

Challenges in virtual English education: dropout and student participation

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to God, who has been my guide throughout this project and my greatest motivation to improve myself, enhance my quality of life, and help others. I placed my trust in Him, grateful for the strength, health, and people He placed in my path to successfully complete this academic purpose. With deep love and gratitude, I also dedicate this monograph to my family, who always offered their unconditional support, patience, and affection, sustaining me through every challenge.

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and motivational support was invaluable. This monograph is the result of collective effort, perseverance, and the conviction that education remains a powerful tool for personal and social transformation.

Resumen

Este trabajo monográfico analiza los principales desafíos de la educación virtual en inglés, centrándose en la deserción estudiantil y la participación en entornos de aprendizaje en línea. El estudio adopta un enfoque cualitativo y descriptivo basado en una revisión bibliográfica de artículos académicos, estudios de investigación y documentos teóricos relacionados con la educación virtual y el aprendizaje de idiomas. El análisis identifica varios factores que influyen en la deserción de los estudiantes en cursos virtuales de inglés. Entre los más significativos se encuentran las limitaciones tecnológicas, habilidades digitales insuficientes, falta de motivación y dificultades para equilibrar las responsabilidades académicas con el trabajo y los compromisos personales. Además, la interacción limitada entre docentes y estudiantes, la reducida práctica comunicativa y la retroalimentación tardía pueden afectar negativamente la participación de los estudiantes y los resultados de aprendizaje. Estas condiciones pueden generar sentimientos de aislamiento y reducir la motivación de los estudiantes para participar activamente en el proceso de aprendizaje.

Asimismo, el estudio enfatiza que la participación activa de los estudiantes es esencial para una adquisición efectiva del idioma en entornos virtuales. Cuando los estudiantes interactúan con los materiales del curso, colaboran con sus compañeros y reciben retroalimentación continua de los docentes, es más probable que se mantengan comprometidos y motivados. La participación promueve el desarrollo de la competencia comunicativa, el pensamiento crítico y experiencias de aprendizaje más profundas. Los hallazgos sugieren que mejorar el diseño de los cursos virtuales de inglés y fortalecer la comunicación entre docentes y estudiantes son estrategias esenciales para reducir las tasas de deserción. La implementación de actividades interactivas, enfoques

pedagógicos inclusivos y apoyo tecnológico puede mejorar la retención y el compromiso de los estudiantes. En última instancia, estas estrategias contribuyen a crear entornos de aprendizaje virtual más efectivos, motivadores y accesibles para la educación en lengua inglesa.

Palabras clave: Participación estudiantil, educación virtual, aprendizaje del idioma inglés, deserción, entornos de aprendizaje en línea.

Abstract

This monograph analyzes the main challenges of virtual English education, focusing on student dropout and participation in online learning environments. The study adopts a qualitative and descriptive approach based on a bibliographic review of academic articles, research studies, and theoretical documents related to virtual education and language learning. The analysis identifies several factors that influence student dropout in virtual English courses. Among the most significant are technological limitations, insufficient digital skills, lack of motivation, and difficulties balancing academic responsibilities with work and personal commitments.

Additionally, limited interaction between teachers and students, reduced communicative practice, and delayed feedback can negatively affect student engagement and learning outcomes. These conditions may lead to feelings of isolation and reduce students' motivation to actively participate in the learning process.

Furthermore, the study emphasizes that active student participation is essential for effective language acquisition in virtual environments. When students interact with course materials, collaborate with peers, and receive continuous feedback from instructors, they are more likely to remain engaged and motivated. Participation promotes the development of communicative competence, critical thinking, and deeper learning experiences. The findings suggest that improving the design of virtual English courses and strengthening communication between teachers and students are essential strategies to reduce dropout rates. Implementing interactive activities, inclusive pedagogical approaches, and technological support can enhance student retention and engagement. Ultimately, these strategies contribute to creating more effective, motivating, and accessible virtual learning environments for English language education.

Keywords: student participation, virtual education, English language learning, dropout, online learning environments.

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Introduction

Virtual education has transformed the way students access learning opportunities, particularly in the field of English language teaching. As technological platforms expand and institutions adopt digital modalities, virtual environments have become essential tools for promoting flexibility, accessibility, and inclusion. However, despite these benefits, such environments also present significant challenges that affect the effectiveness of language instruction and students' academic success.

In the context of English as a foreign language, two issues become particularly relevant: student dropout and low levels of participation. These factors directly influence learning outcomes by reducing interaction, limiting communicative practice, and weakening student engagement. According to Budiman (2018) states that "the lack of basic English skills and the difficulty of balancing study, work, and personal life contribute to poor academic performance" (p. 14).

Understanding these limitations is essential for strengthening virtual English programs, since student participation involves actively engaging in discussions, debates, questioning, and explanations, which facilitates the construction of deep knowledge (Simovska, 2007). In this regard, participation plays a key role in achieving learning outcomes (Kim, 2013) as it promotes critical thinking and enhances the overall quality of discussions. (Davies & Graff, 2005; Quinonez-Beltran et al., 2023)

Building on these perspectives, this monograph explores the challenges of virtual English education, focusing specifically on student dropout and participation as factors that influence

retention and language learning outcomes. Conducted through a qualitative-descriptive approach based on a bibliographic review, the study seeks to examine the factors associated with these issues and discuss pedagogical strategies that may strengthen student engagement and improve the effectiveness of virtual English instruction.

