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Teaching English through virtual education: A systematic review

Enseñanza del inglés mediante la educación virtual: una revisión sistemática

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Abstract

The systematic review conducted had the general objective of evaluating how English language teaching is presented through online education. The PRISMA approach was selected as the methodology; 20 scientific articles indexed in Scopus, Web of Science, and SciELO were audited. The findings revealed that teaching English through online education demonstrates that digital methodologies represent an effective alternative for strengthening language skills, as they promote interaction, motivation, and autonomous learning. It is concluded that online education has become established as an effective strategy for teaching English, given that it fosters interaction, motivation, and flexible access to digital resources that strengthen students' language skills. This demonstrates that tools such as blended learning, gamification, social networks, and the metaverse generate more dynamic and innovative learning experiences.

Keywords: learning, English, motivation, technology.

Resumen

La revisión sistemática realizada tuvo como objetivo general: evaluar cómo se presenta la enseñanza del idioma inglés mediante la educación virtual. Como metodología se seleccionó el enfoque PRISMA; se auditaron 20 artículos científicos indexados en Scopus, Web of Science y SciELO. Los hallazgos revelaron que la enseñanza del idioma inglés a través de la educación virtual permite identificar que las metodologías digitales representan una alternativa efectiva para fortalecer las competencias lingüísticas, debido a que favorecen la interacción, la motivación y el aprendizaje autónomo. Se concluye que la educación virtual se ha consolidado como una estrategia efectiva para la enseñanza del idioma inglés, dado que favorece la interacción, la motivación y el acceso flexible a recursos digitales que fortalecen las competencias lingüísticas de los estudiantes. Esto evidencia que herramientas como el *blended learning*, la gamificación, las redes sociales y el metaverso generan experiencias de aprendizaje más dinámicas e innovadoras.

Palabras clave: aprendizaje, inglés, motivación, tecnología.

Introduction

Virtual education has emerged as a significant alternative for English language instruction, expanding access, offering greater temporal flexibility, and enabling the integration of multimodal didactic resources. Nonetheless, it also confronts considerable challenges, including the digital divide and the need for ongoing teacher professional development. According to UNESCO (2023), these difficulties align with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education), particularly target 4.4, which seeks to increase technical and vocational competencies to promote decent employment.

At the global level, various international organizations have underscored the potential of digital technologies to broaden learning opportunities and strengthen student competency development. In this regard, UNICEF (2022) acknowledges that digital transformation has fostered new avenues for knowledge acquisition, thereby supporting the reinforcement of communicative abilities such as English language learning. Similarly, UNESCO (2022), through

its Global Education Monitoring Report, emphasizes the importance of implementing innovative educational strategies that increase children's and young people's participation and retention in formal education. The Banco Mundial (2021) stresses the continued need to strengthen technological infrastructure and internet access as key elements for expanding foreign language learning opportunities and promoting more inclusive and equitable education worldwide.

Within the Peruvian context, undertaking a systematic review on virtual English instruction holds particular relevance due to growing interest in strengthening students' linguistic competencies through educational technologies. The Ministerio de Educación (2023) has promoted various initiatives aimed at improving English language learning at both basic and higher education levels, encouraging innovative strategies that foster greater educational inclusion. Likewise, reports from the Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática (2023) document a progressive increase in access to digital tools and connectivity services, representing an opportunity to expand the reach of virtual education and enhance the development of English communicative competencies. In this scenario, the virtual modality presents itself as a valuable alternative for strengthening teaching and learning processes, thereby contributing to students' academic and professional formation across diverse contexts within the country.

International organizations have noted that Peru's educational digital transformation still faces challenges related to infrastructure, teacher training, and pedagogical design. A systematic review thus offers a means to synthesize recent scientific evidence on effective methodologies for virtual English instruction, identify research gaps, and propose guidelines to strengthen educational quality.

The social relevance of this systematic review lies in its examination of students, teachers, and educational institutions seeking to improve English language learning in virtual environments, while also contributing to reducing gaps in access to linguistic competencies across diverse and vulnerable educational contexts (Vizcaíno et al., 2023). Its practical utility consists of identifying effective methodological strategies for virtual English instruction and facilitating institutional decision-making regarding the implementation of digital resources and appropriate pedagogical approaches (Ruiz & Valenzuela, 2022).

