



Navigating Borders, Transforming Classrooms: A Thematic Analysis Of Moroccan Educators' Experiences In Virtual Exchange Programs

Lhoussine Qasserras^{1*}

^{1*}American TESOL Academy of Rabat, Email: lhoussine_qasserras@yahoo.com

Citation: Lhoussine Qasserras, et al (2024), Navigating Borders, Transforming Classrooms: A Thematic Analysis Of Moroccan Educators' Experiences In Virtual Exchange Programs, *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 30(7), 547-558
Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v30i7.6721

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of virtual exchange programs on teaching practices, by conducting semi-structured interviews with Moroccan English instructors who are actively engaged in global collaborative endeavors. The responses collected from a broad set of participants were subjected to thematic analysis, which aimed to investigate their experiences, problems, and the positive changes observed in their teaching methods. The identified themes were the wide-ranging involvement in virtual exchange programs, the complex influence on teaching methods, and the difficulties faced in incorporating these programs into the educational environment. Prominent discoveries encompass the positive impact on cultural consciousness, the adaptability of acquired instructional resources, and the intricacies associated with time restrictions and technology constraints. This research provides unique insights into the dynamics of virtual engagement in educational contexts, elucidating both the transformational potentials and the challenges encountered by educators.

Key-words: Virtual programs, Moroccan EFL teachers, experiences, challenges, and impacts

I. Introduction

The rise of virtual exchange programs in the ever-changing field of global education signifies an essential change in how teachers participate in and contribute to the internationalization of learning experiences. These programs surpass geographical limitations, linking instructors from various cultural backgrounds and promoting an interactive setting for collaborative investigation. This study seeks to explore the various effects of virtual exchange programs on Moroccan English EFL instructors. It will examine both the potential for transformation and the obstacles that arise from these innovative initiatives.

Virtual exchange programs provide teachers with a distinctive opportunity for professional growth, promoting enhanced cultural awareness and understanding. Through the use of platforms such as video calls, organized campaigns, and simulations, educators actively participate in cross-cultural dialogues, which allow them to acquire valuable knowledge about various cultural behaviors and customs. The recurring subject of acquiring adaptable teaching tools highlights how virtual exchange experiences provide educators with adaptive abilities that are essential for managing the intricacies of the modern educational landscape (Ciges, 2001). The start of cooperative online projects expands the influence, offering professors chances to augment teamwork and critical thinking abilities among their students.

Nevertheless, the capacity for virtual communication to bring about significant change is accompanied by certain difficulties. Galofré & Minguillón (2008) and Barajas (2000) both highlight the barriers in virtual learning environments, including the limited time available and conflicting schedules which pose a substantial obstacle to seamlessly incorporating these experiences into educators' busy routines. The occurrence of technical challenges, such as connectivity problems and disruptions during virtual exchange sessions, emphasizes the existence of the digital divide and the necessity for strong technological infrastructure. Another issue is related to cultural and communication differences, making the integration process among international teachers and students more complex. This highlights the need to address subtle cultural differences and employ effective communication tactics in virtual exchange programs.

This study deepens the global education expansion debate and offers practical advice for enhancing virtual exchange programs. It does this by examining the benefits and challenges teachers confront in their

attempts. As virtual exchange initiatives transform globalized education, educators, policymakers, and researchers must understand their complex dynamics. A detailed evaluation of Moroccan EFL instructors' experiences adds to the topic on effective approaches for increasing internationalization in education.

A. Research Questions

1. What are the diverse ways in which educators participate in virtual exchange initiatives?
2. What are the beneficial effects that educators observe when participating in virtual exchange programs?
3. What obstacles do educators encounter when incorporating virtual exchange programs into education, and how do they address these obstacles?

B. Research Problem

Among the globalized nature of education, there is a lack of thorough exploration of the efficacy and difficulties of incorporating virtual exchange programs into teaching methods, specifically within the educational framework of Morocco. There is a paucity of thorough knowledge regarding how Moroccan educators engage with and are influenced by these programs, as well as the difficulties they face. This research problem aims to fill the gap in existing literature by examining the transformative potential and challenges related to virtual exchange experiences for educators in Morocco.

C. Importance of the Study

This study is of paramount importance for various reasons:

1. The worldwide educational environment:

In an increasingly interconnected world, studying how Moroccan educators participate in virtual exchange programs adds to the broader conversation on the impact of globalized education in varied cultural contexts.

2. Pedagogical Transformations:

The study's results about how it changed teaching methods, the use of flexible resources, and the start of collaborative projects could help teachers and policymakers figure out how to change their teaching methods to fit a changing school environment.

3. Professional Development:

The study offers practical insights to Moroccan EFL educators who are dealing with time limitations, technical problems, and cultural differences in virtual exchange. As a result, it serves as a valuable resource for their professional growth.

4. Implications for policy:

The findings aid in the formulation of educational policies that promote the incorporation of virtual exchange programs into educational systems, guaranteeing a unified approach that corresponds to the requirements and difficulties faced by educators.

5. Cultural comprehension:

The study explores the cultural influence of virtual exchange, boosting our understanding of how these experiences stimulate cultural awareness, comprehension, and admiration.