The significance of this study lies in the need to gain an in-depth understanding of the factors that influence student dropout and participation in virtual English education. In a context where digital modalities have become a central alternative for language teaching, it is essential to examine the causes that limit student retention and engagement, as well as to discuss strategies that may improve these aspects. This study is relevant because it addresses issues that directly affect learning quality and the effectiveness of online training programs.

The results of this work may benefit various groups, including English teachers, virtual program designers, educational institutions implementing digital learning environments, and students who face technological, motivational, or pedagogical barriers. By providing an analysis of the causes of dropout and low participation, the study contributes to closing existing knowledge gaps and informing decision-making processes aimed at promoting more inclusive, motivating, and accessible educational practices. Additionally, the findings offer useful insights for the development of pedagogical approaches that respond to the real needs of students in virtual environments.

Moreover, this research has an impact beyond the academic field, as it encourages reflection on the importance of ensuring equitable educational opportunities in digital settings, especially in regions where connectivity and access are limited. The study also presents a perspective based on real formative experiences in virtual education, which enriches the understanding of the phenomenon from a practical and contextual viewpoint.

Overall, this monograph contributes to the body of knowledge on virtual English education by clarifying the factors associated with student retention and active participation.

Statement of the Problem

Teaching English in virtual environments has become a necessary and increasingly common alternative within educational systems. According to Finardi et al. (2014), globalization has contributed to the emergence of the information society and the knowledge economy, which in turn has promoted the internationalization of higher education, a process defined as the integration of international, intercultural, or global dimensions into the mission and functions of higher education institutions (p. 4295). However, the transition to virtual teaching and learning has revealed challenges such as student dropout and low participation, which directly affect the development of learners' language skills by reducing interaction, limiting communicative practice, and weakening engagement.

Understanding these difficulties is essential for identifying the factors that limit the success of online English programs and for examining the conditions that influence student retention and participation. Therefore, this work contributes to the field of foreign language teaching by analyzing the main challenges of online learning and discussing pedagogical approaches that address these issues, with the purpose of supporting more equitable and effective educational environments aligned with the demands of a globalized world.

Formulation of the Problem Question

What factors contribute to student dropout and low participation in virtual English courses?

Justification

Virtual English instruction has become a necessary and increasingly common method within educational systems. As noted by Finardi et al. (2014), globalization has driven the rise of the information society and the knowledge economy, strengthened the internationalization of higher education and positioned English teaching in virtual environments as a key tool for mobility. However, this transition has also revealed challenges such as student dropout and low participation, which directly affect learners' ability to achieve linguistic competence.

The analysis of these difficulties is justified by the need to better understand the factors that limit success in virtual English programs and to review inclusive and innovative pedagogical strategies that strengthen retention and active participation. Moreover, in a context where students must adapt to new technological interaction dynamics, it is essential to identify the influence of time management, motivation, access to technological resources, and the quality of digital tools on linguistic progress. These conditions create learning gaps, especially in vulnerable socioeconomic environments where unequal access to technology increases the risk of academic disadvantage.

This monograph contributes to the field of foreign language teaching by offering a critical reflection on the challenges of virtual education and proposing practical alternatives to improve teaching and learning processes. Likewise, it responds to the demand for equitable and effective education in a global context where English proficiency is essential for accessing academic and professional opportunities. It also contributes to the development of flexible, student-centered pedagogical models that integrate multimedia resources and support strategies that promote autonomy and persistence in virtual environments.

Objective

General objective

To explore the factors associated with student dropout and low participation in virtual English courses.

Specific objective

To identify factors associated with student dropout in virtual English courses.

To examine the effects of low participation on language learning in virtual environments.

To analyze pedagogical strategies that enhance retention and participation in virtual English education.

Research Background

Research Background International Context

The learning of English in virtual environments has significantly increased in recent years, particularly following the Covid-19 pandemic, which accelerated the transition from face-to-face education to online modalities. Since then, digital learning has become a common and often permanent component of language education. Various authors have examined the factors that hinder effective language learning in digital contexts, as well as the challenges associated with participation, engagement, and student retention.

One of the most frequently highlighted aspects in the literature is the influence of self-efficacy on participation levels in virtual courses. Wu (2023) found that students' self-efficacy for online learning is a significant indicator of engagement and that social presence during virtual classes positively mediates this relationship. This suggests that the challenges of virtual environments are not solely technological but also depend on the quality of online interactions, which directly influence motivation and academic performance.

Similarly, Fang et al. (2025) demonstrated that informal digital English learning enhances motivation and self-efficacy, leading to higher levels of active participation. The authors note that when students use digital resources such as videos, social media, or collaborative platforms outside the classroom, they exhibit greater confidence when engaging in formal activities within online courses. This finding indicates that limited digital practices may restrict students' readiness to participate effectively in fully virtual environments.

Additionally, Shaikh & Asif (2022) determined that the logical organization of the course, together with self-efficacy and clarity of content, significantly influences student satisfaction, a critical factor in retention and persistence in online programs. These results help

explain why some learners withdraw from virtual classes, as difficulties in navigation, lack of structure, and cognitive overload tend to reduce motivation and engagement.

