

# Through Teachers' Eyes: The Use of Virtual Classrooms in ELT

## Puntos de vista de los docentes en relación al uso de aulas virtuales en la enseñanza del inglés

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The use of virtual environments to support as well as to complement language teaching and learning processes is becoming a recurrent practice and sometimes policy in several educational institutions. This paper reports the results of an inquiry carried out at the language center of a private university in Bogotá. Those results intended to describe EFL teachers' viewpoints regarding the promotion of autonomous, collaborative, and meaningful learning through the use of virtual classrooms in the teaching of English as a foreign language. Findings show that the promotion of these three types of learning through the use of virtual classrooms still represents challenges in the context in which this study was carried out.

**Key words:** Autonomy, collaborative work, meaningful learning, technology, virtual classroom

El uso de ambientes virtuales para apoyar y complementar los procesos de enseñanza aprendizaje de lenguas se ha convertido en una práctica recurrente y en ocasiones en una política en muchas instituciones educativas. Este documento reporta los resultados de una investigación llevada a cabo en el centro de lenguas de una universidad privada en Bogotá, en el que se describen los puntos de vista de los profesores de inglés en relación al desarrollo de aprendizaje autónomo, colaborativo y significativo por medio del uso de aulas virtuales en la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera. Los hallazgos muestran que en el contexto en donde se llevó a cabo este estudio, estos tres tipos de aprendizaje aún representan retos educativos.

**Palabras clave:** aprendizaje significativo, aula virtual, autonomía, tecnología, trabajo colaborativo

## Introduction

The current world requires that teachers be updated in new trends of teaching–learning processes. One of them is the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) as a complement to the work done within the classroom. The university where this inquiry was carried out has implemented the use of a virtual campus powered by Moodle Platform, at which students can check extra material and develop different activities by means of the use of a great deal of resources available on the web, such as specialized web-pages, wikis, forums, and blogs, among others. Since 2003, one of the academic units of the university that has widely implemented this virtual work has been the Language Center. This academic unit mainly offers courses for undergraduate students who freely choose to take these general English courses in the university and comply with the second language requirement to successfully finish their majors.<sup>1</sup> There are about 20 teachers in the language center and they are encouraged to develop a virtual classroom to complement the work they do in their four weekly academic hours. Thus, students are supposed to devote most of their four independent hours to working in the virtual classroom in which the teachers may propose different sorts of activities to enhance language learning.

The implementation of this virtual tool has represented some challenges for teachers in several aspects. First, a struggle with media literacy has been evidenced. Some teachers held basic skills on the use of computers which appeared not to be fitting this matter's demands. Second, a challenge emerged when choosing appropriate material to include in the virtual classroom. On the web, teachers might come across very useful activities with suitable content but they are equally exposed to others that are not very useful or reliable. Third, there is a huge challenge in reshaping some traditional and common beliefs towards the effectiveness of using virtual classrooms.

Taking into consideration the aforementioned description of the context, we report in this paper the systematic inquiry carried out at the university whose aim was to give a critical account of the perceptions teachers at the Language Center have towards the use of virtual classrooms as a teaching and learning strategy. More specifically, this paper describes the beliefs that have been developed towards the use of the Moodle platform. Since the institutional educational project is based on the promotion of autonomy, collaborative and meaningful learning, we decided to explore how these elements have been dealt with in the work teachers and students do in the virtual classroom. These tenets serve as the theoretical support for our study.

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1 At this university, all students have to certify a B1 level of proficiency in a second language before graduation.

## Theoretical Framework

### *ICT in Education*

The use of ICT has increased during the last years both at home and school. Nowadays it is common to see people walking around using a technological device for communicating with others, to be updated, or only to have some fun; all this because of the rapid development of technology. In the educational field this has also been evident; more and more schools and universities are using technological tools for students to work on different subjects or only as a matter of reinforcement for some topics (Dudeny & Hockly, 2007; Segovia, 2006).

