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Virtual exchange in the internationalization scenario of Brazilian higher education: a review of studies¹

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims at presenting the results of a review of studies focused on Virtual Exchange (VE) in the Brazilian Higher Education (HE) context, published from 2013 to 2024, in academic search platforms, in order to comprehend this initiative in a local and situated way. This is a qualitative and exploratory study and bibliographic research was carried out in selected platforms, using specific keywords, to identify and analyze the texts. A total of 110 academic works were found and examined, considering these thematic categories: i) the nature of the text writing; ii) types of VE and specific institutional designations in some Higher Education Institutions (HEIs); iii) internationalization, the pandemic and post-pandemic periods; iv) the variety within VE; v) language use and VE; vi) support for the VE initiatives and task design; vii) potentialities and viii) challenges. Results show that VE has had an increasingly growing potential for the internationalization of Brazilian HEIs as it represents variety of work and international collaboration possibilities. Even highlighting the potential of VE initiatives, studies also acknowledge the challenges faced, showing, thus, the importance of a critical stance and perspective in their implementation.

¹ This paper presents some of the results of a postdoctoral research project conducted by the first author in the Graduate Program in Education at the Federal University of Espírito Santo (UFES), with funding from CNPq and under the supervision of the second author.

RESUMO

Este artigo apresenta os resultados de uma revisão de estudos com foco em Intercâmbio Virtual (IV) no contexto do Ensino Superior brasileiro, publicados entre 2013-2024, a fim de entender essa iniciativa de modo local/nacional e situado. Trata-se de uma pesquisa qualitativa e exploratória realizada por meio de levantamento bibliográfico em plataformas de pesquisa para selecionar e analisar os textos identificados. Foram encontrados 110 trabalhos, os quais foram examinados, considerando as seguintes categorias temáticas: i) a natureza da escrita dos textos; ii) tipos de IV e nomenclaturas institucionais específicas; iii) internacionalização, o período pandêmico e pós-pandêmico; iv) variedade de IVs; v) uso da língua nos IV; vi) suporte para as iniciativas de IV e planejamento das tarefas; vii) potencialidades e viii) desafios. Os resultados evidenciam que o IV tem tido potencial cada vez mais crescente para impulsionar a internacionalização das instituições de ensino superior brasileiras, pois ele representa variedade e possibilidade de colaboração internacional. Apesar do destaque dado às potencialidades identificadas nas iniciativas de IV, os estudos analisados também reconhecem os seus desafios, salientando, assim, a importância de posturas e perspectivas críticas em sua implementação.

KEYWORDS

Internationalization. Virtual exchange. Brazilian Higher Education. Review of studies.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Internacionalização. Intercâmbio virtual. Educação superior brasileira. Revisão de estudos.

RESUMO PARA NÃO ESPECIALISTAS

Este artigo analisa os resultados de um mapeamento de estudos e trabalhos sobre intercâmbio virtual (IV) realizados em instituições de ensino superior no Brasil, publicados no período de 2013 a 2024 em plataformas de pesquisa. IV pode ser entendido como a colaboração de estudantes de contextos culturais diversos para desenvolvimento de tarefas e projetos conjuntos. Os trabalhos selecionados foram organizados em temas para análise. Os resultados discutem o potencial de IV para atividades de internacionalização; apontam aspectos positivos mas também desafios assim como olhares críticos sobre o seu desenvolvimento no Ensino Superior nacional.

Introduction

Recent studies and discussions on internationalization of higher education (HE) highlight the growing importance of alternative initiatives that go beyond traditional models focused on physical mobility, with the purpose of including more people and make it more accessible for the academic community. In this scope, Internationalization at Home (IaH) actions play an important role. For Beelen and Jones (2015, p. 69), IaH can be conceived as "the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students, within domestic learning environments". This concept, according to Knight (2015), increases the importance of campus-based strategies, such as incorporating intercultural and international perspectives into the teaching-learning process, research, extracurricular activities, connecting to local groups and integrating international students and scholars into the university. Another possibility to advance IaH initiatives is through Virtual Exchange (VE).

Defined as a broad term to refer to many types of sustained online collaboration that students engage with peers from different cultural backgrounds as part of their educational programs, mediated by faculty or facilitators (O'Dowd, 2018), VE has the potential to foster linguistic, digital, transversal skills (O'Dowd, 2021), develop global citizenship education (Finardi; Salvadori; Wehrli, 2024) among other numerous attributes that can help learners reflect on the challenges of the contemporary world (Wimpenny et al., 2022).

Also, for O'Dowd (2023) and Guimarães and Finardi (2021), by carefully planning the tasks, professors can design pedagogical activities that optimize the learning experience and develop intercultural competence as well as global citizenship. In addition, O'Dowd emphasizes that VE brings many opportunities for continuous professional development, partnership and methodological innovation for the faculty involved in its planning.