Regarding the development of linguistic competencies, the study (Understanding anxiety, self-efficacy, and motivation in online English learning, 2024) found that metacognitive strategies and self-efficacy beliefs are essential for progress in English comprehension and production in virtual contexts. The study concludes that students facing technical or methodological difficulties tend to use fewer metacognitive strategies, which directly affects their learning outcomes. This finding demonstrates the connection between digital-environment challenges and language learning performance.

Finally, recent studies have emphasized that the quality of instructional design significantly affects retention. Research published in *The Australian Educational Researcher* (2024) revealed that students' expectancy-value beliefs how much they value tasks and how capable they feel of completing them mediate the relationship between the virtual environment and academic engagement. This suggests that unclear or poorly contextualized pedagogical design may increase difficulties in virtual learning and consequently reduce active participation.

Based on these studies, it becomes evident that the difficulties present in online English programs are associated with multiple factors, including psychological aspects such as self-efficacy and motivation, pedagogical elements such as course design and clarity of activities, technological conditions related to access and platform management, and socio-communicative factors such as social presence. These findings indicate that such challenges affect not only linguistic competence development but also retention, engagement, and overall learning outcomes. Therefore, these antecedents support the relevance of examining the factors that influence dropout and low participation in virtual English learning environments.

Research Background National Context

At the national level, public policies in Colombia have sought to address student dropout in higher education, particularly among rural and vulnerable populations. Guzmán et al. (2021) state that these policies contemplate the intervention of the various protagonists of the education system, focusing on the role of the State and Higher Education Institutions (IES). In this sense, the state has maintained its conservative approach by financing tuition and other expenses associated with higher education, mainly through credit lines and scholarship programs aimed at supporting access and permanence.

An example of these initiatives is the program “More Colombian than Ever,” which facilitated access to higher education through virtual programs for citizens located in areas with the highest rurality indexes (p. 2). However, despite these governmental efforts, dropout rates continue to represent a significant challenge Guzmán et al. (2021) state that “Despite the strategies implemented through public policy to prevent and mitigate student dropout rates in rural populations, the Ministry of National Education (MNE) estimated that the dropout rate at the undergraduate level is close to 50% for this population;” (p. 2). These findings suggest that, although institutional and state-level strategies have been implemented, structural, socioeconomic, and contextual barriers persist, negatively affecting retention and participation in virtual higher education programs.

From a pedagogical perspective, additional challenges emerge in distance English language teaching. Acosta et al. (2025) explain that this market-oriented approach presents additional challenges for ELT in distance learning models, as online programs frequently depend on standardized curricula and assessment tools designed for broad applicability (pp 231).

Such reliance can further marginalize local pedagogical approaches and cultural contexts, potentially neglecting the specific language learning needs of Colombia's diverse communities.

Furthermore, another key factor in successful language acquisition is sustained motivation and engagement. In distance and online learning models, where autonomy and self-regulation are not only desired characteristics of learners but fundamental pillars that support them, promoting intrinsic motivation and maintaining students' sustained persistence can become a challenge.

Theoretical Framework

Student Dropout in Virtual English Learning Contexts

Student dropout in virtual English courses refers to the premature withdrawal or non-completion of academic programs before learners achieve the expected learning outcomes. In online education, dropout is considered a multidimensional phenomenon that affects students' academic trajectories, institutional effectiveness, and the quality of learning processes. Although distance education provides flexibility and wider access, persistence and completion remain significant challenges, particularly in language learning contexts that require constant interaction and sustained practice.

A widely accepted definition of dropout emphasizes its temporal and persistence-related nature: Xavier et al. (2020) state that:

Dropout can be broadly defined as the student's failure to enrol for a definite number of successive semesters. However, there are many different definitions of dropout in the literature, usually related to a temporal conception, and the issue is controversial (GrauValldosera & Minguillón, 2014). A number of related concepts are often employed, some as synonymous – attrition, withdrawal, non-completion– and others as antonymous - retention, persistence, continuance, completion, and success. (p. 73).

This definition demonstrates that dropout is not simply an isolated decision to abandon a course but rather a process connected to disengagement, lack of persistence, and academic discontinuity. In virtual English learning environments, this issue becomes particularly critical because language acquisition depends on continuous exposure, regular interaction, and consistent communicative practice over time.

Research indicates that dropout is commonly influenced by psychological, social, and technological factors. Psychologically, low self-efficacy, limited motivation, and weak self-regulation reduce persistence. Socially, feelings of isolation and reduced peer or teacher interaction diminish the sense of belonging. Technologically, poor connectivity, limited digital skills, and platform-related difficulties can generate frustration and cognitive overload. Together, these conditions increase the probability of disengagement and course abandonment in virtual English programs.

Psychological factors represent one of the most significant causes of student dropout in virtual English learning environments. In online education, students are required to maintain high levels of autonomy, motivation, and self-discipline in order to complete academic tasks. However, when learners experience low confidence in their academic abilities, their participation and persistence may decrease. Self-efficacy, which refers to students' beliefs about their capacity to perform specific learning tasks, plays a fundamental role in sustaining engagement in digital environments. When learners perceive that they lack the ability to succeed in virtual courses, they are more likely to experience frustration and disengagement.