One of these new technologies is virtual classrooms. Conventionally, virtual classrooms are conceived of as “spaces” in which students can take classes synchronically through the use of certain software that allows them to interact as they do in a classroom built with bricks, as well as asynchronously. Virtual classrooms have been spread all over the world by universities and other institutions that provide education to those who cannot attend traditional universities because of the distance, time, or other factors (Hiltz, 1995).

However, in our context, educators have become aware of the features new generations have as, for example, the fact that they are what Dudeny and Hockly (2007) called *digital natives*. For that reason, they have taken advantage of some of the characteristics virtual classrooms have and decided to use them as a tool to reinforce traditional classes. This new tool becomes a facilitator of teaching-learning processes due to the integration of different kinds of activities that allow students to develop different skills (Villaseñor, 1998). The use of activities designed to be used in virtual classrooms offers some advantages teacher must keep in mind. For example, activities designed to be used with technology can provide students interactivity and, at the same time, can enhance critical thinking, creative thinking, research skills, and social skills (Segovia, 2006).

Nevertheless, what some people consider an advantage for others could be a disadvantage. That is the case of those teachers who could be considered digital immigrants and who struggle every time they have to use cutting-edge technology in classes. According to Dudeny and Hockly (2007), this happens because some teachers are media illiterate: They do not know enough about how to use these resources; additionally, they sometimes consider that using technology inside or outside the classroom is a waste of time and effort and, in some cases, think that since students know much more than they do about this topic, they could be overshadowed by them. Nonetheless, these problems could become strengths for teachers who are committed to changing and looking for strategies to successfully implement ICTs, in our case virtual classrooms, in their professional practices (Dudeny & Hockly, 2007; Rueda, 2008).

### *Autonomous Learning*

Kumaravadivelu (2003) states that autonomy does not mean total independence or being alone during the learning process. On the contrary, autonomy is a state that must be led at the beginning by the teacher, who gives strategies to students in order to enhance critical thinking, decision making and independent action. An autonomous student is able to decide about self-learning processes: What, how and why s/he learns something. This means that a student becomes responsible for her/his own learning, developing self-control and discipline, regulating and evaluating consciously and intentionally the use of strategies to achieve the learning objectives, and discovering her/his own potential through confronting weaknesses and failures in order to overcome them. In this regard, the use of technology helps students to create their own learning routes towards proficiency in the target language and, thus, go beyond teachers' instructions (Allford & Pachler, 2007).

In order to develop autonomy, learners can use some strategies such as cognitive and metacognitive strategies, planning, and self-regulation among others. Cognitive strategies lead students to understand and remember concepts in order to produce knowledge. Metacognitive strategies offer information about progress to reach goals, that is, they are used to organize, manage and make decisions about students' own learning processes. Planning strategies help students program and organize their own schedule so that they can work on each one of the tasks at a certain time. Finally, self-regulation strategies enable students to be aware about their learning processes, analyze and evaluate them, and to decide improvement actions just in case they are necessary (Universidad de San Buenaventura, 2010).

Having in mind the aforementioned description, teachers cannot leave students alone in the learning process. Autonomy requires the creation of innovative activities that teach students step by step how to be independent learners.

### *Collaborative Learning*

Referring to collaborative learning, Olivares (2007) defends the idea that individual learning is the major goal of a collaborative environment mediated by an instructor or, in this study, computers. In this fashion, individuals learn and reach a more personal, deeper understanding of a given task through collaborative methodologies than when working on their own. Olivares also explains that collaborative learning looks for the creation of new knowledge through a social context. In his own words,

collaborative learning is not a structured group process; it is concerned with cultivating independence, and independence of thought through the collaborative process [...] Individual student success (learning) is NOT a central concern [...] rather, the concern is that joint group

activities result in knowledge acquisition or problem solving that is superior to individual efforts. (Olivares, 2007, p. 26)

