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



TOPIC:

THE IMPORTANCE OF VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENTS IN CURRENT EDUCATION.

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INFORME FINAL DE CURSO DE ESPECIALIZACIÓN ADMINISTRACIÓN DE AMBIENTES VIRTUALES PARA LA ENSEÑANZA Y APRENDIZAJE DE IDIOMAS EXTRANJEROS.

TO OBTAIN THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS IN ENGLISH WITH A MAJOR IN LANGUAGE TEACHING.

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ABSTRACT

The Internet has brought new alternatives into our lives, one being virtual learning environments. These educational technologies have helped teachers diversify the teaching-learning environment since the COVID-19 pandemic affected traditional teaching methods. Thus, the world of teaching and learning implemented new options to develop classes and become more interactive. The objective of this report is to present how the course of Specialization in the Administration of Virtual Environments for Teaching Foreign Languages developed over six months in virtual mode and to describe the different activities carried out during this time, the activities performed in class as teachers to evaluate the students. During the sessions and evaluations, some tools taught and used, either those that are LMS (Learning Management System) or those that cannot be in that group: *Nearpod, Edmodo, Schoology, Liveworksheet*, and some other platforms, for example, *Google site* to have a better learning delivery. This report contains a brief description of them. Finally, this will provide what the students achieved by participating in this specialization course and some recommendations.

Keywords: Platforms, virtual modality, education, technology classes, Learning Management System (LMS), virtual learning environment, and tools.

I. INTRODUCTION

The course "Administration of Virtual Environments for the Teaching and Learning of Foreign Languages" was developed to train future teachers to teach online classes. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the world faced a situation that affected traditional methods in El Salvador. From March of that year, teachers and students found the necessity to continue education in an online environment. Nowadays, the online process has become a very accessible option for students and teachers; for that reason, this specialization course has focused mainly on the technological tools that are important for teaching online classes.

This document contains different parts, starting with a presentation of the objectives. Then, the theoretical framework describes various subtopics related to the importance of virtual environments in current education.

In addition, a description of the activities carried out throughout the course development, divided into three modules, which have a logical sequencing, from the simple topics to the most extensive or complex ones. Then, the achievements reached during this course and some conclusions.

In the end, the recommendations to the authorities of the foreign language department and the teachers. These tips will help to improve the teaching-learning process in future specialization courses.

II. OBJECTIVES

General Objective

• To identify the importance of virtual environments in current education.

Specific objectives

- To recognize the primary benefits of virtual education and demonstrate that it can elevate student learning achievements.
- To mention the different technological tools used in online classes and their advantages.
- To detail the activities carried out in the course and the technological tools learned.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Recent developments have surged the significance of virtual learning environments in education. Though these environments offer numerous advantages, it is crucial to acknowledge the potential drawbacks and obstacles that may emerge, particularly for students in low-income or rural regions struggling with inconsistent internet connectivity. Moreover, instructors must find strategies to tackle distractions and disengagement in virtual settings while ensuring that social interaction and community development remain at the forefront. Nevertheless, virtual learning environments present a promising opportunity for accessible and adaptable educational offerings to students from all walks of life.

Nowadays, virtual environments have become indispensable in education; they have positively impacted the development of students' competencies. However, it is necessary to strengthen the interaction with students and the content feedback process. According to Maraza (2016), a virtual environment aims to "develop dynamic methods for the search and identification of a learner's best learning style" (p. 21). Along the same lines, Silva (2017) points out that a virtual learning environment is a computer application designed to facilitate the pedagogical communication between the participants in an educational process, whether it is entirely at a distance, face-to-face, or of a mixed nature combining both modalities in different proportions.

A virtual learning environment has a specific structure that can vary according to the needs of each institution or level of study. In this sense, for the teaching-

learning process to work in a virtual setting, it is necessary to have a methodological strategy that must respond to an instructional design that enhances the operational qualities proposed by a platform such as Moodle for the development of efficient instructional modules according to the results sought to obtain.

A relevant level of flexibility is necessary for this type of environment, according to Díaz and Castro (2017), and among its elements should include the module of news and tasks assigned by the teacher, the forum established to clear doubts about a specific topic, the chat to interact in real-time with classmates and the tutor, a glossary to know the terms used by the teacher, e-mail, file exchange, among others.

