



IMPACTS OF THE INSTITUTIONAL TELETANDEM PROGRAM ON THE LEARNING OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES AT THE TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY OF COTOPAXI, PUJILÍ EXTENSION

IMPACTOS DEL PROGRAMA INSTITUCIONAL TELETANDEM EN EL APRENDIZAJE DE LENGUAS EXTRANJERAS EN LA UNIVERSIDAD TÉCNICA DE COTOPAXI, EXTENSIÓN PUJILÍ

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Abstract

Teletandem is a learning modality in which students from different linguistic and cultural contexts collaborate through digital platforms. It has evolved into an innovative alternative for foreign language education globally. That is why the aim of this investigation is to examine how do teachers' roles impact the effectiveness of the institutional Teletandem program at the Technical University of Cotopaxi. A qualitative approach was used. A semi structured interview was applied to both teachers and students. To analyze the data, thematic analysis was used in order to determine the common themes in the participant's answers. Then, the triangulation method was used to compare the answers from the perspectives of teachers and students. The results show that in the Teletandem programs, the roles of the teacher are multifaceted and crucial in facilitating a productive tandem learning experience. Teachers serve as interaction facilitators, intercultural mediators, activity designers, goal setters, feedback providers, promoters of autonomy, adapters, and creators of a supportive environment. The effective execution of teachers' roles in the Teletandem program significantly impacts students' participation and engagement in interactions. The analysis of interviews conducted in Teletandem sessions has revealed that educators play a crucial role in preparing students for these interactions, guiding them in behavior, question formulation, and session navigation. However, there is variation in the approaches employed by educators, with some providing structured guidelines while others opt for more flexible methods. Furthermore, a disparity in the clarity and explicit delineation of learning objectives has been identified, influencing students' experiences internet.

Keywords: Teletandem; teachers; students; interaction; meetings.

Resumen

El Teletándem es una modalidad de aprendizaje en la que estudiantes de diferentes contextos lingüísticos y culturales colaboran a través de plataformas digitales, y se ha consolidado como una alternativa innovadora en la educación de idiomas extranjeros. Es por ello que el objetivo de esta investigación es examinar cómo inciden los roles de los docentes en la efectividad del programa institucional Teletándem en la Universidad Técnica de Cotopaxi. Se empleó un enfoque cualitativo. Se aplicó una entrevista semiestructurada tanto a docentes como a estudiantes. Para analizar los datos, se utilizó el análisis temático con el fin de determinar los temas comunes en las respuestas de los participantes. Luego, se utilizó el método de triangulación para comparar las respuestas desde la perspectiva de docentes y estudiantes. Los resultados muestran que en los programas Teletándem, los roles del docente son multifacéticos y cruciales, lo que facilita una experiencia productiva de aprendizaje en tándem. Los profesores sirven como facilitadores de interacción, mediadores interculturales, diseñadores de actividades, fijadores de objetivos, proveedores de retroalimentación, promotores de autonomía, adaptadores y creadores de un entorno de apoyo. La ejecución efectiva de las funciones de los docentes en el programa Teletándem impacta significativamente la participación y el compromiso de los estudiantes en las interacciones. El análisis de las entrevistas realizadas en las sesiones de Teletándem ha revelado que los educadores desempeñan un papel crucial en la preparación de los estudiantes para estas interacciones, guiándolos en el comportamiento, la formulación de preguntas y la navegación en la sesión. Sin embargo, existen variaciones en los enfoques empleados por los educadores: algunos proporcionan pautas estructuradas mientras que otros optan por métodos más flexibles. Además, se



ha identificado una disparidad en la claridad y delimitación explícita de los objetivos de aprendizaje, lo que influye en las experiencias de los estudiantes.