Similarly, Watkins, Carnell, and Lodge (2007) highlight two main characteristics of collaboration. The first one refers to the fact that through it, something new is created that could not have been created otherwise. The second is that collaboration can only take place when all the participants can contribute to a new shared product. In agreement with Olivares (2007), Watkins, Carnell, and Lodge (2007) enhance the idea that when learners explain their meaning-making to each other, their learning is richer and deeper, since this implies the challenge to have others make sense of individual understandings. The latter is based on specific evidence in the language learning and teaching field. Swain (2000) proposed that collaborative dialogues or going beyond “the output hypothesis” lead learners to make progress in their learning process since through negotiation of meaning, they notice holes in their interlanguage and look for strategies to overcome them. Therefore, learners who are involved in a task that really demands collaboration are required to bridge multiple perspectives on the problem and create a common ground through language. Under these conditions their discourse becomes more thoughtful and conceptual than does that of individuals working alone (Schwartz, 1995, as cited by Watkins, Carnell, & Lodge, 2007).

Furthermore, in collaborative learning processes the role of teachers is important, even more if we take into account that collaboration cannot happen if the socio-affective processes are ignored. In this regard, teachers must go beyond being expert transmitters of knowledge to students; they have to regulate and influence these processes: cognitive, motivational, and affective. It demands them to be expert designers of intellectual experiences; otherwise, the level and quality of interaction among students could decrease, and thus affect the process of acquisition of knowledge (Smith & MacGregor, n. d.). In other words, academic collaborative procedures demand a role from the teacher framed by being a guide, facilitator and generator of environments in which negotiation of meaning and dialogic problem solving take place.

On the other hand, although there are many positive aspects of collaboration, Beatty (2003) points out that there are some problems, specifically in a language learning setting. For example, the lack of participation in the different tasks from one or more members of the team and the insecurity of some teachers over unpredictable outcomes of the tasks can make that students feel not comfortable while working on a team. This can produce breakdowns in communications and the whole work could be problematic.

### *Meaningful Learning*

Ausubel, Novak, and Hanesian (1978) present a learning approach whose fundamentals are constituted by the knowledge individuals have built in their daily

experiences; and based on them, individuals are led to modify, broaden and systematize it by means of instruction. Besides, this knowledge would be long-lasting depending on how meaningful the individuals find it for their cultural context (Martínez, 2004). Ausubel (2000) explains that the relationship that should exist between what is known and what is to be learnt should be neither arbitrary nor literal. That is, meaningful learning is reached when individuals do not memorize concepts by repetition (rote learning). On the contrary, it takes place when individuals manage to relate the essence of what is intended to be learnt with knowledge they have already built and, thus, multiple connections are made.

After an overview of the fundamentals of meaningful learning and considering the nature of the study, we want to refer to the ways meaningful learning might be fostered when using technology for educational purposes in general. Ashburn (2006) describes meaningful learning when using technology as characterized by six complementary attributes:

1. **Intentionality:** Using clearly articulated goals to guide the design of learning tasks and assessment of learning progress.
2. **Content centrality:** Aligning the learning goals and tasks with the big ideas, essential questions, and principles of the methods of inquiry that are central to the discipline.
3. **Authentic work:** Constructing multifaceted learning tasks that represent the challenges, problems and thinking skills required outside the classroom.
4. **Active inquire:** Using a disciplined inquiry process for learning that builds on students' own questions and develops habits of mind that foster high levels of thinking.
5. **Construction of mental models:** Embedding the articulation of cognitive models within the learning tasks.
6. **Collaborative work:** Designing learning tasks so that students' working together adds value to achieving the learning outcomes. (p. 9)

All in all, the use of technology can be very useful to provide learning environments students find meaningful. However, it requires planning, collaboration, and active roles from both learners and teachers.

## **Method**

After using virtual classrooms to support traditional classes for several years, it was worth carrying out a descriptive study which tried to account for the beliefs teachers have built towards this matter and the ways in which collaborative, autonomous, and meaningful learning have been dealt with. As the main intention was to describe this phenomenon in this single institution, the approach to develop the project was via a descriptive case study which is understood as a research methodology that “can offer rich and revealing insights into the

social world of a particular case” (Yin, 2011, p. 49) in a natural setting opposite to what happens in experimental research (Scott & Morrison, 2005). In this study, our particular case was to describe the views teachers have regarding the implementation of autonomous, collaborative, and meaningful learning through the use of a virtual classroom as a complement to the work done in the actual classroom and, at the same time, gather the beliefs they had developed towards it.