The most important thing about virtual environments is that they can enroll in many fields, including education. Virtual environments in education must offer the possibility of guaranteeing a didactic that stimulates cognitive vision and awakens an interest equal to or better than that provided in a face-to-face educational space, supported by visual and auditory tools, taking advantage of the boom in multimedia. It is important to note that virtual environments in education would not have much importance, nor would they be transcendental if they did not cover all the spheres that are the responsibility of educational systems like students, teachers, the evaluation process, the organization, management, and monitoring of teaching procedures, since these are intertwined and allow their total integration and optimal functioning. Bill Gates says it well in his book Road to the Future when he expresses

that "new technologies can offer opportunities to improve the educational environment for students, teachers and administrators."

People point out the importance of virtual environments in education. Virtual environments offer a more interactive and immersive approach to educational material than traditional classrooms. By creating virtual environments, educators can set up simulations that allow students to explore and experiment with complex concepts in a safe and controlled environment. This approach enhances both comprehension and retention of information as it becomes embedded in the learner's memory through experiential learning.

In addition, virtual environments can be accessed from anywhere and at any time, making education more accessible and flexible. Students can learn at their own pace, and educators can provide feedback and support remotely, reducing the need for physical attendance in the classroom. In other words, virtual environments are a powerful tool for educators to enhance the learning experience and provide students with an engaging and flexible educational experience.

It is essential to transform educational practice by incorporating Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in the teaching process as the basis of the virtual environment. As Contreras and Garcés (2019) state, Virtual learning environments are spaces or environments that favor students, and the support of technology has generated better interactions between students and teachers.

AbdElsamie (2023) indicates that one effective strategy to support online education is to embrace multimedia content, such as videos, podcasts, infographics,

and other interactive elements that help students visualize complex concepts and engage with the material more dynamically. These tools make a more immersive and interactive learning experience that suits each student's learning style and develops a prominent understanding of the content. The deployment of virtual environments enhances both the students' and teachers' experience in and out of the classroom, besides fostering active participation and collaboration among students.

Individuals may be getting into difficult situations in staying attentive and engaged while attending classes. The conventional lecturing approach can swiftly become monotonous and result in disinterest. Therefore, educators should consider implementing novel teaching techniques and tools to create a lively, enjoyable, and informative classroom. This approach can enhance students' attention and foster a more comprehensive and productive learning environment. Furthermore, teachers should prioritize community development and social interaction in virtual settings while addressing potential distractions and disengagement with utmost urgency. (AbdElsamie, 2023) the concept of *online tools* plays an essential role in the development of today's education. Accordingly, there are numerous available technological tools on the web to enrich and innovate teaching and learning experiences; some tools handle communication better than others, while games are great for increasing students' understanding of specific subjects. Each tool helps make learning easy and fun (prodigy, 2021).

Virtual learning environments have been so important since the world faced the COVID-19 pandemic, and this one created a window for those who needed to continue their process. It is also important to mention that most of the population found (VLE) some advantages and used these environments to facilitate the learning process and refine what they knew, even though others felt disappointed with VLE because they did not have the knowledge to use or take advantage of this. It was COVID-19 that demanded them to use it as the only resource.

Within the benefits of this environment, Inmaculada Fernández provides some of them, such as:

-Teachers can provide personalized learning by creating different learning paths and presenting plenty of options to their students.

-These environments help teachers to support their students. It could be as instantaneous as they could, so they don't need to wait for the next class to solve their doubts.

-The VLE can simplify the life of teachers by saving time to grade the activities by using self-marking activities that import the grades to monitor the students.

-There is flexibility and comfort because the students can learn at their own pace.

However, the VLE has some disadvantages, such as:

-Limitations: Students can have many limitations; for example, they have internet connection issues because some internet providers do not offer good internet quality in their places.

-Self-discipline. This disadvantage could be either an advantage or a burden. The students must have the motivation necessary to develop and give their best performance in a course. This process could be effortful for those who feel less attentive to what they are doing.