This study aims to enhance the scholarly discussion on globalized education by providing significant insights that go beyond the specific situation of Morocco. This research contributes to the continuing discussion about the changing character of education in a globally interconnected society by analyzing the effects, difficulties, and potential for transformation of virtual exchange programs for Moroccan educators.

II. Literature Review

The integration of virtual exchange programs in educational settings has become a pivotal avenue for educators to engage in cross-cultural collaboration, foster global perspectives, and enhance teaching practices. Virtual exchange, defined as the online exchange of educational content and experiences among learners or educators from different cultural backgrounds, has gained prominence in recent years (Gutiérrez & O'Dowd, 2021). Lin (2021) and O'Dowd (2021) emphasize the potential of virtual exchange in expanding teaching practices and professional development. Likewise, by Scherer Bassani & Buchem (2019) and Duffy et al., (2020) found that virtual exchange can enhance intercultural skills and global competencies among students.

A. Virtual Exchange Participation and Diverse Experiences:

Several past studies reported a recurring theme on virtual exchange is the diverse range of experiences educators encounter. As evidenced by O'Dowd's (2018) study which underscored the multitude of virtual exchange models, including synchronous video calls, collaborative online projects, and simulation programs. These experiences underline the evolving nature of virtual exchange initiatives, catering to different needs and preferences (Garcés & O'Dowd, 2020).

B. Impact on Teaching Practices:

The literature consistently suggests that virtual exchange positively influences teaching practices (Baroni et al., 2019). Previous research has documented similar impacts, stressing the role of virtual exchange in upholding intercultural communication (Commander et al., 2022) and fostering a sense of global citizenship

(Turula et al., 2019). On the other hand, Hilliker (2020) and Lenkaitis et al., (2020) found that virtual exchange improved teaching efficacy by providing opportunities for practical application of course knowledge and the development of corrective feedback strategies. The present study contributes to this body of knowledge by providing real-world insights into how Moroccan EFL teachers perceive and apply these impacts in their teaching contexts.

C. Challenges in Integrating Virtual Exchange:

Challenges associated with the integration of virtual exchange programs into teaching practices have been recognized in past research (O'Reilly & Arnold, 2022). The digital gap is a significant issue that arises as highlighted by Ruth (2002), emphasizing the socio-economic inequalities in the availability and competence of digital technologies. Dalgarno (2002) accentuates the need for a strong technology infrastructure to reduce these inequities and enable effective engagement in online education. Qasserras & Qasserras (2023) and Falloon (2011) highlight that technical obstacles, such as network problems and disturbances during virtual interactions, are significant concerns. The need for educators to be ready to face these problems is highlighted in Harms' et al., (2006) scholarly work, which stresses the necessity of being adaptable in teaching methods and having technical expertise. Moreover, Greenan (2021) examines the influence of virtual education on classroom culture, which is a complex aspect of teaching dynamics. This underlines the need for Moroccan EFL teachers to carefully evaluate the subtle effects of virtual methods on the wider educational environment.

D. Global Collaborative Learning and Online Projects:

The emphasis on collaborative online projects as a positive outcome of virtual exchange resonates with the literature on global collaborative learning. Virtual exchange programs often involve joint projects that promote meaningful interactions among participants. For instance, research by Duffy et al., (2020) accentuate the transformative potential of collaborative tasks, providing participants with opportunities to negotiate meaning, share perspectives, and develop language and intercultural skills. The narratives of educators engaging in virtual exchange reinforce the notion that collaborative projects not only enhance teaching practices but also contribute to the development of cross-cultural competencies among learners (Zilberberg Oviedo & Krimphove, 2022).

E. Impact on Students and Learning Outcomes:

While the focus of some past studies was on educators, vast of previous research extends the discussion to the impact of virtual exchange on students and learning outcomes (Siergiejczyk, 2020); Hilliker, 2020). These studies hint at potential benefits for students, such as exposure to diverse perspectives and enriched learning experiences. Studies have indicated that virtual exchange has a beneficial impact on students' language skills, intercultural competence, and digital competences (Machwate et al., 2021). Incorporating insights from educators, the literature review recognizes the potential ripple effects of virtual exchange on the broader educational community (O'Dowd, 2021).

This literature review synthesizes key findings from past research on virtual exchange regarding the experiences of educators engaged in such programs. The diverse participation, positive impacts on teaching practices, challenges, emphasis on collaborative projects, and potential effects on students collectively contribute to a nuanced understanding of the role of virtual exchange in educational settings.

III. Research Methodology

A. Research Design:

This study employed a qualitative research approach to investigate the experiences of Moroccan educators who have engaged in virtual educational programs. The selected approach sought to offer a comprehensive understanding of the influence of these programs on teaching methods as well as the difficulties faced by educators in the virtual exchange environment.

B. Sampling Methodology:

The study used purposive sampling to recruit participants. Only teachers with prior expertise in virtual education programs were deemed eligible. The focused methodology guaranteed that participants had direct experience with virtual interaction, providing useful perspectives on its effects and difficulties.