From a methodological standpoint, this systematic review contributes to the scientific community by developing a systematic process for collecting, analyzing, and synthesizing previous studies on English instruction in virtual settings (Rodríguez et al., 2021). At the theoretical level, the review contributes to analyzing and updating the principal theories related to English language teaching in virtual environments, integrating pedagogical, communicative, constructivist, and technological approaches that explain second-language acquisition processes within digital contexts (Romero et al., 2024).

Selected relevant studies

Several preliminary studies help contextualize the issues under investigation. First, Valera-Yataco et al. (2023), in Bolivia, aimed to examine the use of digital tools and their benefits for English language learning in higher education. Through a systematic review of fourteen scientific articles, they demonstrated that technological integration supports the development of oral skills, writing, and listening comprehension.

Second, Moreno et al. (2022), in Costa Rica, analyzed university students' perceptions of virtual English teaching and learning, concluding that learners value schedule flexibility and access to multimedia resources positively, while also emphasizing the critical need to strengthen synchronous social interaction alongside pedagogical teacher mediation.

Finally, Gutiérrez et al. (2022), in Lima, examined the relationship between virtual learning strategies and English language acquisition among university students. They concluded that a significant relationship exists between virtual strategies and English proficiency levels. Furthermore, they provided evidence that appropriate use of virtual environments improves academic performance in linguistic competencies such as listening, reading, and writing.

Theoretical foundation: connectivism

Connectivism was selected as the theoretical framework for this study, as it offers a relevant explanation for learning in virtual environments. This theory provides a perspective on teaching-learning processes in digital settings applicable to all educational domains, including English language learning. It constitutes a broad theoretical framework that underpins pedagogical approaches oriented toward digital literacy and lifelong learning across any curricular area.

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Connectivism posits that knowledge is distributed across digital networks and that learning occurs through connections between information nodes. In this sense, the use of virtual platforms, educational applications, and digital communities enables students to access multiple English-language sources and develop communicative competencies through global interaction (Ramalingam et al., 2022).

Conceptual definitions

From a conceptual perspective, English language teaching in virtual environments is defined as the educational process mediated by digital technologies that allows students to develop linguistic competencies through online platforms and interactive resources (Li & Yu, 2023). Virtual education applied to language learning is conceptualized as a pedagogical model integrating digital technologies, educational platforms, and online didactic strategies to facilitate English instruction (Yingxin et al., 2024).

In summary, the reviewed literature indicates that virtual-environment English instruction represents an innovative pedagogical alternative responding to the educational demands of the digital society. Technological advances have significantly transformed teaching and learning processes, enabling students to develop linguistic competencies through digital platforms that foster interaction, collaboration, and ongoing access to diverse educational resources.

Given the above, the present investigation pursues the general objective of analyzing English language instruction through virtual education by means of a systematic literature review. On this basis, two specific objectives are formulated: (1) to identify the importance of virtual English language instruction within the Peruvian context, and (2) to describe the theories underlying virtual English language instruction in the Peruvian context.

Methodology

This research was classified as basic in nature, understood as the scientific process oriented toward generating theoretical knowledge that enables understanding of phenomena without immediate practical application, while also contributing to the development of new explanations about reality (Arias & Covinos, 2021). Consistent with this basic orientation, a qualitative approach was adopted, conceived as a research perspective that seeks to understand reality through subjects' experiences and the interpretation of their meanings (Hadi et al., 2023). As the appropriate methodological strategy for this approach, a systematic review was employed, a type of study that collects, analyzes, and synthesizes in an orderly and rigorous manner the available scientific evidence on a specific topic (Hernández & Mendoza, 2023).

Once the methodological strategy was defined, selection criteria were established to ensure the quality and relevance of the scientific evidence. First, high-impact articles were considered, consulting databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and SciELO, which provided access to reliable and validated literature. Additionally, studies published within the last five years and written in either Spanish or English were delimited to broaden the comparative analysis. Investigations with defined methodological designs, whether qualitative or quantitative, were also included, facilitating consistent comparison of results. The search was conducted using keywords related to teaching, English language, and virtual education, with Boolean operators employed to optimize precision. Finally, incomplete, duplicated, or methodologically unreliable articles were excluded, thereby ensuring the robustness of the document.