Technological advances demand us to be aware of the challenges that education might bring or the options the education system can provide for students and learners to facilitate access to education. (Fernández, 2022). However, virtual environments have become valued as increasingly motivating for students and, therefore, are employed as an innovative and more accessible framework to provide education and entertainment to the public.

As Stoddart and Niederhauser (1993) point out, ICT may fit into a spectrum of instructional approaches, varying from traditional to innovative. Thus, education must provide the appropriate conditions to optimize learning and promote the transfer of knowledge and skills. Learning environments should reflect the potential uses of knowledge that pupils might realistically expect to be proficient in to prevent the acquired knowledge from becoming inert (Bransford, Sherwood, Hasselbring, Kinzer, & Williams, 1990; Duffy & Knuth, 1990). Rich contexts and tasks that are as authentic as possible should be provided by presenting links to the world outside school. In addition, teachers should stimulate pupils to engage in active knowledge construction. Therefore, to achieve meaningful learning for learners due to these tools implemented in pedagogy.

Rivera (2013) points out that due to its importance, careful planning based on the needs and characteristics of the students is necessary, as well as adherence to educational theories that ensure meaningful learning. He adds that this type of context is not an addition to the existing face-to-face technique but a new way of teaching, the change towards a new paradigm that replaces the current models, to respond with its flexibility, contribution to the transversality and digital literacy to the needs of today's society. From the perspective of Silvero (2014), virtual learning environments are closely linked to Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), which have been steadily becoming part of all spheres of life, both in professional and personal environments. Thus, the educational field, of course, has not been unaffected by this process. For this reason, the author suggests incorporating new technological tools in the daily formative activity from a didactic point of view to evolve the learning process.

In agreement with Contreras and Garcés (2019), formative virtual environments are understood as spaces or environments that favor student learning, supported by technology, through which an interaction between learners and instructors is encouraged. Additionally, today's students are a generation that lives technology as part of their usual environment. Part of their everyday environment; for them, information and learning are not limited to the walls of the classroom, nor are they the walls of the room, nor is it offered exclusively by a teacher.

Atlantic University (2022) states that it is necessary to consider that technology is a tool for education, but it cannot solve problems by itself. The

usefulness of educational technology lies in what educators do with it and how they use it to meet the needs of their students. Appropriate use of digital learning tools in the classroom can boost student engagement, help teachers improve lesson planning, and enable personalized learning. Technology will impact students' critical thinking skills depending on a diverse range of elements, including the type of technology used and the context in which it is engaged.

When technology is introduced into the classroom smoothly and thoughtfully, students will not so much become more engaged as they will begin to take better control of the learning process. Technology allows teachers to adapt every style of learning. Whether students learn best through lectures, reading, illustrations, or recordings, technology can accommodate every type of learning that students use and prefer (Atlantic University, 2022). Students can learn at their convenience using online videos, audiobooks, interactive online games, and other resources, as online material is often updated by teachers so that students can always get the most up-to-date information.

In conclusion, when the Covid-19 pandemic started, technological tools became an essential part of our lives. Thanks to technology, students and teachers can perform their studies when people need it; the development and application of technological tools have been such a helpful part of the teaching-learning process, whether classes are developed in interactively and easily ways that help students and teachers to achieve better income and outcome.

IV. DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES

MODULE 1.

During module I, Online Foreign Languages Teaching, the participants studied the importance of Learning Theories for teaching English - Behaviorism, Constructivism, Cognitivism, Connectivism, and Humanism - in online education, as well as learning different technological tools, such as LMS (Learning Management System), for instance, Moodle and Canvas, to enhance and engage synchronous and asynchronous activities in virtual learning. The activities developed in the module helped the participants learn and experience the application of these tools in online classrooms and innovative teaching methods.

For the development of these activities, the participants carried out the first one, analyzing the theories of learning in virtual education; the question to answer; "Do you consider that the same learning is generated in an online teaching modality as in a face-to-face teaching modality?" taking into consideration one of the theories in their answers and publishing them in a forum created by the instructor on the Moodle platform.