Furthermore, recent studies highlight that self-efficacy is strongly associated with academic persistence and student retention in higher education. Students who demonstrate higher levels of confidence in their learning abilities tend to participate more actively and show greater resilience

when facing academic challenges. In contrast, those with lower self-efficacy often perceive learning tasks as more difficult and may withdraw from courses earlier. Bernardo et al. (2025) indicate that self-efficacy is a significant predictor of university persistence and plays an important role in preventing dropout in digital learning contexts.

In addition to self-efficacy, motivation represents another critical psychological factor influencing student retention in online English learning environments. Motivation can be understood as the internal drive that encourages learners to initiate and sustain learning activities over time. Psychological elements such as curiosity, interest, and learners' future vision of themselves as English users contribute to maintaining sustained engagement in language learning processes. Kim et al. (2013) explain that these motivational factors directly influence students' willingness to participate actively in language learning tasks and to persist when facing difficulties.

Moreover, emotional and cognitive factors also affect participation and persistence in virtual learning environments. Research on online education suggests that psychological variables such as emotional resilience, learning confidence, and information literacy self-efficacy influence students' engagement with digital platforms. When learners feel overwhelmed by academic demands or technological requirements, their motivation may decrease significantly. Zhao (2024) found that psychological readiness and confidence in using digital learning tools are closely related to students' levels of participation in virtual courses.

Finally, in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) virtual programs, technological self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation are particularly important for sustaining long-term engagement. Students who feel capable of using digital tools and navigating online platforms are more likely to adopt effective learning strategies and remain committed to their studies. Conversely, learners who experience technological insecurity or low motivation may gradually disengage from course activities.

According to Mekheimer (2025), these psychological conditions directly influence students' satisfaction with online instruction and their persistence in virtual English learning programs.

Socioeconomic conditions represent one of the most important social factors influencing student dropout in higher education and virtual learning environments. Financial difficulties and family responsibilities often affect students' ability to continue their studies, especially when they must divide their time between academic obligations and work. In addition, the level of satisfaction with academic programs and the degree of integration into the university environment can influence students' commitment to their studies. As Quincho Apumayta et al. (2024) state, "Socioeconomic status is another critical determinant, as financial difficulties can force students to abandon their studies to work or attend to family responsibilities. Finally, institutional aspects, such as satisfaction with study programs, integration into the academic environment, and institutional support, are fundamental for reducing dropout rates" (p. 3).

Student dropout also generates significant consequences that go beyond the individual level. When students leave their academic programs before completion, the effects can impact personal development, institutional performance, and society as a whole. The loss of potential professionals and the economic resources invested in education represent important challenges for both families and educational institutions. In this regard, Quincho Apumayta et al. (2024) explain that "The impact of university dropout extends to economic, personal, and institutional levels. Dropout leads to frustrated professionals, a lower intellectual and productive contribution to society, and economic costs for families and institutions" (p. 3).

Based on these considerations, social factors such as socioeconomic conditions, family responsibilities, and institutional support play a crucial role in student persistence in virtual English learning environments. Understanding these social determinants is essential to design

strategies that promote student retention, strengthen institutional support systems, and reduce dropout rates in online education contexts.

Table 1*Factors Influencing Dropout and Low Participation in Online Learning Environments*

Determinant	Concept	Associated Explanatory Variables
Individual	These are the characteristics associated with the student and their personal environment that directly influence the decision to leave the learning process unfinished.	Age, gender, marital status, position in the number of siblings, health problems at the time of entering HEI, family environment, fulfilled expectations, family and personal obligations, conscientiousness, intrinsic motivation, etc.
Socio-economic	They refer to the influence of the social and economic context in which the student is involved and which may lead them to not complete their higher education process.	Social status, employment situation, household and student income, economic dependency, the macroeconomic environment of the country, etc.
Academic	They are the achievement of learning outcomes, competence development, student performance and other factors that influence the teaching and learning process at all levels of education.	Previous academic performance, courses taken prior to higher education, secondary school leaving exams, results of entrance exams to higher education, teaching qualifications, levels of satisfaction with the academic programme, etc.
Institutional	These are the characteristics of HEIs which allow the proper development of the educational process.	Institutional policies, funding facilities, pedagogical resources, level of interaction between teachers and students, academic support, political support, etc.

Note. Taken from article *Rurality and Dropout in Virtual Higher Education Programs*

in Colombia p. 6. Guzmán et al (2021).

Student Engagement in Online Learning

Student engagement refers to the level of active involvement that learners demonstrate during the learning process. It includes participation in academic activities, effort to understand

course content, and commitment to learning tasks. Research on engagement identifies different ways in which students may participate in educational environments. Some learners show an independent approach and focus mainly on their individual academic responsibilities. Others prefer collaborative participation and engage in teamwork and shared academic activities. In contrast, some students demonstrate a more passive form of engagement by limiting their participation to basic course requirements, while highly engaged learners tend to be strongly committed and actively involved in most aspects of their academic work (Student Engagement, 2024, p. 2).