C. Participants:

This study involved the selection of a total of 52 Moroccan teachers to participate. The selection criterion involved individuals who had participated in virtual education programs, ensuring a diversified and extensive group of participants with a wide range of experiences and opinions.

D. Data Collection:

Semi-Structured Interviews:

The main method of data collection involved conducting semi-structured interviews. This framework facilitated adaptability, allowing for the investigation of participants' encounters, perspectives, and obstacles in virtual education programs (Ghardashi et al., 2021). The interviews were conducted using a predetermined series of open-ended questions, allowing for the possibility of exploring emerging themes in greater detail.

Interview Process:

Participants were reached out to via professional networks and educational institutions. Prior to each interview, participants were provided with informed consent, guaranteeing their voluntary and knowledgeable involvement in the study. Interviews were carried out in a favorable and confidential setting, either face-to-face or through virtual platforms, according to participants' choices.

E. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis

It refers to the process of identifying and analyzing patterns or themes within qualitative data (Lochmiller, 2021). The interview data was analyzed using thematic analysis. This approach enabled the detection, examination, and communication of trends within the dataset, enabling a thorough investigation of the effects and difficulties of virtual education programs.

Coding process

Open Coding: Initial codes were developed by an inductive process, enabling a comprehensive examination of the material without any predefined categories.

In Vivo Coding: The phrases and expressions utilized by the participants were used as codes to preserve the genuineness of their voices during the analysis.

Process coding: The approach entailed identifying patterns and processes within the data, ensuring a thorough assessment of the issues related to the impact and challenges of virtual education programs.

F. Validity and Reliability

An ongoing procedure of coding and analysis was used to improve the validity and reliability. The researcher actively sought feedback from colleagues and participants through peer debriefing and member verification to guarantee the accuracy and reliability of the findings. The study's rigor was enhanced by employing systematic theme analysis methodologies, such as open coding, in vivo coding, and process coding.

G. Ethical Considerations:

Approval was received from the appropriate institutional review board, following ethical guidelines. Confidentiality was guaranteed to the participants, and their identities were made anonymous while reporting the findings. Prior to each interview, the concept of informed consent was restated, highlighting the voluntary aspect of participation and the freedom to withdraw from the study at any given time.

Constraints:

Although selective sampling facilitated a targeted investigation of the experiences of teachers who had previous exposure to virtual education, it may restrict the applicability of the findings to a wider population. Moreover, the dependence on self-reporting during interviews presents the possibility of participant bias.

IV. Results

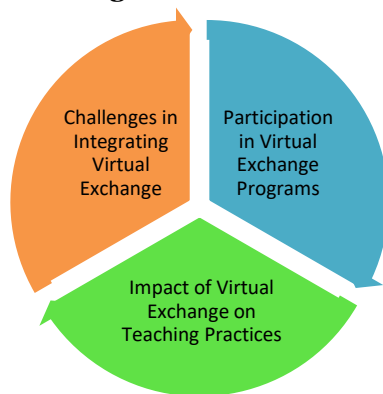
The thematic analysis of interviews with educators engaged in virtual exchange programs has unveiled profound insights into their experiences, perceptions, and challenges. In this section, the findings are presented and organized around key themes, offering a comprehensive understanding of the impact of virtual exchange on teaching practices. Figure 1 shows there three major themes found in the present study:

- A.** Participation in Virtual Exchange Programs
- B.** Impact of Virtual Exchange on Teaching Practices
- C.** Challenges in Integrating Virtual Exchange

Table 1: Themes and Codes

Themes	Codes
Participation in Virtual Exchange Programs	AIESEC Video Calls, RELO Orchestrated Programs, iEARN Platform Engagement, Global Normand Group
Impact of Virtual Exchange on Teaching Practices	Cultural Awareness and Understanding, Versatility of Teaching Tools, Initiating Collaborative Online Projects, Changes in Teaching Approach
Challenges in Integrating Virtual Exchange	Time Constraints, Technical Issues, Cultural and Communication Challenges

Figure 1: Themes

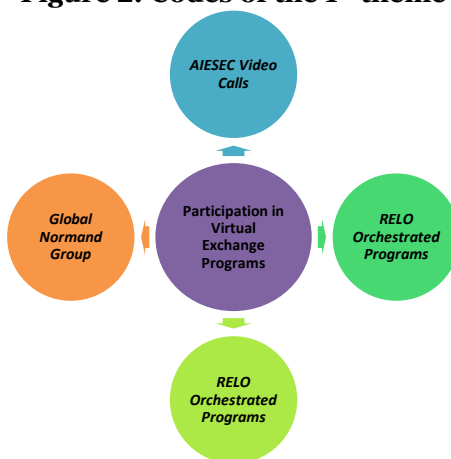


Theme 1: Participation in Virtual Exchange Programs

Table 2: Theme 1 - Participation in Virtual Exchange Programs

Code	Description
AIESEC Video Calls	Involvement in international relation video calls through AIESEC, emphasizing the importance of widening perspectives and understanding cultural behaviors.
RELO Orchestrated Programs	Participation in RELO-orchestrated virtual exchange programs, focusing on material development and the START program, aiming at boosting morale and addressing common pitfalls among teachers.
iEARN Platform Engagement	Describing a virtual exchange experience as a simulation on the iEARN platform, focusing on helping teachers engage students in online discussions and projects securely.
Global Normand Group	Engagement in a program where high school students met on Zoom with American students to discuss global values such as tolerance, respect, solidarity, etc.