While there are many positive aspects of VE, its practice is neither inherently nor necessarily equitable or inclusive (Hauck, 2023). To ensure that those attributes are contemplated, the aforementioned author proposes the framework of Critical VE (CVE) for its potential to address social justice and inclusion motivating changes in different levels (individual, institutional and policy). Hauck (2023) suggests the following strategies for CVE: - employing low-bandwidth technologies; - prioritizing students traditionally underrepresented in IaH, such as those from lower socio-economic backgrounds; - designing exchange activities and topics that are guided by and aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); - linking student outreach initiatives with local businesses, Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and charities to cultivate transversal skills, strengthen graduate employability, and contribute to the realization of the SDGs; - integrating translanguaging especially in exchanges focused on the teaching and learning of languages and cultures. Translanguaging can be understood as the practice of drawing on participants' linguistic and semiotic repertoires to maximize communication.

Regarding the use of critical perspectives to VE and inclusive linguistic strategies such as translanguaging, in Brazil, Finardi (2019) suggests the use of the intercomprehension approach (IC)

as a relevant strategy to guarantee more inclusion and representation in the process of internationalization. In what concerns VE, the use of IC is also a way to afford CVE approaches (Hildeblando Junior; Finardi, 2018).

Having contextualized IaH and VE, this paper aims at presenting the results of a review of studies focused on VE in the Brazilian Higher Education context, published from 2013 to 2024, in academic search platforms, in order to take stock of this initiative in the national scenario in a situated way. This review will help to understand how VE has been developed in Brazil for the purpose of considering the next steps to motivate and foster more inclusive and comprehensive internationalization actions.

Taking into consideration the national scenario, Oviedo and Krimphove (2022) highlight that the first online collaboration activity was carried out through the Teletandem Brasil project, launched by UNESP in 2006, for language learning purposes. In 2013, as presented by the authors, the Centro Paula Souza (CPS), in São Paulo, initiated the first Brazilian COIL (Collaborative Online International Learning)² program, in partnership with SUNY Ulster. Continuing this historical overview in the Brazilian context, Oviedo and Krimphove (2022), as well as Freire Junior, Massini-Cagliarelli and Putti (2020) explain that, in 2015, UNESP invited the founder of the SUNY COIL Institute, Professor Jon Rubin, to deliver a course at the Brazilian institution and to carry out a workshop at the Faubai (Associação Brasileira de Educação Internacional - Brazilian Association of International Education) Conference, which took place in 2016. Subsequently, in 2017, also at the Faubai Conference, renowned COIL professors and coordinators from several HE institutions participated as speakers to promote VE in Brazil. Oviedo and Krimphove (2022) emphasize that, as a result of these initiatives within the national context, FAUBAI, with the support of UNESP, CPS, and the Federal University of Pernambuco (UFPE), established the Brazilian Virtual Exchange Program (BRaVE) in 2018.

According to Oviedo and Krimphove (2022), in 2020, amid the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, a consortium of Latin American universities, including Universidad Veracruzana and Universidad de Monterrey (UEM) in Mexico, UNESP in Brazil, and Instituto Tecnológico Metropolitano de Medellín (ITM) in Colombia, established the Red Latinoamericana COIL (LatamCOIL Network). The initiative was designed to promote COIL-based virtual exchange projects in HE across the region. The network was formally launched in July 2020 and its first annual conference happened in June 2021. Since then the field of COIL/VE has expanded considerably in Brazil, as will be shown in this study.

In what follows and so as to go deeper in the way VE has been implemented in Brazil, in the next section, the methodology used to carry out this bibliographical review is described.

² Teletandem and Telecollaboration are initiatives developed in the foreign language education field while COIL is a shared syllabus approach for VE conducted by professors from different subject areas (O'Dowd, 2018).

1. Methodology

This is a qualitative and exploratory study, as it seeks to create and/or deepen knowledge on the subject under investigation, in this case, VE. According to Gil (1999), exploratory research is undertaken with the purpose of providing an overview of a phenomenon or theme that has not been extensively explored.

To achieve the aim of the present study, bibliographic research was carried out to map and analyze works, studies, research and initiatives of VE in the Brazilian HE context, developed in the last ten years (2013-2024).

Search was conducted in platforms such as Google Scholar, the Capes Theses and Dissertations Portal, Scielo and Google, using the following keywords: intercâmbio virtual e Brasil; virtual exchange and Brazil; internacionalização em casa e intercâmbio virtual; COIL and Brazil; Internationalization, COIL and Brazil.

A total of 110 academic works were found: 53 papers in journals, 27 book chapters, 9 (extended) abstracts in conference proceedings, 9 papers in conference proceedings, 7 Master's thesis, 3 PhD dissertations, 1 edited book and 1 VE theoretical and practical guide. Besides these works, VE discussion has also been spread through presentations at conferences; interviews, news; articles in magazines and newsletters. This shows that faculty involved in VE have made an effort to disseminate it using different textual genres both in a more academic language as well as in other formats of texts to reach a broader audience - not only the ones involved in VE research.

Another point to highlight is that many Brazilian scholars have participated in international conferences on VE around the world and specific events to discuss VE have been promoted by some Brazilian institutions (examples: "3ª Jornada Internacional da RedAES"; IVES Cesu - International Virtual Exchange Symposium (Simpósio Internacional de Intercâmbios Virtuais)).