Student engagement is particularly important in online education because learners often study with limited supervision and must manage their own learning processes. In many contexts, especially in developing countries, students may face technological limitations such as unstable internet connections or shared digital devices. For this reason, effective online courses require clear weekly structures, accessible learning materials, and well-designed activities that can be completed asynchronously. When instructors maintain consistent communication and provide timely feedback, students are more likely to stay connected to the course and sustain their participation, which ultimately improves the quality of learning, (Shahriar & Akter, 2026)

In virtual learning environments, interaction plays a central role in strengthening the learning process. Students interact not only with the educational content but also with instructors and peers. Digital materials such as virtual learning objects, multimedia resources, and innovative tools can facilitate knowledge construction by allowing students to explore information in dynamic ways. At the same time, communication between teachers

and students supports academic continuity because learners receive guidance, instructions, and feedback throughout the course. Peer collaboration is also essential in online English programs, as interaction among classmates encourages participation and provides opportunities to practice Linguistic skills a second language.

Self-Efficacy and Motivation in Virtual Language Learning

Self-efficacy refers to learners' beliefs about their ability to successfully complete academic tasks and achieve learning goals. In virtual language learning environments, this perception influences how students approach challenges, participate in activities, and persist in their studies. When learners feel confident in their abilities, they tend to demonstrate greater motivation and engagement in the learning process. As Yu & Duan (2024) explain, self-efficacy is closely related to learners' feelings of success, confidence, and motivation in educational contexts (2022, p. 554).

Likewise, motivation is widely recognized as a key factor in second language learning because it influences students' willingness to begin and continue the learning process. In language education, motivation can be understood as a psychological force that encourages learners to invest effort, maintain interest, and persist when facing challenges. Learners who experience positive emotions while studying a language and who have a strong desire to learn are more likely to remain engaged and committed to their academic goals. As Rezai et al. (2025) explain, motivation functions as a driving force that initiates and sustains the complex and often long-term process of language learning, promoting greater engagement and facilitating learning progress.

In addition to self-efficacy and motivation, psychological readiness refers to

students' mental and emotional preparedness to participate in learning activities, particularly in virtual environments where autonomy and self-management are essential. In online language learning contexts, students must be able to adapt to digital platforms, manage their time effectively, and remain emotionally resilient when facing academic or technological challenges. When learners are psychologically prepared, they tend to approach learning tasks with greater confidence and maintain a positive attitude toward the learning process. This readiness helps students remain engaged in virtual courses and supports their persistence in language learning programs.

Pedagogical Strategies to Strengthen Retention, Engagement, and Meaningful Learning

Garrison et al. (2010), through the Community of Inquiry Framework, highlight the importance of integrating social, teaching, and cognitive presence. Key strategies include structured synchronous activities such as debates, role plays, and pair work, along with immediate feedback and the creation of virtual learning communities to increase participation and engagement. These elements help foster a more supportive and interactive environment, allowing learners to feel connected, guided, and intellectually challenged. When these presences are balanced, students demonstrate higher levels of motivation, collaboration, and persistence throughout their virtual English learning experiences.

Active and Task-Based Learning.

The Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) approach, supported by Ellis (2017), promotes the authentic use of language through tasks that require oral and written interaction. In virtual settings, this approach allows students to use English in real-life situations, increasing autonomy. It also fosters active participation and improves fluency through activities centered on solving communicative problems. Additionally, TBLT encourages learners to focus on meaning before form, which helps reduce anxiety and promotes more natural communication. When applied in

online environments, this approach can integrate multimedia resources, collaborative platforms, and project-based tasks that simulate real communicative demands, thereby enhancing engagement and strengthening both linguistic competence and confidence.

Gamification and Interactive Tools

Deterding et al. (2011) show that gamification increases motivation through rewards, levels, and challenges. In English courses, tools such as interactive quizzes, badges, and virtual simulations enhance engagement and reduce dropout. Gamification transforms activities into more dynamic experiences, encouraging constant language practice. Moreover, the incorporation of game-like elements fosters a sense of achievement and progression, which helps maintain student interest over time. When combined with well-structured learning objectives, gamification can also promote healthy competition, strengthen persistence, and support the development of linguistic skills in a more enjoyable and meaningful way.

Self-Regulation Support Strategies

Zimmerman (2013) emphasizes that teaching self-regulation skills significantly improves performance in digital environments. These strategies include weekly planning, setting linguistic goals, periodic self-assessments, and monitoring progress. In virtual programs, these practices reduce procrastination and strengthen students' responsibility toward their English learning. Moreover, self-regulation fosters greater autonomy, helping learners develop habits that sustain long-term engagement and consistent study routines. When students acquire these skills, they are better equipped to manage distractions, evaluate their own progress critically, and make informed decisions about the strategies that best support their linguistic development.

Inclusion and Differentiated Instruction

Tomlinson (2014) highlights the need to adapt content to different learning styles and paces. Inclusion in virtual environments requires multimodal materials such as videos, podcasts, and leveled readings, as well as accessible platforms that offer personalized practice options. Additionally, support through tutoring and discussion forums enhances participation and improves retention in online English programs. This differentiated approach ensures that learners with varying needs, abilities, and preferences can engage meaningfully with the content. Moreover, inclusive virtual design fosters a more equitable learning environment, helping students overcome linguistic or technological barriers and promoting sustained progress throughout their English learning journey.

Legal Framework

The regulatory foundation of this monograph is based on the commitment of the State and institutions to guarantee quality education, mediated by technologies and oriented toward global competitiveness through bilingualism. This legal framework not only regulates the provision of educational services but also establishes guidelines to protect students' academic trajectories in non-conventional modalities. The following section describes the legal pillars that support retention strategies and the development of linguistic competencies within the context of Colombian virtual education.