Figure 2: Codes of the 1st theme



AIESEC Video Calls

Several participants expressed involvement in international relation video calls as a member of AIESEC, emphasizing the importance of widening perspectives and understanding cultural behaviors. For example, participant (5) stated:

Being part of AIESEC allowed me to engage in international video calls, widening my perspective and deepening my understanding of cultural behaviors.

RELO Orchestrated Programs

Some participant highlighted participation in two RELO-orchestrated virtual exchange programs, focusing on material development and the START program. This aimed at boosting morale and addressing common pitfalls among teachers. This is clarified by participant (11) assessing that:

RELO programs were instrumental; they not only focused on material development but also boosted morale and addressed common pitfalls.

iEARN Platform Engagement

Other Participants described a virtual exchange experience as a simulation on the iEARN platform, focusing on helping teachers engage students in online discussions and projects securely. For example; Participant (14) said:

My experience on iEARN was like a simulation, aiding teachers in securely engaging students in online discussions and projects.

Global Normand Group

According to semi-structured interviews, out of 38 of interviewees, seven participants engaged in a program where high school students met on Zoom with American students to discuss global values such as tolerance, respect, solidarity, etc. Participant (29) expressed her opinion:

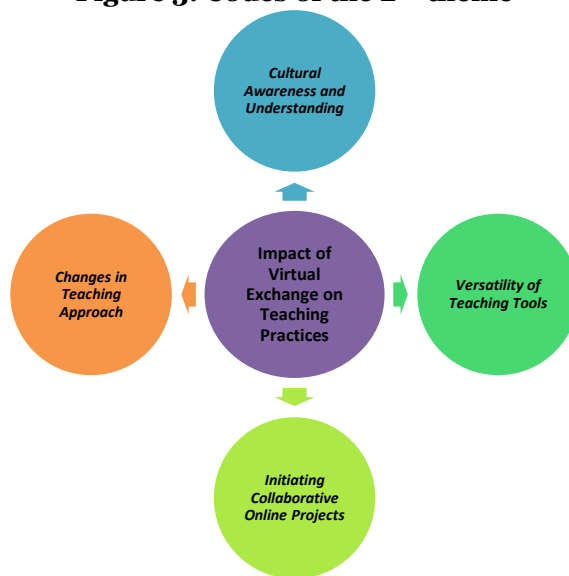
The Global Normand Group was a unique program; our high school students met on Zoom with American students to discuss global values.

Theme 2: Impact of Virtual Exchange on Teaching Practices

Table 3: Theme 2 - Impact of Virtual Exchange on Teaching Practices

Code	Description
Cultural Awareness and Understanding	Positive impact of virtual exchange on cultural awareness, understanding, and appreciation, providing a broader perspective in teaching.
Versatility of Teaching Tools	Acquisition of versatile teaching tools through virtual exchange, enabling situational decisions on teaching approaches.
Initiating Collaborative Online Projects	Engagement in online projects with peers from other countries, fostering collaboration and critical thinking skills.
Changes in Teaching Approach	Noting changes in teaching approaches, incorporating games, fun activities, and reflective practices in EFL classrooms, influenced by participation in virtual exchange initiatives.

Figure 3: Codes of the 2nd theme



Cultural Awareness and Understanding

The majority of participants emphasized the positive impact of virtual exchange on cultural awareness, understanding, and appreciation, providing a broader perspective in teaching. For instance, participant (17) expressed his satisfaction:

Virtual exchange has helped expand my cultural awareness by meeting virtually colleagues from different cultures discussing different topics, and this provided a broader perspective in my ways of teaching.

Versatility of Teaching Tools

Participants 3, 8, 14, 24 and 31 highlighted the acquisition of versatile teaching tools through virtual exchange, enabling situational decisions on teaching approaches. For instance, participant (14) stated:

Engaging in virtual exchange equipped me with useful tools, which enables me to make situational decisions in teaching.

Initiating Collaborative Online Projects

Participants 9, 16, and 50 spoke about engaging students in online projects with peers from other countries, fostering collaboration and critical thinking skills.

Virtual exchange allowed me to initiate online projects, improving collaboration and enhancing critical thinking skills among my students.