In respect to the publication period (Figure 1), there was an increase of contributions regarding VE, in a broad way, and COIL, in a specific way, during and after the pandemic. It is important to note that, as mentioned earlier, Telecollaboration and Teletandem initiatives have been implemented in Brazil since 2006, especially through the "Teletandem Brasil" Project from Unesp (Telles; Vassalo, 2006), but these two specific terms were not used in the search; nonetheless, much of those initiatives were found under the VE scope. The goal was to have an overview of VE broad projects and the ones connecting classes from different subject areas (as we find in COIL).

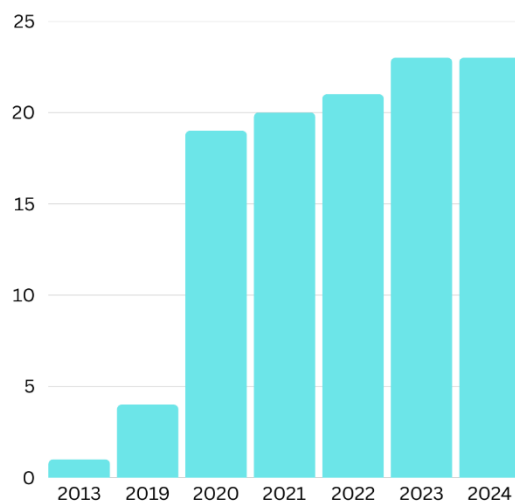


FIGURE 1 – Publication on VE along the Years.

Source: the authors.

In the next section, we discuss the main findings of the review of studies. For this, analytical categories with topics focused on main aspects discussed were established in a way to better organize the reflection.

2. The review of studies

Following the reading of the texts and their organization into analytical tables, main topics were identified based on the themes most frequently addressed in the works. In addition, general analysis about the publications and the types of VE carried out was also employed.

So, in this section, the following topics are addressed: i) the nature of the text writing; ii) types of VE and specific institutional designations in some HEIs; iii) internationalization, the pandemic and post-pandemic periods; iv) the variety within VE; v) language use and VE; vi) support for the VE initiatives and task design; vii) potentialities and viii) challenges.

2.1. The nature of the text writing

The first aspect observed was related to the nature of the text writing. Here many different situations are presented: i) there were Brazilian professors reporting their experiences and reflecting on the VE carried out with the international partner(s) (e.g. Salbego et al., 2021; Felix, 2022; 2023; Sales Patricio et al., 2022; Guimarães; Hildeblando Júnior; Finardi, 2022; Ferreira; Rocha; Cândido, 2022, among others); ii) there was collaboration between faculty members from Brazilian and international

contexts in co-authoring the papers (e.g. Kopish; Marques, 2020; Marques-Schäfer; Perez; Gondar, 2021; Mayrink et al., 2023; Calvo; Hartle, 2024a; 2024b; 2024c; Finardi; Salvadori; Wehrli, 2024, 2024, Paulo et al., 2024, among others); iii) there were texts bringing general considerations on VE or a literature review on topics related to VE (Canto et al., 2022; Rampazzo; Cunha, 2021; Rampazzo; Moore, 2024; Alves; Silva; Salomão, 2024); v) results of qualitative research analyzing data generated by/through different research instruments – as surveys, final reports, narratives, reflective journals, course assignments/tasks, interviews, observational notes, etc. – (Salomão, 2020; Oviedo; Krimphove, 2022; Silva, 2024, Calvo; Hartle, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c, among others); and iv) institutional results of the VE implementation written by stakeholders or staff in international offices (Succi Junior, 2020; Salomão; Freire Junior, 2020; Calvo; Alonso, 2024; Freire Junior; Salomão; Primo, 2024).

Academic work on Brazilian Graduate Programs (7 Master's thesis, 3 PhD dissertations) has been developed mainly in the South and Southeast regions: Unesp (n=5); UFES (n=2); PUC-SP (n=1); UTFPR (n=1); Universidade de Caxias do Sul (n=1), showing the potential of systematic research to analyze VE initiatives in an empirical way.

In general, most of the analyzed works aim to share faculty views and reflections on the VE and very few publications use empirical data to analyze the results. As a suggestion and for further outcomes, VE could be an initial step to foster other types of collaboration among the professors to develop joint research project, formalized in their institutions. Also, longitudinal studies focused on the impact of VE within institutions or programs and drawing on empirical data could also play a significant role in developing the field in the national scenario.

2.2. Types of VE and specific institutional designations in some HEIs

The VEs described focus more on Teletandem or COIL initiatives. Regarding the Teletandem projects, they are generally developed in the Languages and Literature Programs (cursos de Letras), in a way to focus on the linguistic and cultural development of the participants (Figueiredo, 2022). According to Oliveira et al. (2023), Salomão (2020) and Rampazzo and Cunha (2021), Unesp has had experience with Teletandem because of the project “Teletandem Brasil: Línguas Estrangeiras para Todos [Foreign Languages for All]”, founded by Telles and Vassalo (2006). In this type of projects, pairs of speakers of different languages work collaboratively through synchronous or asynchronous online communication tools to learn each other's language. Rampazzo and Cunha (2021) explain that this project is grounded in the principles of the tandem learning and seeks to promote foreign languages learning through the engagement of dyads in intercultural interaction. The authors elucidate that the term “tandem” derives from tandem bicycles (“bicycles with seats and pedals for two riders, one behind the other” (p.3)), emphasizing the mutual commitment of the learners in the pair to support each other's learning.