As a second activity carried out, the students of the course created an infographic, a visual representation of content, describing online platforms, LMS, and not LMS that can be used for virtual classes, specifying the most important features of each tool, and making use of the online tool *Canva* to create the infographics to represent and describe creatively and engagingly such platforms.

For the third activity, the team leader spearheaded the creation of a comprehensive English course on Google Classroom for their project and made interactive content and didactic material related to the topic selected, such as videos from YouTube, activities or exercises, and quizzes created on the platform. Likewise, they shared their work with the class and the professor, explaining the resources they employed and how they carried out the course.





Google Classroom

In the last developed activity for this first module, students worked in groups to plan and perform a short class through Google Meet for the rest of their peers. They used different online tools, e.g., Google Slides and Kahoot, among others, adding various web resources to develop the class design, such as YouTube videos, interactive images, activities or exercises, and quizzes to experience a meaningful and dynamic class.



MODULE 2.

In Module II. Educational Applications For Learning a Foreign Language, students acquired a comprehensive comprehension of the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge Framework (TPACK) and its significance in teaching. The student's examination of numerous virtual tools such as Nearpod, Edpuzzle, Flipgrid, Flippity, Liveworksheet, Padlet, Classroomscreen, Powtoon, and Kahoot has assured them that integrating these tools into the forthcoming teaching methodology. Students will be confident that they have a more engaging and interactive learning environment for learners.



As the name of the second module refers, the first technological tool to be applied was the interactive worksheet in a live worksheet where students learned to convert PDF documents to an online interactive document in which students could interact from their computer or cell phone at any time of the day; in addition, they were given a grade at the end of the activity while being shown the mistakes made. The second tool was Flipgrid, in which they learned how to make a video from the computer explaining step-by-step how to create an interactive activity using the previously mentioned tool.



The third application used was Edpuzzle, which worked through work groups; first, it explained how to convert a YouTube video into an interactive video with open or multiple-choice questions. But to continue watching such a video, they had to answer questions related to that video.

The fourth tool to mention was Nearpod, which explained how to convert a simple presentation to an interactive one in which we could add questions to continue with the slide shows. In turn, this workshop developed in teams where we could practice what we learned and explain the use of this tool in class, which was very ingenious and helpful to apply in classes or activities. However, Powtoon was the fifth tool of the application, explaining how to transform a PowerPoint presentation into a video, where we could add animations, interactive elements, and background music, among other features that made a video attractive to the audience.



During the virtual classroom session, students discovered that the latest application tools provided invaluable assistance. The instructor explained Kahoot, Classroomscreen, Flippity, and Padlet in detail, emphasizing their usefulness. These tools have proven invaluable in reinforcing lesson content and facilitating student participation in face-to-face classes. The diversity of resources available for virtual education is impressive.

After finishing this Module, we had the privilege of showcasing our newfound knowledge by leading a class. It is a great satisfaction to have the opportunity to apply the learned tools and witness their effectiveness in a classroom setting. This experience has highlighted the immense untapped potential of these tools to revolutionize the education sector.

MODULE 3.

Throughout this third course, which also happened to be the last one, students explored the implementation of multimedia in contemporary education and its various components, such as images, videos, audio, and written texts. In the beginning, students closely examined the application of audio podcasts and why they are relevant in online teaching. Audio resources have many advantages, as they are played on any electronic device anytime, so students were assigned to create a podcast on an educational topic. Thus, they used an electronic device to record their audio, which they converted to MP3 format. They then used the Audacity application to enhance the audio with a backing track before uploading it to Soundcloud, a streaming service.





Further to the module, the students learned about the structure of the image. They taught about resolution, the number of pixels displayed per inch, which affects image quality. They taught about pixel size, the number of pixels displayed per inch, and the number of pixels per pixel, which affects image quality. They learned about the quality of an image: the more pixels per inch, the higher the quality. In addition, they discovered which file types are optimal for different imaging needs. Likewise, students learned about interactive images, which are creative images that can include buttons. These buttons can showcase images, links, text, and videos. To practice, the students devised an interactive graphic using Genially featuring the identical topic as the podcast.