Right to Education and Student Retention

The Political Constitution of Colombia (1991), in Article 67, defines education as a fundamental right of the individual and a public service with an essential social function. This

constitutional provision acts as the fundamental pillar for academic retention strategies, as it obliges the State to ensure that students not only formally access the system but also remain in it effectively. Within the framework of this monograph, this regulation supports overcoming the socioeconomic and technological barriers that have been identified as the main causes of dropout in virtual learning environments.

Quality and Flexibility in Online Education

Decree 1330 of 2019 from the Ministry of National Education regulates the quality conditions necessary for the offering and development of academic programs in the country. For this research, it is important to highlight that this decree requires Higher Education Institutions to implement comprehensive support models and strong university welfare programs. The regulation recognizes that virtual education demands specific pedagogies that promote self-regulation and autonomy, elements that are critical to mitigating dropout from virtual courses and ensuring that online education meets the required standards of academic excellence.

Bilingualism as a Policy for Competitiveness

Law 1651 of 2013, known as the Bilingualism Law, establishes the learning of English as a national priority within the Colombian educational system. This regulation justifies the relevance of Bachelor's programs in Foreign Languages, emphasizing that mastery of a second language is a transversal competence for productivity and globalization. However, the law also implies that insufficient levels of language proficiency may generate academic frustration if adequate virtual pedagogical support is not available, which aligns with the analysis of dropout factors addressed in this study.

Student Retention and Institutional Innovation

The guidelines of the UNAD, specifically Agreement 002 of 2018, formally establish the Institutional Policy for Student Retention and Persistence. This internal framework is vital for the monograph because it promotes educational innovation through the strategic use of early warning systems and specialized academic counseling. These policies actively seek to mitigate risks associated with the isolation of virtual students and the technological gap present in rural areas, ensuring that the institution's solidarity-based pedagogical model effectively responds to the particular needs of its student population.

Methodology

Research Approach

This study adopts a qualitative research approach because its objective is to understand and analyze the factors that contribute to student dropout and low participation in virtual English courses. According to Mantula et al. (2024), "Qualitative research collects and analyzes non-numerical data such as texts, videos, or audio recordings to understand concepts, opinions, or experiences" (p. 3). Therefore, qualitative research focuses on interpreting educational phenomena through the analysis of concepts, experiences, and theoretical perspectives rather than through numerical data.

In the context of this monograph, the qualitative approach allows the researcher to explore different academic perspectives related to student engagement, motivation, and retention in virtual English learning environments. Through the interpretation of scholarly literature, the study seeks to understand how psychological, social, and pedagogical factors influence students' participation and persistence in online language education.

Type of Study

This research follows a descriptive study design, which aims to identify and explain the characteristics of a specific educational phenomenon through the systematic analysis of existing information and theoretical perspectives. Descriptive studies focus on providing a detailed understanding of a situation by examining patterns, conditions, and relevant variables within a particular context. In this case, the study analyzes the factors that influence student dropout and low participation in virtual English courses. By reviewing scholarly literature, the research seeks to describe the main elements that shape students' experiences in online learning environments.

Rather than testing hypotheses or establishing direct causal relationships, this research concentrates on describing and interpreting the conditions associated with students' engagement in virtual education. The descriptive approach allows the researcher to explore psychological, social, and pedagogical factors that may affect students' motivation, participation, and persistence in online English learning. As a result, the study contributes to a clearer understanding of the challenges that students face in virtual courses and highlights the key aspects that may influence retention and active participation in digital learning environments.

Research Method

The research method used in this study is a bibliographic or documentary review. This method involves the systematic collection, analysis, and interpretation of information from academic sources such as scientific articles, books, institutional reports, and previous educational studies, institutional reports, and previous educational research. Through this process, the researcher examines existing literature in order to understand the main theoretical perspectives related to the topic. In this study, the bibliographic review focuses on research about virtual learning, student engagement, motivation, and dropout in online education.

By analyzing these academic sources, the study identifies patterns, explanations, and pedagogical approaches that help clarify the factors influencing students' participation in virtual English courses. This method allows the researcher to compare different viewpoints and synthesize relevant information that contributes to the understanding of the research problem. Furthermore, the bibliographic review is particularly suitable for monographic studies because it provides a solid theoretical foundation while offering a comprehensive overview of the existing literature related to online language learning.

Data Sources

The information used in this research was obtained from secondary sources, mainly academic publications related to online education and language learning. These sources include peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books on educational research and language teaching, reports from national and international educational institutions, and previous studies focused on virtual learning environments and English language education. The use of secondary sources allows the researcher to access a wide range of theoretical and empirical studies relevant to the research topic.

The selection of sources prioritized reliable and academically recognized publications to ensure the credibility of the information analyzed. Particular attention was given to recent studies, especially those published within the last decade, in order to ensure the relevance and up-to-date nature of the literature reviewed. This careful selection of sources contributes to building a solid theoretical foundation for understanding the factors that influence student participation and dropout in virtual English learning environments.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the information was conducted through a thematic analysis of the selected literature. In this process, the reviewed sources were carefully examined and organized according to the main themes related to the research problem. The purpose of this analysis was to identify recurring ideas, patterns, and perspectives within the existing academic literature on virtual English learning and student participation in online environments.