The participants of this study were six teachers who volunteered to participate and contribute to the achievement of the project’s goals. Besides willingness to participate, other parameters to select the teachers were their years of experience using virtual classrooms, three of them with more than 3 years and the other three teachers with 1 to 3 years of experience, low and high eagerness to use them and teachers who had proven to have computer skills as well as those who have reported some sorts of technical difficulties to use computers. There were four eager and skillful teachers and two teachers who were reluctant to use virtual classrooms, and who very often needed technical support. All these parameters were established in order to account for some of the multifarious factors that come into play in the process.

The process of data collection was done in three stages. In the first stage, an online questionnaire was administered. Its intention was to gather ideas the teachers had constructed regarding the use of a virtual classroom as a complement to their action in their regular classes. Additionally, this instrument was useful to collect teachers’ initial insights about the possible strategies and actions that could be undertaken to integrate the learning process in the virtual classroom autonomously, collaboratively, and meaningfully (see Appendix 1).

In the second stage, we observed the types of activities the teachers proposed in the virtual classrooms. The researchers used a format to record the weekly actions done in the virtual classroom for about ten weeks (see Appendix 2). In this format, we documented the types of activities the teachers assigned to their students as well as the ways in which autonomous, collaborative, and meaningful work were included by mainly observing the content and the roles the teachers were expected to assume, as well as the ones they proposed students to have.

In the third stage, an interview was conducted. With the intention to collect a description of the experiences teachers had had in the use of virtual classroom and with the idea of exercising a minimal degree of control possible on the interviewee’s responses, semi-structured interviews were done (Nunan, 2007). By means of this instrument we could delve further into the insights teachers developed in terms of the effectiveness, usefulness, critiques, and limitations of the use of virtual classrooms to teach English in the university context (see Appendix 3).

## Findings

In order to obtain the results of this study, the data collected by means of the three instruments were classified, triangulated, and validated following the Content Analysis Approach (Gray, 2004). Thus, as there were clear pre-established concerns in the inquiry, the data, from the different instruments used, were broken down, compared, and contrasted. In this fashion, we could reach inferences about the information gathered, which helped to systematically identify especial characteristics within them and ground the process of analysis (Gray, 2004). As a result, the outcomes of this inquiry are presented by reporting, interpreting, and discussing the teachers' beliefs identified regarding the use of virtual classrooms and the promotion of autonomous, collaborative, and meaningful learning in this environment. Besides, in an attempt to go beyond the mere description, in every category analyzed we propose ways in which the inclusion of the educational concepts of interest in this study can be enhanced.

### *Virtual Classrooms Represent Challenges in Developing Media Literacy and Breaking Traditional Views of Education*

When teachers were surveyed about their insights regarding the general use of technology in education and the use of virtual classrooms for language teaching in particular, their responses referred to two main issues: media literacy and the need to change traditional views in this regard. In terms of the former, teachers expressed their concerns about the need to be more familiar with the technicalities of using technology in their professional practice as evidenced in the following excerpts:

I think there is always a lot to learn there, it is a matter of exploring, if we don't know how to upload a listening track, there are some technological tools we need to learn, but it is a matter of doing them. (Teacher 6, interview)

I have to know all the tools we have in there, second that we don't have enough information how to take advantage of the resources that Moodle platform offers. (Teacher 1, Questionnaire)

I guess designing might be difficult if we don't have so many computer skills, because what I've been doing is mainly like some links with exercises that have already been done. (Teacher 2, Questionnaire)

In the first case, teacher 6 points out the fact that when attempting to use technology in the classroom, it is necessary to explore the technological tools to be used as well as learn about them. This view is complemented by teacher 2 by specifically referring to the lack of knowledge he has about the usefulness of the resources provided by the platform the institution uses. Due to this lack of knowledge, teachers fell into the excessive use of links to web pages as the main resource since it is one of the easiest activities to propose in terms of technological demands. It is even more evident after analyzing what the Weekly Process



Description Format shows: 100% of the participants in this study mainly linked web pages in order to have more material to reinforce the topics worked in class. This happened along the ten weeks of observation. Besides, there is no evidence of assertive feedback given in reference to the work students did there.