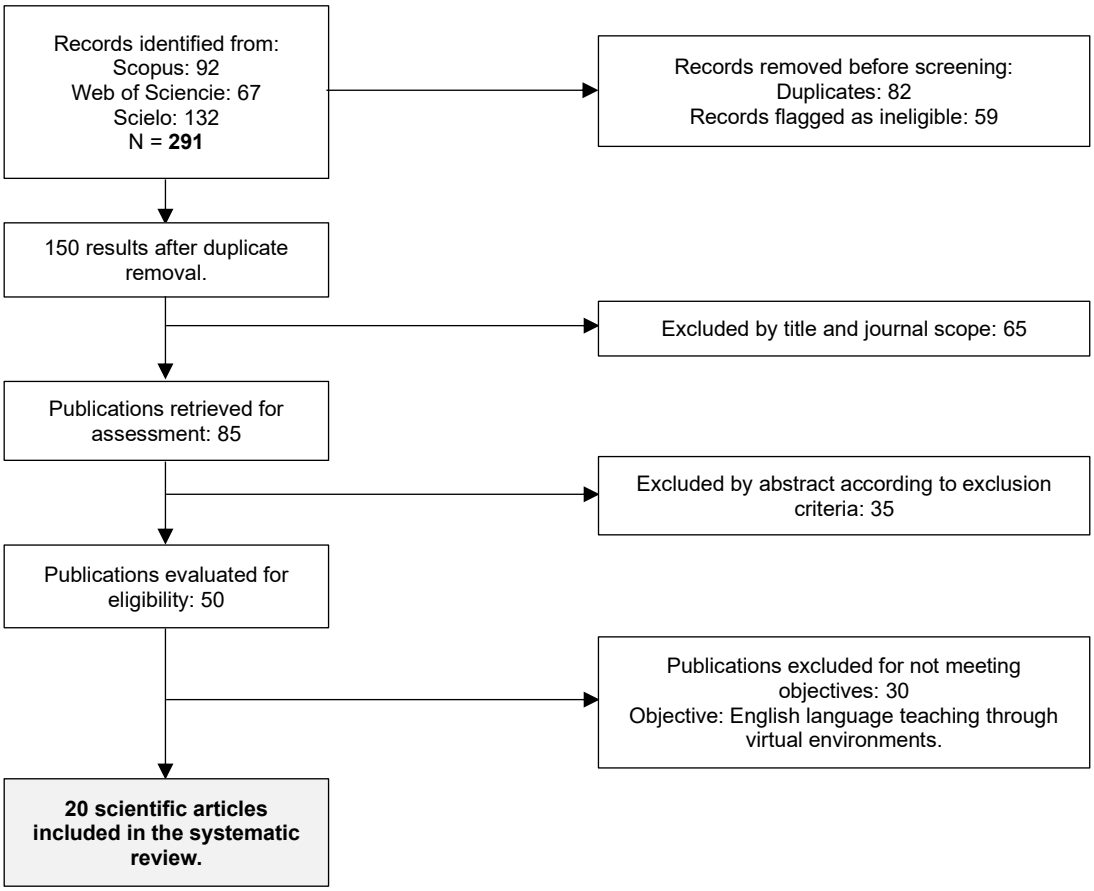
To operationalize the review process, two fundamental instruments were utilized. Document analysis is conceived as a technique oriented toward the systematic review of written sources that yield relevant information for understanding social, educational, or organizational phenomena (Romero et al., 2024). Similarly, the checklist is defined as a structured instrument that guides the observation, evaluation, or review process of a study object through previously established criteria, facilitating the identification of specific elements and the orderly organization of information for subsequent analysis (Romero et al., 2022). The document selection procedure is presented below.

Figure 1 presents the analysis of 291 articles across different databases, including Scopus, SciELO, and Web of Science. Subsequently, 141 of these were excluded for not containing information relevant to the systematic review, leaving 150 articles. Following a homogeneity analysis aligned with the proposed objective, 20 articles were selected for detailed examination.

Figure 1

Document selection procedure

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Results and discussion

This section presents the findings and their discussion, with the aim of demonstrating the relevance of virtual environments as pedagogical tools for English language instruction. In this regard, the analysis examines how the digital transformation of educational processes has generated new opportunities for strengthening foreign language learning.