Changes in Teaching Approach

Throughout the thematic analysis, a quarter of interviewees noted changes in their teaching approaches. They confirmed that virtual exchange programs encouraged them to incorporate games, fun activities, and reflective practices in their EFL classrooms. As an example, participant (17) elaborated on that saying:

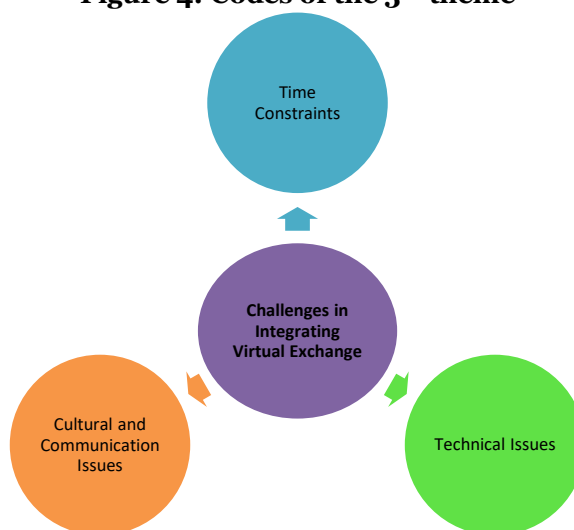
Thanks to my participation in virtual exchange initiatives, my ways of teaching gets improved. Meeting virtually students and colleagues from other cultures allowed me to use ice-breakers, fun activities, and reflective practices to create a positive learning environment.

Theme 3: Challenges in Integrating Virtual Exchange

Table 4: Theme 3 - Challenges in Integrating Virtual Exchange

Code	Description
Time Constraints	Citing time constraints as a significant challenge, with overlapping schedules and limited availability, hindering the balance between virtual exchange and personal schedules.
Technical Issues	Encountering technical problems, especially connectivity issues and disruptions during virtual exchange sessions, leading to challenges in the overall experience.
Cultural and Communication Challenges	Highlighting challenges related to cultural differences, low levels of students, and difficulties in communication, with Moroccan EFL teachers expressing negative experiences due to mixed ability classes.

Figure 4: Codes of the 3rd theme



Time Constraints

Half of participants cited time constraints as a significant challenge, with overlapping schedules and limited availability. Participant (1) expressed dissatisfaction:

I found the program very challenging since making a balance between virtual exchange and my schedule was a big headache. Both the coinciding schedules and limited availability were big obstacles for me while embarking in this program.

Technical Issues

The thematic data analysis also brought an interesting point that several participants encountered technical problems, especially connectivity issues and disruptions during virtual exchange sessions. Participant (47) clarified this challenge stating:

Whenever I participated online, my students and I faced several difficulties related to technical issues. For example, sometimes our internet connection went low and this caused disruptions, and added complexity to virtual exchange experiences.

Cultural and Communication Challenges

More than ten participants who highlighted challenges related to cultural differences, low levels of students, and difficulties in communication. Moroccan EFL teachers also expressed their negative experiences during the virtual exchange program due to the fact that they have mixed ability classes. Students have different language abilities which added difficulties to the program. For instance, participant (30) made it clear:

When I participated in a virtual exchange program, I found cultural differences and communication challenges as the major problems because it is really hard to adapt the course to low student levels and this required additional effort.

V. Discussion

This discussion section rigorously examines the thematic analysis obtained from semi-structured interviews conducted with Moroccan English educators who are involved in virtual exchange programs. It provides a detailed investigation into the intricate dynamics that are present in these interactions. The analysis involves a comprehensive evaluation of the influence on teaching methods, the various difficulties encountered, and the wider consequences for the educational environment.

1. Impact on Teaching Practices

The thematic analysis uncovers a complex and multifaceted transition when assessing the impact on instructional practices. Teachers involved in a range of activities, such as AIESEC video calls, RELO-orchestrated initiatives, and iEARN simulations, observed noticeable improvements in their teaching methods. This thematic progression is consistent with the wider educational conversation that highlights the transformative capacity of virtual exchange encounters. For instance, Baroni's et al., (2019) research not only corroborates but also extends our understanding of the multifaceted benefits of virtual exchange. It illuminates how these encounters contribute to the cultivation of digital-pedagogical skills, thereby equipping educators with the tools necessary to navigate and effectively leverage technology in the educational landscape. In the same way, Hilliker (2020) and Lenkaitis et al. (2020) make strong cases for how virtual engagement can improve the teaching efficacy. These studies show that virtual teamwork makes it possible to use course materials and create more advanced ways to give constructive feedback. This two-fold gain highlights the useful benefits of virtual communication in school settings and presents it as a revolutionary instrument for making teaching methods better, pushing for its full integration into school systems.

A. Cultural Awareness and Understanding:

The present study's results stress the importance of virtual communication in promoting deeper cross-cultural understanding and awareness. In line with the findings of Zilberberg, Oviedo, & Krimphove (2022), participants demonstrated increased recognition and admiration for a wide range of cultural behaviors and traditions. This also aligns with the overarching idea that virtual exchange acts as an entry point to a globalized viewpoint, as proposed by Turula et al. (2019).

B. Versatility of Teaching Tools:

Throughout the data analysis, we have observed the constant occurrence of acquiring adaptable teaching tools as a prominent subject. A good number of participants discussed the importance of developing adaptive abilities, which allows for making decisions based on specific situations in teaching. This skill is crucial for navigating the always-changing educational environment. The present finding is consistent with current pedagogical debates that emphasize the significance of educators' flexibility in dealing with the intricacies of modern education.