In reference to the change of traditional views of education, teachers reported awareness of the need to start looking at virtual education and with it to the use of technology as a contextual demand in current educational practices. To do so, teachers should open their minds to other teaching and learning environments as the second comment below shows. In the same vein, teacher 3 invites one to believe in and rely on the use of virtual classrooms more. That is, teachers should take on the challenge of potentiating their technological skills and taking responsibility in that regard by ceasing to view them as something others have to do.

Teachers have to deal with technology, they have to start to believe in the effectiveness of the virtual work, they have to be prepared and they have to know how to design exercises, upload exercises in the VP and many of them do not know how to do it, and many of them are not interested in learning how to do it because they think it is other teachers' job. (Teacher 3, interview)

...sometimes we disagree with some experiences and we say no it's better face to face or if we don't like computers that much it's a personal challenge to change our point of view. (Teacher 2, Interview)

Consequently, in our view the use of technology in education brings along with it a viewpoint change in terms of the environments in which teaching and learning can take place. Thus, by first understanding that the use of technology in education is a current world demand, teachers can mediate its acceptance, so as to fight *fears*, recognize its advantages, be aware of its disadvantages and end up learning how to use it effectively. In this process, we also have to be *critical* towards its applicability, the sorts of activities to be proposed, information to be used as well as materials and resources found on the web. It is always a good idea to try to design our own material based on the particularities of our context and, in this fashion, make more accurate connections with the curriculum and syllabi. In other words, there must be very strong bonds among the teaching learning process and curriculum, contents, methods, teaching style, context, evaluation and assessment criteria. Through these elements, computer based activities acquire their real value in the educational environments (Segovia, 2006).

### ***Autonomous Learning is Valued but Under-Promoted***

It is commonly believed that one of the easiest elements to articulate with virtual education is autonomy since students are not “controlled” by a teacher. However, Autonomy is a complex concept that cannot be reduced to individuality or lack of supervision or guidance. In our exploration regarding the ways in which this concept was understood in the work teachers did and

proposed their students to do in the virtual classroom, researchers came across with misconceptions, superficial visions and in a few cases real autonomy-related visions.

It was common to find teachers who believed they were promoting autonomy in their virtual classrooms by giving websites to students for them to have more possibilities to explore information (Teacher 6, Interview) because (1) “they are supposed to be alone or working by themselves” (Teacher 2, Interview) or because (2) the work in the virtual platform “encourages students to study by their own” (Teacher 4, Questionnaire). This situation was also evident in the observations made on the activities that teachers included in the virtual classroom. It was observed that students were supposed to “autonomously” explore a set of links to web pages whose content consisted mainly of vocabulary and grammar practice, activities that were assessed just by the time spent on them, which is the only report the platform offers for this kind of activities.

On the other hand, we could also identify some teachers whose beliefs regarding autonomy were closer to what the concept really entails. Teacher 6, for instance, describes how, in his view, the material he uses in the virtual classroom may “invite students to discover their strengths and weaknesses, for example when they go and practice for one specific skill they do it because they feel they need it” (Teacher 6, Interview). Likewise, for teacher 5, the effectiveness of a virtual classroom depends on how useful the students find it (Teacher 5, Questionnaire).

In this context, we found out that although there were two teachers who referred to autonomy as a process to discover learning potentials and confront weaknesses and failures, there is a tendency to misinterpret or reduce it to simply independent work. Specifically, in virtual environments, it is a challenge for teachers to first be aware of what fostering autonomy really is and, from this point, start to help learners identify and use a series of alternative strategies for language learning. A good start could be to help learners identify how they learn and how these strategies can be implemented in the virtual classroom and little by little guide them to take responsibility for learning, develop self-control and discipline, move beyond instruction, and develop critical thinking skills (Kumaravadivelu, 2003).