Within the scope of Teletandem, Matiola (2024) describes the results of the Literatandem project, carried out since 2019 and focused on the discussion of literary texts. According to the author, Literatandem has the same structure of Teletandem, with students being paired up for weekly

meetings on videoconferencing platforms to communicate in two different languages, followed by participation in mediation sessions. In her words, "what makes Literatandem different from what was usually done in teletandem is that the interactions are planned in such a way that the participants talk about pre-selected literary texts and are asked to engage in a set of tasks" (p. 19).

Focusing specifically on telecollaboration projects, Schaefer and Hermann (2021; 2024) and Schaefer; Hermann and Nieto (2023), for example, report their experience in Instituto Federal Catarinense (IFC) to promote the internationalization of the curriculum. The authors describe projects that applied telecollaboration to foster international experience, intercultural dialogue and critical thinking. They highlight that telecollaboration can prepare students for successful and respectful interactions with people from other cultural contexts.

In the COIL Projects developed in the analyzed publications, shared syllabus courses were carried out in diverse programs: Management, Psychology, Technology, Applied Science, Engineering, Medicine, Nursing, Computer Science, among others.

Also, some institutions use other designations to refer to VE, such as: "Projeto Colaborativo Internacional" (Centro Paula Souza); and BRaVE-UNESP. This can also be seen in the international scenario in other universities, for example: Global Learning Experience (DePaul University, US); EDGE - Experiential Digital Global Engagement (Pennsylvania State University (US); Global Classroom (Tecnológico de Monterrey, México; Drexel University, US).

2.3. Internationalization, the pandemic and post-pandemic periods

Although some VE initiatives have been developed since before the pandemic, it was during this period and after that those projects gained more force. As physical mobility was interrupted, VE was an option to foster internationalization into the curriculum activities. According to Oviedo and Krimphove (2022, p 19),

the COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to strengthening the development of VE initiatives in Brazilian HEIs. Some of the institutions that already carried out VE programs before the pandemic took the opportunity to expand these initiatives. Other institutions established ad hoc VE projects as a reaction to Covid-19 outbreak and alternative for study abroad programs. (Oviedo; Krimphove, 2022, p. 19)

In what concerns the representation of Brazil in these initiatives and according to Finardi and Guimarães (2020), the pandemic brought about many challenges but also, and perhaps more importantly, opportunities for representation of the Global South through VE. Moreover, Guimarães, Finardi and Amorim (2021) claim that VE helped to recalibrate relations with and reposition Brazil in relation to its partners in the Global North.

Despite the opportunities afforded by the pandemic to develop VE, many HE institutions in Brazil switched back to traditional in-person approaches after the pandemic leaving behind the

opportunities provided to incorporate technologies in the curriculum (Guimarães; Hildeblando Júnior; Finardi, 2022; Finardi; Asik, 2024).

In different periods, we see that VE has been linked to internationalization practices such as IaH and/or Internationalization of the Curriculum (IoC) approaches. While the first concept considers all the activities developed on campus/at the home university aimed to develop students' intercultural and global perspectives, the second one is broader, encompassing IaH and physical mobility initiatives. According to Leask (2015), IoC incorporates "international, intercultural and/or global dimensions into the content of the curriculum as well as the learning outcomes, assessment tasks, teaching methods and support services of a program of study" (p. 9). As noted by O'Dowd (2023), both concepts emphasize that internationalization should not be considered as an end in itself, but as a means to embed international and intercultural perspectives within the academic purpose of university and throughout its curricula.

Finally, Finardi and Asik (2024) state that VE can encourage more South-South partnerships and increase internationalization in the Global South in a more inclusive way. Taking into account Global South-North partnership for IaH, Wimpenny et al. (2022) see COIL [VE] as a Third Space to support a new ecology of learning and challenge hegemonic Western perspectives, promoting awareness and respect for "pluralistic ways of knowing, being, relating and expressing" (p. 291). Moreover, Orisini-Jones et al. (2025) consider VE as a collaborative, postdigital, connected, embodied, relational and socio material Third Space for learning.

2.4. The variety within VE

As observed in the works, different professors and programs developed VE in many varied ways, interacting in diverse digital platforms; preparing many types of tasks and using different methodologies, such as engaging students in role-play games (Liberado; Tizoumis, 2024), cross-cultural collaborative projects (Calvo; Hartle, 2024a); preparing podcast (Tenani, 2023), business video pitches (Baptista; Balula; Neto, 2022) or analysing and discussing clinical or veterinary cases and publishing the results in an e-book (Sheth et al., 2021; Alcántara et al., 2023). They also collaborated with partners from many countries and integrated VE both as a curricular and/or an extracurricular activity.

This shows that there is not a one-model fits all approach to plan and implement VE, although the following characteristics should be observed to differ it from other online activities:

- 1) technology-based interaction; 2) engagement with members of other cultures/countries; 3) integration into curriculum; 4) facilitation and support by educators or experts; 5) a strong (but not exclusive) focus on the development of soft skills and intercultural competence; 6) a student-centred, collaborative approach to learning. (O'Dowd, 2023, p. 13).