C. Initiating Collaborative Online Projects:

The present study reveals that the initiation of collaborative online projects has developed as a transformative result, in keeping with the substantial body of literature on global collaborative learning. This finding is compatible with a study conducted by Duffy et al. (2020) that underline the important impact of collaborative tasks on fostering transformative outcomes. These tasks offer participants the chance to engage in meaningful negotiations, exchange perspectives, and enhance their linguistic and intercultural abilities. Additionally our current study's result on the beneficial effects of online projects on students' ability to collaborate and think critically aligns with the findings of Duffy et al. (2020), providing more opportunities for students to develop their collaborative and critical thinking skills.

D. Changes in Teaching Approach:

Furthermore, the thematic analysis reveals modifications in teaching strategies that numerous Moroccan English instructors have reported, indicating a noticeable shift towards more participative and student-centered approaches. Participants 10, 15, and 25 engaged in a conversation about the integration of games, enjoyable activities, and introspective exercises, highlighting the progressive development of teaching approaches in the virtual exchange framework. The finding of changes in teaching approaches strongly supports Qasserras and Qasserras' (2023) research. The authors concluded that incorporating online games

in EFL classrooms has boosted Moroccan students' 21st century skills, especially collaboration, communication the critical thinking as well as creating an enjoyable learning environment full of productivity.

2. Challenges in Integrating Virtual Exchange:

Although virtual exchange offers significant prospects for transformation, the thematic analysis reports the hurdles that educators encounter when trying to integrate it seamlessly.

A. Time Constraints:

Time limitations arose as a notable obstacle, supporting the findings of previous research (Schenker, 2013). Half of the participants expressed that overlapping schedules and a lack of availability make it difficult for educators to incorporate virtual exchange experiences into their hectic routines.

B. Technical Issues:

Technical obstacles arose as a significant hindrance, encompassing problems with connectivity and interruptions during virtual exchange sessions (Participants 13, 16, and 20). The technological issues emphasize the existence of a digital divide and the urgent requirement for strong technical infrastructure, in line with the conclusions of Qasserras & Qasserras (2023) and O'Reilly & Arnold (2022). Their research sheds light on the diverse obstacles faced by educators in virtual exchange programs, encompassing issues such as the digital divide, technical glitches, and discrepancies within educational systems.

C. Cultural and Communication Challenges:

The integration of virtual exchange into educational environments is made more complex by cultural and communication issues. Participants 5, 10, and 11 identified concerns pertaining to cultural disparities, limited student enrollment, and communication obstacles. This is consistent with the findings of Hagley & Cotter (2019), who discovered that cultural and communication difficulties are frequently encountered by students participating in virtual exchange programs.

3. Addressing Challenges for Optimal Integration:

It is crucial to acknowledge and tackle the stated difficulties in order to maximize the advantages of virtual exchange programs. To promote the integration of virtual exchange into educational settings, the current study has suggested that obstacles should be mitigated and addressed through strategies such as providing flexible scheduling options, offering technological support, and adopting cross-cultural training. The present research's findings are compatible with several past studies conducted by scholars like Barajas (2000), Stewart (2010), Galofré (2008), Duke (1998), and Holtbrügge (2008). They have pointed out that putting virtual exchange programs into schools is not easy for many reasons. Barajas emphasizes the importance of a holistic approach, look at things from both a social and a technological point of view, and Stewart and Galofré stress the significance of addressing software, support, and organizational barriers. Duke and Holtbrügge, on the other hand, stress how essential it is to have cross-cultural training and know how to deal with problems that come up between cultures. All of these points of view show how complicated the process of integration is. To make it work in schools, it is important to plan ahead and think about the social, technical, and intercultural aspects. These practical considerations are crucial elements in adapting virtual exchange programs to the changing requirements and intricacies of modern educational settings.

To summarize, this discussion chapter provides a thorough and intricate examination of the influence, difficulties, and wider significance of virtual exchange experiences for English educators in Morocco. The findings provide useful insights for academic debate and practical concerns for educators, policymakers, and program designers who want to use virtual interaction for educational experiences that lead to transformation. The exploration highlights the significant impact that virtual communication can have while also revealing the complex constraints that require intentional interventions to ensure its successful incorporation into educational contexts.

VI. Conclusion

A. Summary of Results

The study has provided valuable insights into the intricate realm of virtual exchange experiences among English instructors in Morocco, illuminating the impacts on pedagogical approaches and the challenges that are faced. The thematic analysis of interviews uncovered a wide range of engagement in programs such as AIESEC video calls, RELO-orchestrated activities, and iEARN simulations. These experiences led to beneficial improvements in teaching methods, such as increased cultural sensitivity, the acquisition of adaptable teaching resources, and the commencement of collaborative online initiatives. However, the smooth incorporation of virtual exchange into educational environments faced notable obstacles, including limited time, technical difficulties, and cultural differences.

B. Implications

1. Professional Development:

The beneficial influence on teaching methods highlights the potential of virtual interchange as a formidable tool for continuous professional growth. Participating educators not only acquire cultural insights but also develop vital skills that improve their ability to adapt and be versatile in the always-changing world of education.

2. Student Engagement and Learning Outcomes:

The documented alterations in instructional methods, stressing interactive activities and collaborative projects, have significant ramifications for the level of student involvement and the achievement of educational goals. Virtual exchange has the capacity to generate dynamic and captivating learning settings that surpass conventional limitations.