Table 1
English language teaching through virtual education

No.	Year and author(s)	English language teaching
1	Li & Yu (2023)	Demonstrate that virtual environments improve interaction and motivation, yet note limitations in students' digital autonomy.
2	Ramalingam et al. (2022)	Show that blended learning enhances English acquisition, though effectiveness depends on the pedagogical quality of virtual design.
3	Zhang & Hasim (2023)	Conclude that gamification strengthens language skills, while acknowledging technical and assessment challenges.

4	Yingxin et al. (2024)	Indicate that virtual collaborative learning improves writing skills, though greater oral interaction remains necessary.
5	Guo & Lee (2023)	Analyze informal digital English learning, highlighting its positive impact on linguistic exposure.
6	Farmati et al. (2023)	Provide evidence that blended learning in ESP contexts improves domain-specific competencies, yet requires teacher training.
7	Tan & Yunus (2023)	Note that social networks enhance English learning, though distractions may arise.
8	Klimova et al. (2023)	Indicate that emerging technologies favor English instruction, but advanced digital skills are required.
9	Zhou & Zhang (2022)	Conclude that virtual learning improves performance, though outcomes depend on technological access.
10	Chouaib et al. (2023)	Document improvements in specialized English through blended learning, while noting implementation gaps.
11	Li et al. (2023)	Examine metaverse use in virtual English instruction, highlighting high motivation but low accessibility.
12	Suyo-Vega et al. (2023)	Point out that virtual educational models require greater pedagogical articulation to achieve effectiveness.

A growing trend toward incorporating innovative methodologies such as blended learning, gamification, educational social networks, collaborative learning, and emerging technologies like the metaverse is observed. These strategies promote greater student participation and generate more dynamic, interactive learning experiences. Studies by Ramalingam et al. (2022), Farmati et al. (2023), and Chouaib et al. (2023) coincide in indicating that blended learning significantly improves English proficiency. Meanwhile, Zhang and Hasim (2023) and Li et al. (2023) emphasize the potential of innovative technologies to increase student motivation and engagement.

Table 2
Importance of virtual English language instruction in the Peruvian context

No.	Year and author(s)	Importance of English language instruction
1	La Torre Castillo (2021)	The study provides evidence that university students in Lima hold favorable perceptions toward virtual classrooms for English learning.
2	Rosas Villena et al. (2023)	The investigation demonstrates that educational virtual communities significantly favor the development of English language learning competencies, particularly in reading, writing, and oral communication skills.
3	Medina Dipas & Cuba Potocino (2024)	The study concludes that post-pandemic virtual teaching in Peru revealed the need to strengthen teacher training and improve technological connectivity to ensure meaningful learning outcomes.
4	Díaz-Ronceros et al. (2021)	The authors examine educational virtualization in Peruvian public universities and note that virtual learning enabled academic continuity during the pandemic.

The findings reveal a positive assessment from students toward virtual classrooms. La Torre (2021) reports that university students perceive these spaces favorably due to the flexibility and accessibility they offer for English language learning. Complementarily, Rosas et al. (2023) highlight that educational virtual communities enhance the

development of linguistic competencies, especially in reading, writing, and oral communication, demonstrating that digital interaction favors foreign language acquisition.

Table 3
Theories of English language instruction

No.	Year and author(s)	Theories of English language instruction
1	Poehner & Lu (2024)	Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory
2	Huang (2022)	Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)
3	Zheng (2022)	Task-Based Learning and Experiential Learning Theory
4	Qin & Lei (2022)	Cognitive-Interactionist Theory

The analyzed studies reveal important similarities regarding the effectiveness of virtual education in English language instruction. Most investigations concur that digital tools favor linguistic learning by increasing motivation, interaction, and flexible access to educational resources. Authors such as Li and Yu (2023), Ramalingam et al. (2022), Zhou and Zhang (2022), and Guo and Lee (2023) maintain that virtual environments and blended learning significantly strengthen academic performance and constant exposure to the English language, demonstrating that technological integration contributes to the development of communicative competencies and active student participation. Likewise, investigations by Zhang and Hasim (2023), Tan and Yunus (2023), and Li et al. (2023) agree that innovative strategies such as gamification, social networks, and the metaverse increase student interest and commitment, fostering more dynamic and interactive learning experiences.