As a flexible pedagogical approach, VE has also been implemented in many different fields of knowledge and courses/programs, as discussed before, despite the greater prominence of the Language and Literature program mainly because of the Telecollaborative/Teletandem projects.

2.5. Language use and VE

Aspects related to language issues were mentioned by some studies (e.g. Guimarães et al., 2019; Souza; Santana, 2022; Zaneratto, 2023; Silva, 2024; Calvo; Hartle, 2024a). The use of English as a lingua franca (ELF) in some of the interactions was highlighted as positive and as a bridge to share experiences to create practices for global citizenship and education for peace (Finardi; Salvadori; Wehrli, 2024). Also, in the VE carried out by Souza and Santana (2022), the authors noticed the development of participants' awareness of the ways in which interactional norms and communicative styles shape the negotiation of meaning in intercultural communication and collaborative settings. In addition, Silva's analysis (2024) of the participants' interactions as ELF users showed that they actively engaged in conversations during moments of negotiation, aiming to achieve understanding and maintain mutual intelligibility. According to the author, their collaborative efforts in constructing and negotiating meaning illustrated their ability to mobilize both linguistic and technological resources to resolve potential misunderstandings.

The multilingual and multimodal character of the communication in the BRaVE Program analyzed by Zaneratto (2023) was pointed out. The study also highlighted the way speakers of Portuguese and Spanish utilize intercomprehension strategies to reach the purpose of their communication and as a resource to overcome potential language barriers between groups. In its turn, Guimarães et al. (2019) argue for the use of the Intercomprehension Approach as an alternative or a supplement to using a lingua franca. As explained by the authors, in intercomprehension, the speaker uses his/her first language while trying to understand the other languages in communication.

2.6. Support for the VE initiatives and task design

Studies highlighted the importance of teachers' support, mediation, and joint planning/coordination for the successful implementation of VEs (Silla et al., 2020; Sales Patricio et al, 2022; Tenani, 2023; Heemann, Schaefer; Sequeira, 2020). Tenani (2023), for example, emphasizes that while student collaboration was the central focus of the project, the partnership between the professors, supported by the institutional offices dedicated to VE, generated significant academic benefits. The author states that the professors' knowledge and experience guided didactic-pedagogical decisions that were relevant and appropriate, making it possible to adjust the planned pathways whenever they found that the initial plan could not be carried out due to the characteristics and challenges experienced by the students.

In a specific way, Salomão (2020) stresses the role of research and actions of the professionals from the Applied Linguistic/Languages field to support VEs and other internationalization initiatives involving foreign languages (Pinto et al., 2021). For his part, Succi Junior (2020) emphasizes the role of the institutional coordinator and financial support for VE.

Regarding task design, some studies point out the importance of clarity in the proposed tasks and well-defined purposes in their elaboration. Garcia (2021) states that VE must be guided by clear purposes shared by teachers and learners, rather than reduced to mere virtual meetings between people from different institutions or countries.

In its turn, Marcelino and Woicolesco (2022) acknowledge that the mere use of digital technologies in HE internationalization is insufficient to foster critical thinking, meaningful learning, or the development of intercultural and international competences. For the authors, what truly advances these goals is the creation of collaborative and purposeful learning environments that engage students across cultures, value diverse backgrounds, and cultivate awareness of global dynamics and social responsibilities beyond national borders.

2.7. Potentialities

The analyzed works highlight many potentialities of the VE projects, as summarized in Figure 2.

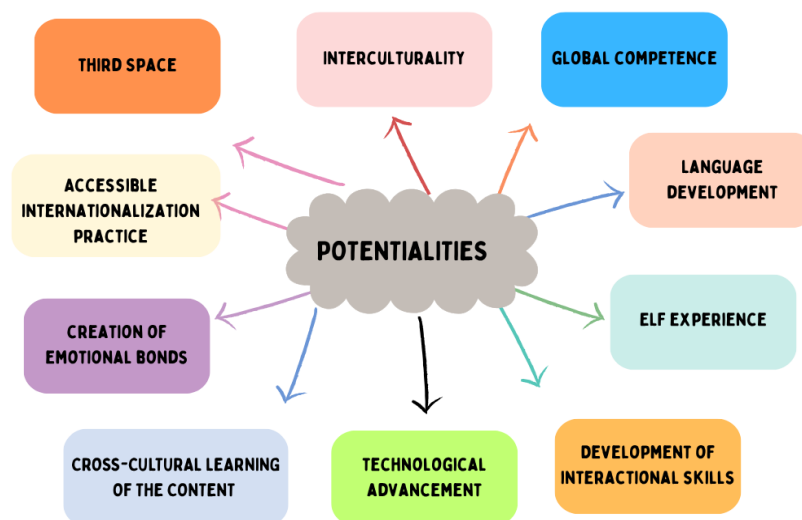


FIGURE 2 – Potentialities of VE.

Source: the authors.