3. Community Building and Global Perspectives:

Educators' experiences demonstrate the capacity of virtual exchange to cultivate communities of practice. The establishment of supportive networks, as shown in programs organized by RELO, serves as a prime example of how virtual exchange may foster the cultivation of a global outlook within the education community.

C. Limitations

Although this research offers significant perspectives on the experiences of Moroccan English educators in virtual exchange programs, it is crucial to recognize specific constraints. Initially, the study primarily concentrated on Moroccan EFL instructors, which may restrict the applicability of the findings to educators in different fields. Second, the study predominantly focused on participants from Morocco, and the results may not comprehensively reflect the varied experiences of educators from multiple cultural and educational contexts. Third, the sample size, while significant, may not include the complete range of opinions within the specific population being studied. Fourth, the study predominantly depends on self-reported data provided by participants, which could potentially include response bias or subjective interpretations. Ultimately, the study's qualitative approach, although beneficial for thorough investigation, could potentially hinder the capacity to quantify the results. These constraints underscore the need for future studies to explore broader cross-disciplinary investigations, different cultural samples, and potential triangulation with quantitative approaches in order to strengthen the reliability of the findings.

D. Recommendation

1. Dealing with Time Constraints:

In light of the problems that have been discovered, it is recommended that program designers take into consideration flexible scheduling choices in order to provide assistance to educators who have busy schedules. It is possible that the problem of competing schedules could be efficiently addressed by integrating asynchronous components into the virtual exchange of information.

2. Technical Support and Infrastructure Improvement:

Resolving technical challenges necessitates a collaborative endeavor to offer resilient technical assistance. If teachers were to engage in collaborative efforts with information technology specialists and provide resources to improve digital infrastructure, the effectiveness of their virtual interactions would be significantly improved.

3. Cross-Cultural Training:

To effectively address issues arising from cultural disparities and communication barriers, it is advisable to include cross-cultural training as part of virtual exchange program. This program has the potential to improve participants' ability to understand and navigate different cultures, as well as promote the development of successful communication strategies.

E. Conclusion

Ultimately, this study has explored the profound encounters of educators participating in virtual exchange program, revealing insights into the beneficial effects as well as the difficulties encountered. The findings augment the expanding reservoir of knowledge on virtual education, providing valuable insights that might guide the development of future programs and initiatives. Amidst the increasing globalization of society, virtual exchange is developing as a potent tool for fostering cross-cultural comprehension, professional advancement, and innovative teaching approaches in the field of education. To fully exploit the potential of virtual exchange in creating the future of education, educators, program designers, and policymakers must confront the problems and take advantage of the opportunities that have been highlighted.