Palabras clave: Teletándem; estudiantes; profesores; interacción; reuniones

Fecha de recibido: 29/11/2023

Fecha de aceptado: 11/01/2024

Fecha de publicado: 13/01/2024

Introduction

Currently, Teletandem is well known for being one of the best options to learn a second language, as it allows speakers from different cultures and parts of the world to interact, communicate and share with each other. In fact, "Teletandem is a new distance and computer-assisted mode of learning foreign languages in-tandem that makes extemporaneous use of oral and written production, reading and listening comprehension and webcam images of the participants" (Telles & Vasallo, 2006, p.193). Therefore, several universities and educational centers have opted to create links with others so their students can benefit from the process.

For example, the UTC (Universidad Técnica de Cotopaxi) whose students have been interacting with students from UM (University of Miami) to learn Spanish and English respectively. The main basis of the whole interaction is settled on the fact that all speakers who participate are native speakers, which means that the feedback received will be from someone who has natural management of the target language (Cando & Tovar, 2021). Over the years, several studies have been conducted on how Teletandem sessions should be addressed. Nevertheless, in most cases, there is not a clear path to lead the way on how these encounters between students should profit.

Some of them include that teacher do not prepare specific topics and materials with students for the interactions. Logically, if the students go unprepared to address the meeting, then, they will not be able to "fluid", and the meeting can lack stability. Telles (2015) explains why this does not work out by saying "the practice of conducting telletandem mediation sessions requires knowledge about intercultural contact, discourse, and communication" (p.607). In the same way, another problem is teachers not involving deeply in the Teletandem sessions. Finally, it can also be said that teachers do not integrate the information students get from the interactions with language learning. This is shown by Suzi & Cavalari (2019) "telecollaborative exchanges can be a powerful learning instrument when integrated into the FL (foreign language) curriculum and given adequate institutional support" (p.558).

As a result, addressing this topic correctly could highly impact how teachers are carrying out their teaching, making them reflect on whether they should prepare something specifically for the meetings (a topic to talk about), or continue with an improvised approach during the sessions (participants talk about any topic concerning their own interest). The consequences of not taking these considerations as a problem could end in a bad or not adequate teaching process, but also in students not getting to get the best out of the sessions. Talking and practicing with a native speaker is not something that all language learners can afford, doing it



using technological tools from a comfortable space is a plus, as it also turns out to be quite cheaper. It would be a shame to have such a learning opportunity and not using it.

Foreign language education has undergone a transformation in the global educational landscape, with the Teletandem program emerging as an innovative response to the changing demands of language teaching and learning. Open communication and reflection on Teletandem experiences also emerge as recommended strategies to fortify the approach (Hansell, Pörn, & Bäck, 2021). In a world where cross-cultural communication is essential, this research becomes a significant effort to enhance educational quality and foster deeper understanding among students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Cavalari & Aranha (2019) delve into the pedagogical implications of integrating Teletandem into foreign language curricula, with a particular emphasis on the multifaceted role of educators. Their study revolves around the dual responsibilities of instructors: conventional English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction in traditional face-to-face settings and the mediation of virtual autonomous and collaborative learning through Teletandem. These studies reflect the Latin American adaptation of modern pedagogical approaches and the promotion of intercultural competence in language learning, with challenges including internet access and the transformative role of technology in education.

In the Ecuadorian context, foreign language education has witnessed the integration of innovative pedagogical strategies, including telecollaboration and tandem language learning. These approaches, inspired by global trends, have been embraced by educational institutions to enhance language acquisition and intercultural competence. Scholars like Cando & Tovar (2021) have explored the implementation of Teletandem projects at the Technical University of Cotopaxi, evaluating its impact on language learning, culture, and motivation. Additionally, the integration of e-tandem modes into language curricula, as studied by Zuña et al. (2023), highlights the ongoing efforts to align modern teaching methods with Ecuador's educational landscape.

These endeavors reflect the country's commitment to fostering language proficiency and cross-cultural understanding in the increasingly interconnected global environment. The results and aims of these previous investigations offer teletandem as an excellent technological tool for the learning and practicing of a second language. In the global context, new learning approaches have arisen around the role of instructors. In a regional aspect, the concept of telecollaboration has been wider acknowledge, and in a national context exists an effort to integrate these teletandem practices within the curriculum. All the elements mentioned before are important features for teachers, instructors, and educators in order to carry out the teletandem meetings with their students in the best possible way to get the most successful learning results of the interactions. The objective of the research that supported this article was: Examine how teachers' roles impact the effectiveness of the institutional Teletandem program at the Technical University of Cotopaxi.