The literature was analyzed according to three main categories: (1) factors associated with student dropout in virtual English learning contexts, (2) the role of student participation and engagement in online learning environments, and (3) pedagogical strategies that promote retention and active participation in virtual English education. Through this analytical process, the study establishes connections between theoretical perspectives and educational practices, allowing for a deeper understanding of the challenges present in virtual English learning programs.

Scope and Limitations

This study focuses on the theoretical analysis of the factors that influence student dropout and participation in virtual English courses. The research examines existing academic literature related to online education, student engagement, motivation, and retention in virtual learning environments. By analyzing previous studies and scholarly perspectives, the research aims to provide a clearer understanding of the challenges that students face when participating in online English learning programs. One of the main limitations of this study is that it is based exclusively on a bibliographic review and does not include the collection of primary data such as surveys, interviews, or direct observations. As a result, the findings are derived from the interpretation of existing literature rather than from

empirical data collected directly from students or teachers. However, the analysis of multiple academic sources allows the research to present a broad and well-supported perspective on the factors that affect participation and dropout in virtual language learning environments

Analysis

Factors Associated with Student Dropout in Virtual English Courses

The main challenges identified in the literature is the high rate of student dropout in virtual learning environments. Online education offers flexibility and accessibility; however, it also requires students to demonstrate strong self-discipline, autonomy, and time management skills. When learners lack these abilities, they may struggle to organize their academic responsibilities and keep up with course activities. As a result, they may gradually lose motivation and engagement in the learning process, this situation often leads students to abandon the course before completing the learning objectives. Therefore, personal learning management becomes a key factor influencing persistence in virtual English education.

Likewise, the research conducted by Guzmán et al. (2021) explains that several socioeconomic and personal characteristics can influence students' decisions to end their educational process early. According to the authors, factors such as marital status, family responsibilities, age, socioeconomic status, work obligations, educational level, parents' occupations, income level, the type of employment relationship of the student, and the number of people who depend on family income may significantly affect students' academic continuity (pp. 14–15). These elements demonstrate that educational persistence is not only determined by academic factors but also by personal and social conditions that influence students' availability and commitment to their studies.

Another relevant factor associated with student dropout is the limited interaction between students and instructors in virtual environments. In traditional face-to-face classrooms, students usually receive immediate feedback and emotional support from teachers and classmates. In

contrast, communication in online courses can sometimes be delayed or restricted to written platforms, which may reduce the sense of connection between participants. This lack of interaction can generate feelings of isolation and reduce students' motivation to participate actively. Additionally, technological difficulties and limited access to reliable internet connections can negatively affect students' learning experiences and increase the likelihood of dropout in virtual English programs.

The Role of Student Participation and Engagement in Online Learning

Student participation is considered one of the most important elements for the success of virtual learning environments. Active engagement allows learners to interact with educational materials, collaborate with classmates, and practice language skills in meaningful contexts. When students participate actively in discussions, assignments, and collaborative activities, they are more likely to develop deeper understanding and improve their learning outcomes. Participation also encourages learners to become more responsible for their own learning process. For this reason, many studies highlight engagement as a key factor in maintaining motivation and academic persistence in online education.

However, participation in virtual courses may vary depending on the design of the learning activities and the teaching strategies implemented by instructors. Courses that rely mainly on passive activities, such as reading materials without interaction or feedback, may lead students to gradually lose interest in the learning process. In contrast, courses that incorporate interactive elements such as discussion forums, collaborative projects, and synchronous virtual meetings tend to increase students' motivation and participation. These interactive strategies help create a more dynamic learning environment where students feel more involved in the educational experience.

According to Rezai et al. (2025) participation and engagement in online learning are influenced by multiple factors related to how digital platforms are used by both teachers and students. Elements such as task design, the quality of feedback provided by instructors, and opportunities for social interaction play an essential role in maintaining student engagement (p. 11777). When these aspects are carefully designed, they can significantly enhance students' motivation and willingness to participate in online learning activities. In addition, a strong sense of belonging to a learning community encourages students to remain committed to the course and actively engage with their peers and instructors.

Pedagogical Strategies to Promote Retention and Participation

The literature suggests several pedagogical strategies that can contribute to improving student retention and participation in virtual English courses. One of the most important approaches is the implementation of interactive and student-centered learning activities. These activities encourage students to actively engage with the content and apply their language skills in practical situations. For example, collaborative tasks, problem-solving activities, and real-life simulations allow learners to practice English in meaningful contexts. This type of learning environment increases motivation and promotes deeper learning experiences in virtual education.

Another important strategy is the use of continuous communication and constructive feedback between instructors and students. Regular feedback helps learners understand their academic progress and identify areas that require improvement, when students receive timely responses from their teachers, they feel supported and guided throughout the learning process. This support can increase students' confidence and reduce feelings of frustration or uncertainty, as a result, effective communication between teachers and learners becomes a key factor in

maintaining participation and reducing the risk of dropout in online courses.