### ***Individuality Is Privileged Over Collaborative Work***

Regarding the ways in which collaborative learning has been included in the work teachers and students do in the classroom, we came across the fact that it is still an issue. Most teachers report not having fostered collaborative work in the academic activities they propose in the virtual classroom. This is evident in what the teachers 3 and 4 say below:

I am not very sure about the collaborative learning because most of the time they work individually, maybe working with forums and chats. But I think these activities are the ones that are performed the least. (Teacher 3, Interview)

According to my experience, I have been working in an individual way not in a collaborative one. They could be promoted if we have a specific topic, procedure and objective to work with them in order to reach collaborative or meaningful learning. (Teacher 1, Interview)

As can be seen, teachers see a lack in what they do in the virtual classroom in terms of what collaborative work embraces. For instance, teachers 3 and 1 explain how individual dynamics are favored over collaboration among students. These two participants, however, clearly state some strategies and ways in which collaboration might be incorporated to what they do in the virtual classroom, which at the same time can lead the learner to find it more meaningful, too. In this sense, teacher 5 also says that “forums and chats or other activities in which they have to interact, if students are responsible for this kind of activities I think that could improve a lot” (Interview). In short, we found that although there is awareness as to how enriching collaborative learning can be for language learning processes, teachers do not foster this type of learning in their practices. The former was also evident in the follow up done to the virtual classrooms where we found that 5 out of 6 teachers proposed activities like forums, a maximum of three forums along the semester; all of them have the purpose of uploading individual writing assignments, forgetting the primary intention of forums: interaction with others.

Considering the fact that collaborative work has resulted to be an institutional concern in virtual classrooms and taking into account that language is used in social interaction, we see it necessary to come up with pedagogical plans in which even in virtual environments the target language can be used the way it is supposed to work in the real world. To do so, in a virtual environment, getting familiar with the way collaboration and interaction can be promoted in this space is the first step. Designing activities rooted in these concepts would be a second step. Likewise, a third basic step is to make sure the activities are being developed in the way they have been thought of. As a result, collaboration as a naturally social act in which the participants talk among themselves and learn from each other (Pacheco, 2005) would be at the core of the practices in the virtual classroom. The virtual classroom offers a set of activities that can be used in collaborative learning, so teachers need to explore them and take some time designing activities in which students get involved in discussion and exchange of ideas through the use of technological resources.

## **Making Learning Meaningful Through Virtual Classrooms: An Added Challenge**

Ausubel (2000) describes meaningful learning as a process in which the background knowledge from individuals, the teaching and learning purposes, procedures and materials are articulated in such a way that the connection between what is known and what is intended to be learnt is not arbitrary. This has been one of the main strengths we have found in the work being done at the university, where students' realities and likes are considered. It was evident in a

Careful selection of materials, links related to music and movies that, at the same time, work on vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension (observations made in each virtual classroom).

However, based on Ashburn's (2006) six attributes of meaningful learning when using technology described above, we could infer that there is still a long way to go before meaningful learning is effectively promoted in the virtual lessons teachers have designed. Teachers have basically acknowledged that there are some initial conditions to start facing the challenge such as the fact that the use of virtual classrooms is "an excellent resource and most students like it because they are keen on technology" (Teacher 4, Questionnaire), and that "students feel very comfortable and self-confident working with computers" (Teacher 3, Interview). Despite this fact, to enhance meaningfulness in the learning activities proposed in the virtual classroom it is necessary to set clear goals, choose appropriate procedures to reach those goals, assign real like tasks, work collaboratively, and reflect upon the process (Ashburn, 2006).

## Conclusions and Implications

All in all, from the teachers' perspectives, we could identify how despite the fact that they have been using virtual classrooms for several years now, they still perceive the need to be trained in how to use virtual classrooms and exploit this educational tool much more. Besides, they see that the use of this virtual environment is a current educational demand; they show awareness of the importance of being open to the range of learning opportunities virtual classrooms might offer as a complement to what they regularly do in their physical classrooms. Furthermore, this study has shown how teachers have built weak perceptions of what promoting autonomous, collaborative, and meaningful learning through a virtual environment means. Likewise, teachers' work evidences an absence of encouragement of collaboration among students.