Materials and methods

In this study, a qualitative approach was used. As the idea is to collect and describe qualitative data, this investigation presents a descriptive method. This study is framed within a case study research design. The central purpose of this research was to analyze the dynamics interaction between the conventional pedagogical strategies use by teachers of English as a Foreign Language in Teletandem sessions to explore the derived benefits for students. To achieve this purpose, a triangulation methodology was used, combining literature analysis with in-depth interviews with teachers and students. These interviews covered different phases of the process, including preparatory, interactive, and post-interaction stages.



Research context

This project was executed, involving two instructors of the English course, and a group of four students enrolled in the third semester at the UTC, a public institution located in the Cotopaxi province of Ecuador, specifically in the city of Pujilí. This university has historically fostered inter-institutional linkages, including collaborations with entities such as the UM, as a conduit to facilitate cultural and linguistic exchange initiatives. The selected participants encompassed a diverse demographic, spanning distinct age groups and genders, all of whom actively engaged in Teletandem interactions. The selection of participants followed a non-probabilistic sampling methodology. This design choice was rooted in the deliberate selection of individuals directly involved in the Teletandem sessions, thereby embracing a convenience sampling strategy. The data collection methodology that was employed within the scope of this research project revolved around the utilization of semi-structured interviews. The interview-centric approach served as an efficacious conduit for harvesting and deciphering qualitative insights. These insights coming from the vantage point of students and instructors, thereby encompassing two pivotal dimensions intrinsically interwoven with the Teletandem program.

The interview protocol was architected to integrate open-ended inquiries seamlessly harmonized with the theoretical underpinnings furnished by the theoretical framework. It is imperative to underscore that the interview engagements not only extracted participants' demographic attributes, inclusive of gender and age, but also extended inquiries intended to ascertain the academic credentials of educators and the English language proficiency levels of learners. In addressing the core research inquiry, a dual-pronged interview approach was undertaken. Each interview iteration was bespoke, tailored to draw forth insights germane to the research question. One interview cycle was precision-tuned to encapsulate the experiences and perspectives of UTC teaching faculty, while the parallel interview trajectory was dedicated to unraveling the perspectives and experiences of the student cohort ensconced within the same academic institution. The convergence of these distinct interview datasets engendered a comprehensive and triangulated comprehension of the multi-faceted intricacies that envelop the Teletandem program within the specific context of UTC.

Results and discussion

In the contemporary educational landscape, the symbiotic interplay of education and technology has become an inseparable dyad. This synergistic convergence serves to elevate the caliber of knowledge dissemination, effectuating innovation and efficiency in pedagogical practices. Consequently, education has recognized the imperative to assimilate modernized approaches to language acquisition. In this vein, the concept of Teletandem emerges as an ingenious framework for acquiring foreign languages, ingeniously integrating technological apparatus.

Teletandem, also known as tandem learning, as articulated by Tardieu & Horgues (2019), denotes an inventive and distinctive pedagogical instrument harnessed by language educators. Its primary purpose is to address the paucity of authentic, real-world communication opportunities in the target language within conventional classroom settings for L2 learners (p.1). The tandem approach encompasses two distinct modalities: the face-to-face tandem, which entails physical interaction between two individuals situated in the same geographic location and the e-tandem variant that increases the prospects for improving the skills of language students, facilitating the practice of linguistic skills. This format occurs through online videoconferencing platforms



such as Skype or Zoom and is occasionally extended to encompass interactions within the scope of social networks (Griggio, 2018 cited in Serrato & Padilla, 2020, p. 418).