According to Yu & Duan (2024), one of the critical factors related to dropout and low participation in virtual education is students' confidence when facing social judgment. In this sense, virtual environments can help reduce cognitive pressure and strengthen students' self-efficacy. When learners interact in immersive or digital learning spaces, they may feel less fear of making mistakes in front of others. This reduction in social pressure can encourage greater participation and interaction with peers and instructors. Consequently, virtual learning environments can create safer educational spaces that support students' confidence and persistence in the learning process.

The analysis of the literature reveals that student dropout and low participation in virtual English courses are influenced by a combination of academic, technological, and socio-economic factors. Many students face challenges related to time management, personal responsibilities, and limited access to technological resources, which can negatively affect their ability to remain engaged in online learning environments. These factors highlight the complexity of persistence in virtual education and demonstrate that dropout is not caused by a single issue but rather by the interaction of multiple conditions.

Furthermore, the literature emphasizes the importance of student participation and engagement as key elements for successful learning in virtual environments. When students actively interact with course materials, instructors, and peers, they are more likely to remain motivated and committed to the learning process. Elements such as collaborative activities, social interaction, and meaningful feedback contribute to creating a stronger sense of belonging within the learning community, which plays a significant role in reducing dropout rates.

Therefore, the findings of this study suggest that student dropout and low participation in virtual English courses are influenced by a combination of personal, socio-economic, technological, and pedagogical factors that affect students' engagement and persistence in online learning environments. Interactive learning activities, continuous feedback, and the integration of digital communication tools help create more supportive and engaging learning environments. Therefore, improving the design of virtual courses and strengthening teacher-student interaction are essential steps to address the challenges associated with virtual English education.

Results and Discussion

The analysis of the literature reveals several important findings regarding student dropout and participation in virtual English learning environments. One of the most significant results is that student dropout in online education is influenced by a combination of academic, technological, and socio-economic factors. As discussed by Guzmán et al. (2021), personal conditions such as family responsibilities, employment obligations, and socioeconomic status can affect students' ability to maintain consistent participation in virtual courses. These findings suggest that persistence in online education depends not only on academic motivation but also on external circumstances that influence students' availability and commitment to their studies.

Additionally, a relevant finding identified in the is the crucial role of student participation and engagement in the success of virtual learning environments. Studies indicate that students who actively participate in discussions, assignments, and collaborative activities tend to demonstrate higher levels of motivation and better academic performance. According to Rezai et al. (2025), factors such as the design of learning tasks, the quality of feedback provided by instructors, and the level of interaction within digital platforms significantly influence students' engagement in online courses. These results highlight the importance of creating interactive and collaborative learning environments that encourage students to participate actively in the learning process.

Hence, the discussion of these findings also emphasizes the importance of implementing effective pedagogical strategies in virtual English courses. The literature suggests that interactive learning activities, regular feedback, and the integration of technological tools can contribute to improving student retention and participation. Furthermore, Yu & Duan (2024) explain that

virtual environments may help reduce students' fear of social judgment, allowing them to feel more comfortable participating in learning activities. This increased sense of confidence can promote greater engagement and support students' persistence in online learning environments.

Overall, the results of this study suggest that improving the design of virtual English courses and strengthening communication between instructors and students are essential steps for reducing dropout rates. Virtual education offers many opportunities for flexible and accessible learning; however, it requires well-structured pedagogical strategies that support student engagement and motivation. Therefore, educational institutions and instructors must consider both technological and pedagogical factors when designing virtual English programs in order to create more effective and inclusive learning environments.

Conclusions

The analysis of the literature allows us to conclude that student dropout in virtual English courses is a complex phenomenon influenced by multiple academic, technological, and socio-economic factors. Online learning environments require students to demonstrate high levels of autonomy, self-discipline, and time management skills. This occurs because students face difficulties in balancing their academic responsibilities with personal, family, or work obligations, their participation in the course may decrease, which can eventually lead to disengagement and dropout.

From another relevant perspective, participation and engagement play a fundamental role in virtual English learning environments. Students who actively interact with course materials, instructors, and peers tend to show higher levels of motivation and better academic performance.

The literature reviewed highlights that the design of learning activities, the quality of feedback, and opportunities for interaction significantly influence students' willingness to participate in online courses.

To sum up, the research demonstrates that the implementation of appropriate pedagogical strategies can contribute to improving student retention in virtual education. Likewise, interactive learning activities, collaborative tasks, and continuous communication between instructors and students help create more dynamic and supportive learning environments. These strategies not only improve participation, but also strengthen students' confidence and commitment to the learning process.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be proposed for improving participation and reducing student dropout in virtual English courses. First, educational institutions and instructors should prioritize the design of interactive and student-centered learning activities that promote active participation and collaboration among students. These strategies can help create more engaging learning experiences that maintain students' interest throughout the course.

Second, instructors should provide continuous feedback and maintain regular communication with students in order to guide them throughout the learning process. Timely feedback allows students to identify their strengths and areas for improvement, which can increase their motivation and confidence. Additionally, encouraging interaction through discussion forums, virtual meetings, and collaborative tasks can help reduce feelings of isolation that are sometimes associated with online learning.

Overall, institutions should also consider providing technological and academic support to students who may face difficulties in virtual learning environments. Training in digital tools, access to reliable technological resources, and guidance in time management can significantly improve students' learning experiences. By addressing these factors, virtual English programs can become more inclusive, effective, and capable of supporting students' academic persistence.

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