The use of technology in education is a current demand and, as such, we teachers are being called to integrate them in our everyday practices. The use of a virtual classroom is just a way of accomplishing this goal. However, as this study has shown, the use of this tool represents some extra-challenges of a different nature (pedagogical, technological). This can be present in the following aspects:

- Teachers assuming an active critical role. When using virtual classrooms in an institution, it should not be a responsibility of just a reduced number of teachers or administrative staff; instead, all teachers involved should take responsibility towards it, get engaged in proposing activities in the virtual classroom, and be critical towards the ways in which these virtual environments can effectively be used and fully exploited to enhance language learning.
- Seeing the virtual classroom as a maximizer of learning opportunities not just as a requirement of the university. The implementation of virtual environments, like the

one being discussed here, demands a change in terms of how language learning takes place; virtual environments can also play an important role in this endeavor.

- Really enhancing autonomy, collaboration, and interaction. Virtual classrooms are tools that can be manipulated in order to take advantage of them as much as possible to enhance students' academic development. Therefore, processes such as autonomy, collaboration, and interaction could be gradually integrated to the action being done in the virtual classroom specifically in the setting in which this study was carried out since these concepts are part of the cornerstone of the Educational Project. This gradual integration could be enhanced, for example, by grounding decisions and actions in the outcomes of further research studies and reflection.
- Integrating the use of the virtual classrooms in the curriculum. The very act of including and articulating the use of virtual classrooms in language teaching and learning practices might consequently imply a need to make this part of the curricular guidelines of the educational approach of a given institution.

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## Appendix 1: Questionnaire

1. From your personal opinion and experience, how do you define the Moodle Platform?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What's a virtual classroom? What is its purpose  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. How long have you used virtual classrooms at the university?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. How has your experience been with the implementation of virtual classrooms?  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. What do you do in the virtual classroom as the teacher? What activities do you propose and what tools do you use the most? Why?  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. What tools from the virtual classroom do you usually not use? Why?  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. Have you had any sort of limitations or difficulties to design and/or use virtual classrooms? If so, please describe them.  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. How have you overcome the aforementioned difficulties?  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. From your personal view, how effective is the use of virtual classrooms as a complement to classes in a physical space?  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. How do you assess students' performance in the EFL virtual classroom?  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 2: Virtual Classrooms Weekly Process Description

Teacher's name: \_\_\_\_\_ Level: \_\_\_\_\_

Week	Activities proposed	Description	Student's and teacher's role	Sort of feedback
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				



### Appendix 3: Interview Protocol

The following interview aims at learning in more detail about your perceptions and insights regarding the ways in which you have experienced the use of the virtual platform in your English courses. Specifically it is focused on your opinions about the usefulness of the virtual classroom, its advantages, disadvantages, and limitations.

1. How has your experience using the virtual platform been?
  - How long have you been using it?
  - How useful do you find it to be?
  - What advantages can you mention, if any?
  - What disadvantages does it have, if any?
2. Taking into account your experience or what you have seen, what challenges do you think teachers should be prepared for when using the virtual platform?
  - Any technological challenges? Which ones?
  - Any personal challenges?
  - Any philosophical challenges?
  - Any educational challenge?
3. Could you please describe the exact procedure in which you use the virtual classrooms?
  - Why do you use it?
  - What activities do you include there?
  - Which activities do you find more useful? Why?
  - Is there any application you do not find useful? Why?
  - How do you evaluate the activities you propose for your students there?
4. Is there a way in which what you have done so far in the virtual classroom can be better? If so, what does it depend on?
5. Do you think that it is possible to promote autonomous, meaningful, and collaborative learning by means of the virtual activities that are proposed in the virtual classroom? Why? Why not?
  - Autonomous?
  - Meaningful?
  - Collaborative?
6. Is there anything else you want to add in regard to the use of the MOODLE platform for the teaching and learning of English at the university?