Many studies indicate that in VEs learners have an authentic experience to use and develop their language skills in a contextualized way (Ferrerira et al., 2022; Salbego et al., 2021) as well to experience ELF situations and practice (Souza; Santana, 2022; Félix, 2023; Silva, 2024). In turn, Lopes (2023) emphasizes the linguistic repertoire in the languages used in combination with multimodal aspects to

produce and negotiate meanings. Concerning the language aspect, O'Dowd (2021) points out that in VE students have the opportunity to overcome anxiety about communicating in another language and to engage in its meaningful use around relevant issues. The author also mentions that, for many, VE represents a shift from traditional foreign language models that tend to emphasize grammatical accuracy.

Besides developing their language proficiency, there is the advancement of technological (learning about different digital tools by using them) and interactional skills. The study by Kopish and Marques (2020) reports that pre-service teachers, by the end of the course, shifted from using technology merely to complete assignments to exploring new possibilities for teaching and learning with it. The development of interactional or "soft" or transversal skills is also stressed by the studies, such as conflict management and decision-making in unexpected situations (Lopes, 2023), "leadership, initiative, autonomy, and collaboration" (Calvo; Hartle, 2024a, p. 6); as well as adaptability and flexibility in a range of situations (Oviedo; Krimphove, 2022).

Not only learning the content worked in the VE but also analyzing and discussing it in a contextualized and cross-cultural way, taking into account the reality of each country, was another potentiality found in the studies (for example, Calvo; Hartle, 2024a). In this regard, Sheth et al. (2021, p. 95) note as the most interesting aspect "the possibility to find common points of view, to get to know the health system of other countries, and to find out that health systems and management are different but the problems affecting the populations are the same". So, global competence is also promoted in VE when students analyze local, global and intercultural issues and understand their interconnectedness. Some studies analyzed and discussed the extent to which VE content and tasks promoted global competencies (e.g. Kopish; Marques, 2020) and the development of global citizenship (Finardi et al., 2024). By taking a closer look at the terms "global competence" and "global citizenship", O'Dowd (2023) explains that the difference between them rests on the emphasis placed on the learner's active engagement in society. In the author's words:

(...) models of intercultural or global *competence* focus on the development of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to communicate and act effectively and appropriately in different cultural contexts. However, models of global or intercultural *citizenship* are based on models of citizenship education and focus on the application of these competences to actively participating in, changing and improving society. (O'Dowd, 2023, p. 49).

Most of the analyzed work, though, seems to discuss and focus more on the development of global competence; so, fostering global citizenship education in VE is an approach that provides fertile ground for further work.

Other aspects to highlight are related to the establishment of emotional/affective bonds among the participants (Lopes, 2023); especially during the pandemic (Oliveira et al., 2023); and to the consideration of VE as an accessible internationalization practice (Marques-Schäfer et al., 2021; Oviedo; Krimphove, 2022), reducing physical, virtual and mindsets distances "by bringing partners from both parts of the world together in international dialogues" (Finardi; Salvadori; Wehrli, 2024, p. 69).

Interculturality was also present in the findings of the studies (e.g. Machado et al., 2013; Silva et al., 2020; Ferreira et al., 2022; Schaeffer; Heeman; Nieto, 2023, among others) as in VE students have

contact with difference and diversity; deconstruct stereotypes; and understand other modes of being, acting and thinking (Mayrink, 2023). It is also an opportunity to work in multicultural teams and interact effectively with people from other contexts; developing sensitivity for cultural differences and respect for other cultures (Oviedo; Krimphove, 2022).

Finally, VE as a Third Space to promote decolonized thinking, beliefs and learning (Wimpenny et al., 2022; Hildebando Junior, 2023) was discussed to stress the way all participants are “mutually recognized, incorporated, and affected” by means of alternative modes of knowledge, interaction and expression. These aspects are related to the way power relation/coloniality should be addressed in VEs (Finardi; Salomão interviewed by Bacino, 2024) – a topic and a discussion that needs to be more approached in the national scenario.

2.8. Challenges

In this part, the challenges of VE are presented, as summarized in Figure 3.

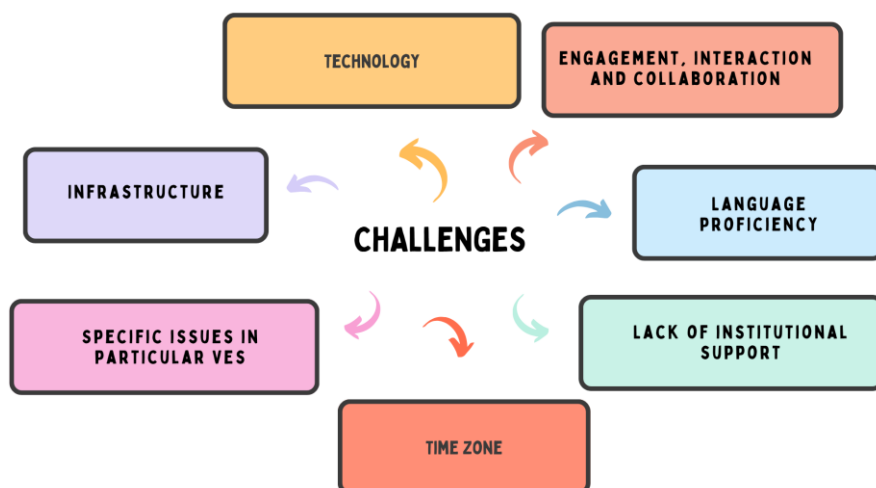


FIGURE 3 – Challenges of VE.
Source: the authors.