References

1. Barajas, M. (2000). Implementing Virtual Learning Environments: Looking for Holistic Approach. <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Implementing-Virtual-Learning-Environments%3A-Looking-Barajas-Owen/e005d62c94c39efdb493bfa572c42eefc5d3c90>
2. Baroni, A., Dooly, M., Garcés García, P., Guth, S., Hauck, M., Helm, F., Lewis, T., Mueller-Hartmann, A., O'Dowd, R., Rienties, B., & Rogaten, J. (2019, March 14). Evaluating the impact of virtual exchange on initial teacher education: a European policy experiment. <https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2019.29.9782490057337>
3. Ciges, A. S. (2001). Online learning: New educational environments in order to respect cultural diversity through cooperative strategies. *Intercultural Education*, 12(2), 135–147. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14675980120064782>
4. Commander, N. E., Schloer, W. F., & Cushing, S. T. (2022). Virtual exchange: a promising high-impact practice for developing intercultural effectiveness across disciplines. *Journal of Virtual Exchange*, 5, 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.21827/jve.5.37329>
5. Dalgarno, B. (2002). The Potential of 3D virtual learning environments: A constructivist analysis. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 5, 1-19. <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/The-Potential-of-3D-virtual-learning-environments%3A-Dalgarno/49bd25d868edo5701c7a58a5a262e3703df9ef2>
6. Duffy, L. N., Stone, G. A., Townsend, J., & Cathey, J. (2020). Rethinking Curriculum Internationalization: Virtual Exchange as a Means to Attaining Global Competencies, Developing Critical Thinking, and Experiencing Transformative Learning. *SCHOLE: A Journal of Leisure Studies and Recreation Education*, 37(1–2), 11–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1937156x.2020.1760749>
7. Falloon, G. (2011). Exploring the virtual classroom: What students need to know (and teachers should consider). *Journal of online learning and teaching*. 7(4), 439-451. <https://hdl.handle.net/10289/7238>
8. Galofré, M., & Minguillón, J. (2008). Identifying pedagogical, technological and organizational barriers in virtual learning environments. *Proceedings of the 10th International ACM SIGACCESS Conference on Computers and Accessibility*. <https://doi.org/10.1145/1414471.1414516>
9. Garcés, P., & O'Dowd, R. (2020). Upscaling Virtual Exchange in University Education: Moving From Innovative Classroom Practice to Regional Governmental Policy. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 25(3), 283–300. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315320932323>
10. Ghardashi, F., Mortazavi, F., Salehabadi, R., & Sharifzadeh, M. (2021). Students' perspectives on the virtual teaching challenges in the COVID-19 pandemic: A qualitative study. *Journal of Education and Health Promotion*, 10(1), 59. https://doi.org/10.4103/jehp.jehp_861_20
11. Greenan, K. A. (2021). The Influence of Virtual Education on Classroom Culture. *Frontiers in Communication*, 6. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2021.641214>
12. Gutiérrez, B. F., & O'Dowd, R. (2021, March 22). Virtual exchange: connecting language learners in online intercultural collaborative learning. *Innovative Language Pedagogy Report*, 17–22. <https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2021.50.1230>
13. Hagley, E., & Cotter, M. (2019). Virtual exchange supporting language and intercultural development: students' perceptions. CALL and Complexity – Short Papers From *EUROCALL 2019*, 163–168. <https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2019.38.1003>
14. Harms, C., Niederhauser, D., Davis, N., & Gilbert, S. B. (2006). Educating educators for virtual schooling: communicating roles and responsibilities. ResearchGate. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/251381952_Educating_educators_for_virtual_schooling_communicating_roles_and_responsibilities
15. Hilliker, S.M. (2020). Virtual Exchange as a Study Abroad Alternative to Foster Language and Culture Exchange in TESOL Teacher Education. <https://tesl-ej.org/wordpress/issues/volume23/ej92/ej92a7/>
16. Lenkaitis, C. A., Hilliker, S. M., & Roumeliotis, K. (2020). Teacher Candidate Reflection and Development Through Virtual Exchange. *IAFOR Journal of Education*, 8(2), 125–139. <https://doi.org/10.22492/ije.8.2.07>
17. Lin, C. C. (2021). Using Virtual Exchange to Foster Global Competence and Collaborative Leadership in Teacher Education. *Dual Language Research and Practice Journal*, 4(1). <https://doi.org/10.21423/dlrpj-v4.a18>
18. Lochmiller, C. (2021). Conducting Thematic Analysis with Qualitative Data. *The Qualitative Report*. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2021.5008>
19. Machwate, S., Bendaoud, R., Henze, J., Berrada, K., & Burgos, D. (2021). Virtual Exchange to Develop Cultural, Language, and Digital Competencies. *Sustainability*, 13(11), 5926. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13115926>
20. O'Reilly, C., & Arnold, M. (2022). Teaching Life Writing in a Virtual Exchange Project: Evaluating the Impact on Students' Learning. *Perspektiven Auf Lehre. Journal for Higher Education and Academic Development*, 1, 10. <https://doi.org/10.55310/jfhead.10>

21. O'Dowd, R. (2018). From telecollaboration to virtual exchange: state-of-the-art and the role of UNICollaboration in moving forward. *Journal of Virtual Exchange*, 1, 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2018.jve.1>
22. O'Dowd, R. (2021). What do students learn in virtual exchange? A qualitative content analysis of learning outcomes across multiple exchanges. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 109, 101804. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2021.101804>
23. Qasserras, L., & Qasserras, M. (2023). An Exploratory Study of Students Evaluations of the quality of Self-Paced Online courses in Morocco: Insights and Implications. *European Journal of Literature, Language and Linguistics Studies*, 6(3). <https://doi.org/10.46827/ejll.v6i3.414>
24. Qasserras, L., & Qasserras, M. (2023). Teachers' Experiences with Using Online Games in EFL Classrooms: A Study of Moroccan Teachers. *International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews*, 4(4), 3043–3052. <https://doi.org/10.55248/gengpi.4.423.36737>
25. Ruth, S.R. (2002). *Virtual Learning: Between Imagination and Challenges*. <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Virtual-Learning%3A-Between-Imagination-and-Ruth/5c36162756b62058094b373a1a7cfoobe64adf53>
26. Schenker, T. (2013, September). The Effects of a Virtual Exchange on Students' Interest in Learning About Culture. *Foreign Language Annals*, 46(3), 491–507. <https://doi.org/10.1111/flan.12041>
27. Scherer Bassani, P., & Buchem, I. (2019). Intercambios virtuales en educación superior: desarrollo de las habilidades interculturales a través de la colaboración en línea. *Revista Interuniversitaria De Investigación En Tecnología Educativa*. <https://doi.org/10.6018/riite.377771>
28. Siergiejczyk, G. (2020). Virtual International Exchange as a High-Impact Learning Tool for More Inclusive, Equitable and Diverse Classrooms. *European Journal of Open, Distance and E-Learning*, 23(1), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.2478/eurodl-2020-0001>
29. Turula, A., Kurek, M., & Lewis, T. (2019, July 2). Telecollaboration and virtual exchange across disciplines: in service of social inclusion and global citizenship. <https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2019.35.9782490057429>
30. Zilberberg Oviedo, L. E., & Krimphove, J. (2022). Virtual exchange contributions to the development of intercultural competence: A Brazilian higher education institutions' perspective. *Actualidades Investigativas En Educación*, 22(1), 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.15517/aie.v22i1.47481>