For the next part of the activity, students watched videos and practiced creating Google Slides and combining colors. Google Slides is a platform where people can make creative presentations and add videos, images, and links. Anyone can access it from any electronic device, anywhere, anytime. Additionally, multiple users can modify the same presentation simultaneously. To practice, students developed a Google presentation that integrated images, videos, and links, and students had to combine colors correctly to catch the audience's attention.



In the next activity, the students learned how to create professional videos for a class. To create a top-notch video, considering the background color is crucial since it can significantly impact the product. Moreover, it is vital to be meticulous when choosing the presenter's apparel and accessories, and through careful practice and experimentation with video recording and editing using my smartphone and the Openshot application, students strategically selected shot angles to create a visually compelling experience. To increase the overall effect and incorporate background music. Once edited, participants uploaded the video to YouTube or Google Drive to share it. The subject matter mirrored my podcast, interactive image, and Google presentation - an innovative and enjoyable way to express ideas and connect with others.





After completing the module, the individual applied their newfound knowledge by creating a dedicated Google site tailored specifically for students. This site incorporates three activities out of four learned in the module and intends to enhance the overall learning experience of the learners. The individual expresses confidence in their ability to effectively apply the skills acquired and a desire to continue to use them in the future.



V. ACHIEVEMENTS.

In the first module, students learned about learning theories and leveraged them to adapt the learning process in today's online education. They also learned how to use Google Classroom and its functionalities to create, develop, and organize content and didactic material for online classes. Moreover, learners were able to create infographics for educational purposes. They also set up a course on the Google Classroom platform, where they could share content, create quizzes, develop activities, and evaluate students.

In the second module, learners were familiar with some tools to develop online courses. Students learned to use Flippity, an instrument where teachers can elaborate creative activities such as word searches, flashcards, presentations, and games. Students also learned how to use Liveworksheets, a tool where teachers can use their printed worksheets and get them into an interactive activity. They also learned to use the Nearpod, this tool to create interactive lessons, where teachers can create games, add slides, videos, and more. Students also study how to use Powtoon, a platform where people can create professional videos with animations, soundtracks, live actions, and more. Moreover, they learned how to use Kahoot, which involves creating cloud-based quizzes. Finally, the students used Paddlet, where either the teacher or the students can add creative content.

In the third module, students created a Podcast (an audio file available on the web). People also learned how to elaborate interactive images, adding buttons where extra content can be attached using Genially. In addition, students created a Google

Presentation that consisted of building creative slides. Next, students developed a professional video using OpenShot, a video editing application. Finally, students developed a web page and integrated material using the tools learned throughout the course to support teaching English online.

With this course, students learned to use different virtual resources, such as Padlet, Kahoot, Nearpod, Classroomscreen, Quizzes, and Flippity, as well as others, to create and develop didactic material for online classes interactively and enjoyably.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

Technology has impacted enormously in recent years by providing tools for academic performance; the usage of these tools has improved the facilities in a learning and teaching environment, and these digital platforms and applications have helped us to continue with academic purposes, which serve as means of communication, as well as inputs and outputs of information, the volume of data storage is essential to share all kinds of content through these platforms.

Students and teachers have quick access to the platforms and tools for the teaching-learning process almost from anywhere if they have an electronic device and internet access. However, knowing how to use and take advantage of them is also integral.

Virtual environments are now a necessary part of education. Educators worldwide can easily access and integrate them into their classrooms.

Teachers must be adequately prepared for the new technologies since there are many inconveniences in obtaining them due to some external factors related to connectivity issues, such as the network available in the geographic area where students and teachers will run the platforms, as well as economic limitations due to the lack of an electronic device.

The group concludes that since the COVID-19 pandemic affected us, online modalities have increased significantly, technology is essential for teaching purposes, and technological tools play an important role in teaching modalities, especially in English teaching.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

To authorities for the Foreign Languages Department:

To recommend that the humanities authorities adopt these technological tools for the development of future classes creatively and enjoyably.

To prepare more teachers for the technological tools to deliver and offer more opportunities and more knowledge to the students.

To educate teachers to become familiar with technological tools to have a better learning-teaching environment and process in the classroom.

To teachers:

To innovate online classes, learning about virtual environments and including them as much as possible in teaching is recommended so students can have a more engaging and significant learning experience.