Some studies reported challenges related to engagement, interaction and collaboration among students (Marques-Schafer et al., 2021; Sales Patrício et al., 2022), especially when the participation was voluntary and not linked to a particular class (Dias et al., 2021).

Other challenges included varied language proficiency (Silva, 2024) or low proficiency levels (Oviedo; Krimphove, 2022) as well as time difference (Alcántara et al., 2022). Regarding technology, some studies indicated issues such as internet access or internet connection; difficulties with specific platforms (Calvo; Hartle, 2024a) and the need to select compatible tools (Hildebando Junior, Finardi, El Kadri, 2022) as well as ensuring participants share the same level of digital literacy (Dias et al., 2021). Infrastructure limitations were also noted (Souza; Silva, 2022), including the absence of equipped

language laboratories for interactions and the lack of technological resources (e.g., webcam, microphone, headset), which were reported as particularly challenging.

Lack of institutional support was also observed (Guimarães; Hildeblando Junior, Finardi, 2022; Simoneli; Finardi, 2024; Hildeblando Junior, Finardi, El Kadri, 2022) as the Brazilian institution in which the VEs were carried out did not support the integration of online teaching activities into the curriculum after the pandemic.

Finally, specific issues related to some VEs were brought, such as: class format in the Brazilian and the international university (in-person classes x asynchronous web classes) (Calvo; Hartle, 2024a); unclearer definition of the learning objectives (Sales Patrício et al., 2022) or of the asynchronous tasks proposed (Souza; Santana, 2022); difference in the academic calendar of the institutions involved (Hildeblando Junior, Finardi, El Kadri, 2022); and unequal number of participants from each context (Asik; Finardi, 2023).

Having presented the analysis of the work found in the platforms search and that were organized in thematic categories, in the next section we discuss some perspectives for VE implementation, practice and research in the Brazilian scenario.

3. Discussion: Looking further

Based on the analysis carried out in this study, in this section we reflect on some aspects to be considered in the Brazilian scenario in relation to VE both in terms of implementation and research.

First, we believe that VE can foster other types of collaboration among faculty to conduct joint research projects and other collaborative activities. Also, VE can contribute to the development of partnerships among professors from different fields of knowledge in a way to motivate interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary work as well as enhance professional continuous development by their joint work, dialogue and practices. More work emphasizing the collaborative endeavors and situating VE in communities of practice could be carried out to position VE within broader academic and professional networks.

Additionally, longitudinal studies focusing on the impact of VE in institutions, programs, courses, individuals and internationalization practices have the potential to bring a deeper understanding about VE in Brazil. The way VE has been and could be integrated into other internationalization practice could also be examined as a means to foster more inclusive and sustainable approaches to internationalization.

Given that many studies highlighted the crucial role of diverse forms of support for VE initiatives, this aspect should be more evidenced and promoted by the various parties and stakeholders interested in advancing internationalization at Brazilian HE.

Another point to be taken into account concerns to the planning and design of VE tasks in a way to foster the development of global citizenship by incorporating an action-oriented dimension that actively engages students in addressing and solving glocal (global and local) problems and challenges.

More critical discussion on VE in relation to inclusion, equity and power relations should also be encouraged, as for O'Dowd and Beelen (2021), IaH and VE are not essentially inclusive. According to the authors, there are many aspects that may contribute to the exclusion of students in online collaborations, including unequal access to devices and internet connection, varying level of language proficiency, as well as pedagogical approaches and assessment practices that may advantage some learners over others. In this context, we argue that cultivating a plurality of knowledge, languages and partnerships within VE initiatives can help advance more inclusive perspectives.

Many studies have focused on the pandemic and the post-pandemic period; currently more reflection and considerations should be made about the role and the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in VEs as we have been witnessing a growing use of those tools in education. Analysis regarding its ethical uses as well as the opportunities, limitations and risks should be made in the VEs planning, development, analysis and research.

4. Final Remarks

This paper presented the results of a review of studies focused on VE in the Brazilian HE context, published from 2013 to 2024, in academic search platforms, in order to comprehend this initiative in a local and situated way. A total of 110 academic works were found and analyzed, considering these thematic categories: i) the nature of the text writing; ii) types of VE and specific institutional designations in some HEIs; iii) internationalization, the pandemic and post-pandemic periods; iv) the variety within VE; v) language use and VE; vi) support for the VE initiatives and task design; vii) potentialities and viii) challenges.

Results of the study suggest that VE has had an increasingly growing potential for the internationalization of Brazilian HEIs as it represents variety of work and international collaboration possibilities. Even highlighting the potential of VE initiatives, studies also acknowledge the challenges faced, showing, thus, the importance of a critical stance and perspective in their implementation.

For further VE research and initiatives, aspects related to partnerships, support, task design, the development of global citizenship, critical perspectives and the role of AI in VEs could be addressed.

By providing a contextualized and situated review, analysis and discussion on the works carried out about VE in Brazil, this paper seeks to contribute both to a local deeper understanding that may motivate more IaH practices, as well as to a broader view of it that can stimulate greater worldwide collaborations on VE.