However, important discrepancies and limitations related to the implementation of virtual education in English instruction are also identified. Several studies caution that the effectiveness of these methodologies depends on pedagogical, technological, and formative factors. Ramalingam et al. (2022), Farmati et al. (2023), Chouaib et al. (2023), and Suyo-Vega et al. (2023) point out that blended learning success requires solid pedagogical designs and adequate methodological articulation. Meanwhile, Klimova et al. (2023) and Zhou and Zhang (2022) emphasize that lack of digital competencies and limitations in technological access continue to represent significant barriers. Similarly, Yingxin et al. (2024) identify that although virtual collaborative learning improves written skills, difficulties remain in strengthening oral and communicative real-time interaction. Furthermore, Li et al. (2023) acknowledge that emerging technologies such as the metaverse present accessibility problems due to their high technological requirements.

Thus, the analyzed studies allow concluding that English language teaching through virtual education represents an effective and innovative alternative for strengthening linguistic learning across diverse educational contexts. Nevertheless, its effectiveness depends not solely on technology use, but also on the pedagogical quality of implemented strategies, teacher training, and equitable access to digital resources.

Regarding the first specific objective, the studies evidence important similarities concerning the relevance of virtual education in English language instruction within the Peruvian context. All authors agree that virtual platforms enabled educational continuity and strengthened English learning during and after the pandemic. Likewise, La Torre (2021), Rosas Villena et al. (2023), and Díaz et al. (2021) highlight that students developed favorable perceptions toward virtual environments due to the flexibility and accessibility they offer for language learning. Additionally, Rosas et al. (2023) emphasize that virtual communities favored the development of linguistic skills, particularly in reading, writing, and oral communication, which coincides with the position of La Torre Castillo (2021) that virtual classrooms strengthened the English learning process among university students.

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Nevertheless, discrepancies and limitations related to the structural and pedagogical conditions of virtual education in Peru are also identified. Medina and Cuba (2024) point out that educational virtualization revealed deficiencies in technological connectivity and teacher training, which affected learning quality. Meanwhile, Díaz et al. (2021) maintain that although virtual education enabled academic continuity, infrastructure and methodological adaptation difficulties persisted during the pandemic, especially in public universities. Likewise, Rosas et al. (2023) report positive results in linguistic competencies; however, the authors acknowledge that unequal access to digital resources limits the effectiveness of these strategies in vulnerable contexts within the country.

The studies demonstrate that virtual English instruction in the Peruvian context represents a relevant educational tool for guaranteeing learning access and strengthening communicative competencies. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of this modality depends on factors such as connectivity, technological access, and teacher preparation.

Regarding the second specific objective, the selected studies evidence important similarities concerning the theories underpinning English language teaching in virtual environments. The findings reported by Poehner and Lu (2024) indicate that English language instruction achieves better results when grounded in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, as learning is constructed through constant interaction between teachers and students. Huang (2022) highlights the importance of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) as an effective strategy for strengthening English communicative competencies; the study demonstrates that students achieve better performance when participating in activities oriented toward solving authentic situations requiring functional language use. Similarly, Zheng (2022) confirms that the task-based approach favors English language acquisition by increasing student motivation and engagement during the learning process. Qin and Lei (2022), from the Cognitive-Interactionist Theory perspective, maintain that second language acquisition occurs through meaningful interaction and cognitive processing of linguistic information. The analysis identifies that recent research on English instruction has prioritized communication- and interaction-centered methodologies due to their positive impact on linguistic competency development.

The analyzed studies allow concluding that virtual education has consolidated itself as an effective strategy for English language teaching, as it favors interaction, motivation, and flexible access to digital resources that strengthen students' linguistic competencies. Evidence further shows that tools such as blended learning, gamification, social networks, and the metaverse generate more dynamic and innovative learning experiences.

Within the Peruvian context, the studies conclude that virtual English instruction represented a fundamental alternative for guaranteeing educational continuity during and after the pandemic. The investigations concur that virtual platforms contributed to strengthening linguistic skills and providing flexible access to English learning.

Regarding the theories associated with virtual English language instruction, it is concluded that constructivist, connectivist, and meaningful learning approaches constitute fundamental bases for understanding educational processes in digital environments.

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