To students:

It is recommended that they become familiar with virtual environments and learn how to use them to enjoy this new learning experience in a worthwhile way.

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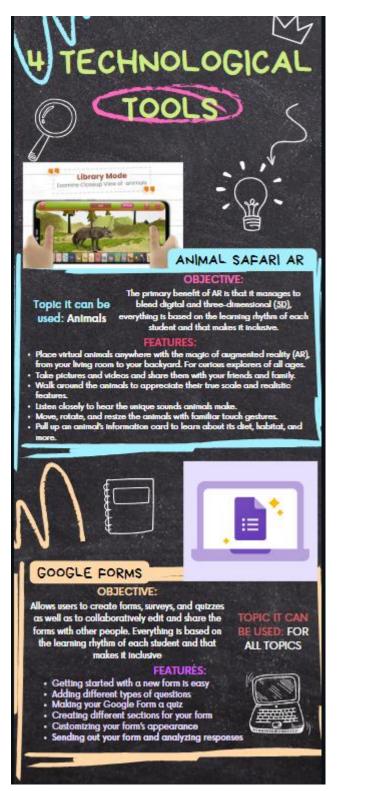
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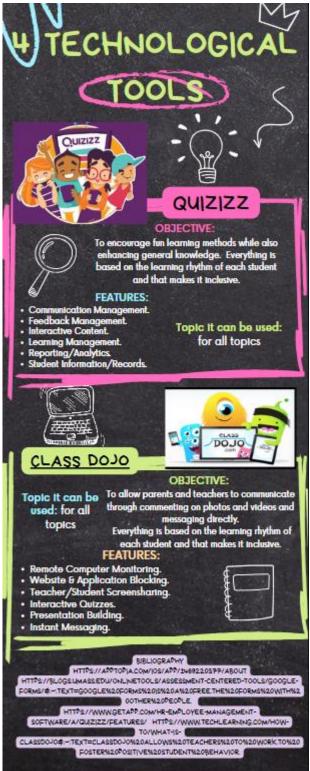
IX. APPENDIXES

