of colors makes it an easy task to manage this process. Websites were suggested to help teachers to find the perfect match and organize the material. Thanks to these useful tools, didactic materials can be catchy for students or readers. Students could learn and compare using many websites to choose and manage the perfect colors for presentations or designs and it was clear to understand that the right combination of colors could attract or affect the reader's attention.

Using Google Sites

Organization is a very crucial part of working as a teacher, for that reason, using Google Sites it's a nice and interactive way to engage students in the topic or activities where they will notice that learning can take place even in an online English environment. This site is so useful, especially for those classes or courses that provide interactive activities for students. The learning created and practiced on the website is endless, so students can enjoy learning new things. So, when the students could practice with the creation of this incredible website in groups, they could navigate through different tools to expand their knowledge. The teacher assigned a task for students to practice and link all their activities in one online magic folder which had everything included. Collaborative work was also taken since in this tool, many future teachers could exchange knowledge with their students in one place.

V. ACHIEVEMENTS

- The team learned about the benefits and impacts of integrating educational technology in virtual learning environments.
- Students acquire knowledge about Learning Management Systems (LMS).
- Students learned how to make use of technological tools.
- The team learned how to create interactive presentations for virtual learning environments.
- The members of the group practiced how to develop an online class making use of technological tools.
- Students learned how to organize information, activities, and materials in an LMS.
- The team gained an understanding of the different tools that teachers can
 use to put into practice different skills in their students, such as: listening,
 writing, speaking, and listening.
- The members of the group learned how to design material for a virtual learning environment.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The integration of EdTech tools in VLEs has brought numerous benefits to modern education. They have not only made things easier for teachers when it comes to designing engaging lessons, but they have also facilitated the students' learning process since they have access to plenty of material and resources that are available online, which help them practice and grasp concepts and have a better understanding of the topics they're interested in.

Each one of the 3 Modules of the specialization course included a wide range of interactive and engaging lessons and activities specially designed for specific learning objectives. Activities that range from individual assignments to group projects, from class forums to synchronous classes, infographics, and the use of ed-tech tools for the effective delivery of online courses.

The students enrolled in the specialization course accomplished numerous learning objectives in each of the 3 modules, and many positive outcomes were attained. Students demonstrated a good level of understanding of the use of the tech tools. The reported gains and acquired skills suggest that the course really helped students develop their competencies in using the tech tools and enhance their comprehension of different topics covered in class; therefore, the curriculum of the course is effective and succeeded in achieving the learning objectives established in each module.

The effective integration of ed-tech tools and efficient implementation of learning strategies for the delivery of online courses suggested that students had a significant and positive impact on their learning process; from individual performance to meaningful learning experiences working with peers. This wide range of benefits of the implementation of these ed-tech tools has undoubtedly improved modern education and contributed to more dynamic and engaging learning experiences in virtual learning environments.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Teachers who are in charge of the specialization should establish a better timing for each activity done in class taking advantage of the time provided during the class, this will help students to feel the demanding point of being in a classroom environment, and they will get used to feeling the pressure of working in an online teaching environment so that they can apply the same process in their classes and create urgency for the students' learning.
- Based on the experience, students who will be future teachers should participate more in the activities done in class since the main purpose of each activity is to help students develop a better flow for their classes and to have their students more engaged in the class, for that reason, the professor should encourage the students' participation.
- Students ought to get ready with each topic previously to avoid hesitation during the practice time during classes since timing is the key factor of each class. If students have an overview of the topic, they should develop a better performance during group or individual work and in that way, they will avoid asking redundant questions during class and ask questions about what they have already checked.
- As a recommendation, the professor in charge ought to have all the tools ready for activities that are executed during the class, and if it is possible, a plan b, in case any visual material does not work properly during the class, moreover, each visual material should make students aware of the knowledge produced in the classes or activities and the importance of it.

• The professor in charge should demand more and better quality in the students' participation - activities since each of them provides a great experience for future teachers to create a more efficient academic environment for their students. Each activity should be evaluated thoroughly and provide wider feedback on how to improve their weaknesses. This has to be also taken into consideration even if it is about the future teachers' English level in spoken and written form.

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IX. APPENDIXES

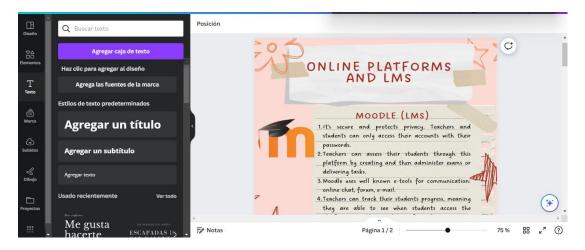
DISCUSSION FORUM



Do you think that the same learning is generated in an online teaching modality as in

You must justify your answer. It is important to include the learning theory(s) you bas

INFOGRAPHIC



VIRTUAL CLASSROOM



DEMONSTRATIVE CLASS ON GOOGLE MEET