Additional information

Evaluation and author's answers

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EVALUATOR 1

O artigo apresenta uma revisão de literatura consistente e atualizada sobre o intercâmbio virtual (Virtual Exchange – VE) no contexto da internacionalização da Educação Superior brasileira. O título reflete com precisão o conteúdo do trabalho, e o resumo demonstra clareza e objetividade ao explicitar objetivos, metodologia e principais resultados.

A introdução está bem estruturada, contextualizando o estudo em bases teóricas sólidas, e a metodologia é adequada ao propósito da pesquisa, com rigor na seleção e análise das fontes. Os resultados estão organizados de forma clara, com categorias bem definidas, e a discussão articula criticamente as evidências com referenciais relevantes, incluindo reflexões sobre inclusão, global citizenship e perspectivas decoloniais.

O texto está bem escrito, coerente e cumpre as normas acadêmicas e de citação. Recomenda-se apenas uma verificação final de uniformidade em legendas e subtítulos.

Conclusão: O artigo apresenta excelência teórica, metodológica e formal. Recomenda-se a publicação sem necessidade de revisões substanciais.

EVALUATOR 2

O texto apresenta um trabalho com relevância e pertinência para o atual contexto de internacionalização a partir de experiências documentadas sobre intercâmbios virtuais. Por meio de uma revisão de literatura, aborda com certa originalidade os principais apontamentos da área, incluindo considerações e algumas contribuições possíveis para o contexto brasileiro.

Os objetivos são apresentados de forma explícita e recorrente ao longo do texto, o que proporciona ao leitor fluidez na leitura e percepção bem direcionada para toda a análise realizada pelas pesquisadoras. Os procedimentos metodológicos, por sua vez, expressam de forma sucinta os requisitos para a elaboração e a execução do estudo, prezando pela possibilidade de replicabilidade e de verificabilidade da pesquisa executada. O estudo, apesar de sintético dado o número de trabalhos mencionados, apresenta relevância acadêmico-científica para a sua área a partir da sua consistência analítica. Acredito que devido à sua brevidade, o texto acaba por brindar às autoras – e, consequentemente, à toda comunidade acadêmica interessada no tema – a possibilidade de seguir aprofundando a temática, a partir das referências bibliográficas mencionadas e dos dados qualiquantitativos publicizados, em outras e em contínuas pesquisas bibliográficas, documentais e/ou bibliométricas.

Entendo que o trabalho deve ser aceito sem correções substanciais para a sua publicação final. Portanto, felicito as autoras pelo excelente trabalho apresentado e por oportunizar aos leitores uma percepção abrangente sobre o que se tem publicado sobre os intercâmbios virtuais no contexto da internacionalização.

EVALUATOR 3

O manuscrito demonstra bom domínio do tema e articula de maneira consistente a literatura sobre internacionalização no ensino superior, foco do dossiê em tela. O levantamento realizado em

publicações entre 2013 e 2024 é sólido e oferece uma visão abrangente da evolução do Virtual Exchange (VE) no contexto brasileiro. A escrita é clara e há coerência argumentativa.

O texto destaca-se por:

- apresentar uma estrutura lógica e bem organizada, com transições adequadas entre contextualização histórica, metodologia, análise das categorias e discussão;
- sistematizar 110 estudos, compondo um panorama que evidencia tanto a maturação do VE no Brasil quanto os esforços institucionais para sua consolidação – embora a apresentação dos estudos, seus locais de publicação e anos pudessem ter sido organizados na metodologia;
- articular abordagens contemporâneas, como pedagogias críticas, interculturalidade crítica, translanguaging, intercompreensão, COIL/BRaVE e práticas de internacionalização em casa, dialogando com autores nacionais e internacionais;
- oferecer uma leitura refinada da diversidade de VE, contemplando dimensões linguísticas, socioculturais, tecnológicas e político-institucionais;
- escrever de forma clara, fluida e informativa, o que favorece a compreensão tanto de especialistas quanto de leitores menos familiarizados com o tema.

Como sugestões de aprimoramento formal (de caráter obrigatório):

- explicitar a sigla HEI, a qual aparece no texto sem menção por extenso anteriormente;
- revisar pequenos detalhes de padronização tipográfica, normatização das referências e citação de trechos longos;

No mais, o trabalho é consistente, metodologicamente cuidadoso e socialmente relevante. Contribui de forma significativa para a literatura contemporânea sobre internacionalização do ensino superior, Virtual Exchange, políticas linguísticas e práticas pedagógicas colaborativas e críticas.

Recomendação ao Autor: Parabéns pela qualidade do manuscrito, pela amplitude da revisão e pela pertinência das análises. O artigo está pronto para publicação, necessitando apenas de ajustes formais sutis.

Conflicts of interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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Research Protocol and Pre-Registration

Os autores confirmam que avaliaram os roteiros propostos pela Equator Network e consideram que nenhum deles se mostra relevante para a pesquisa em tela. Também informamos que a pesquisa desenvolvida não foi pré-registrada em repositório institucional independente.

Data Availability Statement

Os dados, códigos e materiais que suportam os resultados deste estudo estão disponíveis para consulta sob demanda em drive de responsabilidade das autoras.

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