Appendix A







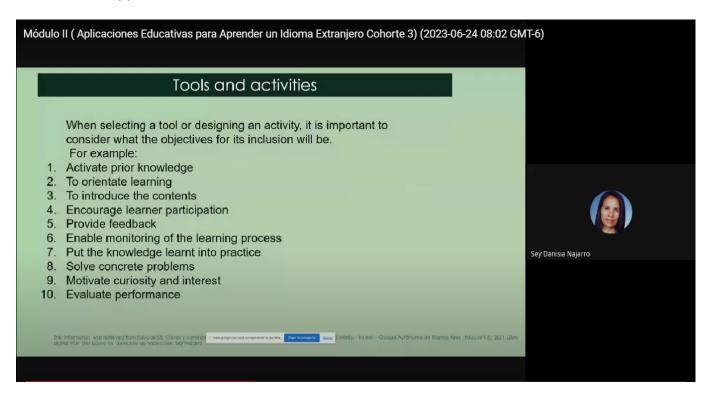




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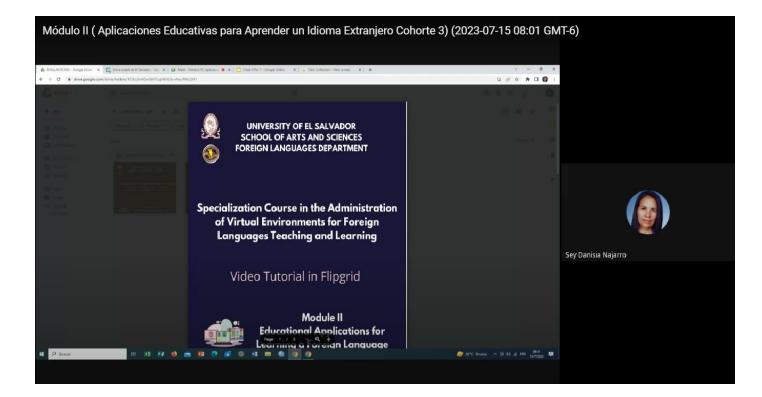
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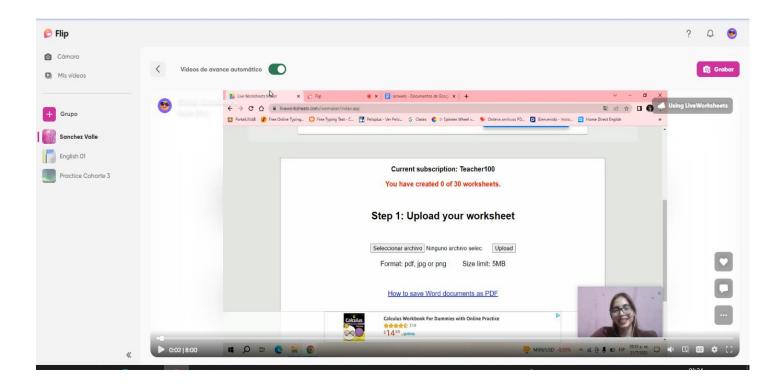
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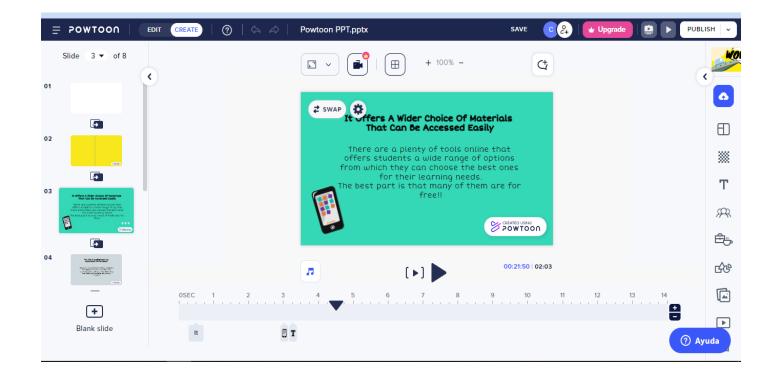


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| С | Cohorte III Group 3 | | | | Week 1 - Direct and Indirect Object Video | Última modificación: 18 may | | | |
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| E. | Tareas pendientes | | | | Exercise 1 | Fecha de entrega: 19 may, 18 | | | |
| G | Grammar Virtual Class 💂 Intermediate Level | | | | Assignment week 1. Direct and Indirect Obj | Fecha de entrega: 23 may, 23 | | | |
| C | Classroom Supplies Children Beginners A1 | | | | • | | | | |
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| = | Classroom > MOD/ Teenag | AL VERBS | | | | | | 1 | C, |
|------------|---|----------|------------------|--------------------|--|------------------------------|---|-----|--------|
| Â | Inicio | Tablón | Trabajo de clase | Personas Calificad | iones | | | 0 8 | ۲ |
| | Calendar | | | | | | | | |
| + <u>₽</u> | Clases impartidas | | | | MATERIAL | | : | | |
| | Para revisar | | | | | | | | |
| С | Cohorte III Group 3 | | | | Modal Verbs - warm up | Última modificación: 17 may | | | |
| M | MODAL VERBS Teenagers | | | | U video | Última modificación: 17 may | | | |
| F | FOOD Yessica, Milena, Gissela, Karen | | | | Link | Publicado: 17 may | | | |
| * 🕅 | Cursos en los que te has insc | | | | | | | | |
| Ξv | Tareas pendientes | | | | ASSIGNMENT | | | | |
| G | Grammar Virtual Class 📃 Intermediate Level | | | | | | · | | |
| C | Classroom Supplies Children Beginners A1 | | | | GIVE YOUR OPINION - USING MODAL VERBS | Fecha de entrega: 20 may, 12 | | | |
| * | Clases archivadas | | | | | | | | |
| ۲ | Ajustes | | | | FORUM | | : | | |
| | | | | | What is a modal verb and what is it for? | Publicado: 17 may | | | |
| | | | | | QUIZ | | | | |
| | | | | | | | • | | |
| | | | | | QUIZ 1 | Fecha de entrega: 19 may, 23 | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | ? |







Appendix C