The operational framework of this methodology revolves around the principle of autonomous learning. Within this paradigm, the process of acquiring a second language (L2) transcends the exclusive scope of pedagogical management by the instructor. Instead, students assume substantial responsibility for the pedagogical trajectory, outlining their unique learning objectives, the curricular content, and the variety of learning tools and materials to be employed. The teacher's Role in Teletandem language teaching

Presently, language educators bear augmented and multifaceted responsibilities, transcending the conventional purview, wherein their roles have evolved from mere conveyors of language content and skill development to encompass more intricate and consequential tasks. This transformation becomes particularly pronounced in the context of Teletandem, accentuating educators' role as orchestrators of intercultural engagement, integrators of technology, coordinators, and collaborative facilitators.

Initiating this transformative role, educators assume the mantle of facilitators and coordinators, vested with the duty of structuring the Teletandem program. Their remit encompasses fostering collaborative engagement with students, steering them towards the adept deployment of strategies that engender gradual progress (Klen & Tiraboschi, 2018, p. 113).

Moreover, educators delineate the program's objectives, parameters, and anticipatory criteria for language exchange activities. These instructors aptly pair students based on congruence in language proficiency, mutual interests, and aligned learning objectives. Ergo, the preparatory phase that precedes the actual interactive sessions—wherein students interface with their Teletandem counterparts through computer-mediated channels—incorporates a series of indispensable procedures and prerequisites. The meticulous fulfillment of these requisites is instrumental in assuring the sessions efficacy and gratification. In this crucial juncture, educators play a pivotal and indispensable role.

According to Cavalari & Aranha (2016), there are three key procedures which are the teacher's responsibilities:

- To prepare students (for example through tutorials or pilot sessions).
- Blending Teletandem sessions into the curriculum by integrating tasks.
- Incorporating various assessment practices (self-assessment, peer assessment, and teacher assessment) (Cavalari & Aranha, 2019).

The key points mentioned above can be distributed according to 4 teachers' roles: guiding role, linguistic role, technological role and mediation role. These roles are played by the teachers responsible of the groups of students involved in teletanden sessions according to the program.

Guiding role

By focusing on the process during each session, teachers should establish clear guidelines and expectations for Teletandem sessions. This includes defining the purpose of the sessions, setting specific learning goals, and establishing appropriate communication etiquette. This guideline includes the following activities:



Table 1. Activities developed by the teacher in Teletandem session.

Activities	Objective	Description
Guided Discussions	To encourage both sides to share thoughts, opinions, and experiences to promote the production of meaningful dialogue	Teachers provide discussion prompts or themes to guide the conversation. These prompts can be related to: • specific topics • current events • cultural aspects
Language Practice Exercises	To target specific linguistic areas such as vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, or fluency	It can include • role plays, • dialogues, • vocabulary games • grammar drills
Collaborative Projects	To work together towards a common goal	It can involve: • creating presentations • videos • written assignments • topics of mutual interest
Cultural Exchange Activities	To promote cultural understanding and exchange	This can include discussions about traditions, customs, festivals, or food from each other's cultures. Students may share photos, videos, or presentations showcasing their cultural heritage.
Error Correction and Language Feedback	To develop language learning	Teachers help clarify misunderstandings, offer suggestions for improvement, and encourage the use of more accurate language expressions.
Reflective Activities	To evaluate their own language learning progress and intercultural competence	It can involve: • journaling • self-assessment questionnaires • reflective discussions with the teacher or partner
Multimedia Resources	To enhance the learning experience	Such as audio clips, videos, news articles, or online resources. These resources can stimulate discussions, provide authentic language input, or expose tandem partners to different cultural contexts.
Assessments and Progress Monitoring	To evaluate the language development and progress	This can include: • oral presentations • written assignments • language proficiency tests
Wrap-up and Reflection	To summarize the key points covered and encourage reflection	Both students reflect on what they have learned, discuss challenges encountered, and set goals for future sessions.

Source: Rampazza (2023) quoted by Noroña (2023).

In every activity, the teacher must provide guidance and constructive feedback to enhance the language skills of the students and track their improvement. On the other hand, the implementation of a pedagogy to promote autonomy is important. This pedagogy will promote the development of student autonomy to achieve better educational results.

The teachers have specific functions to support students while developing their learning autonomy, (Mynard 2011).



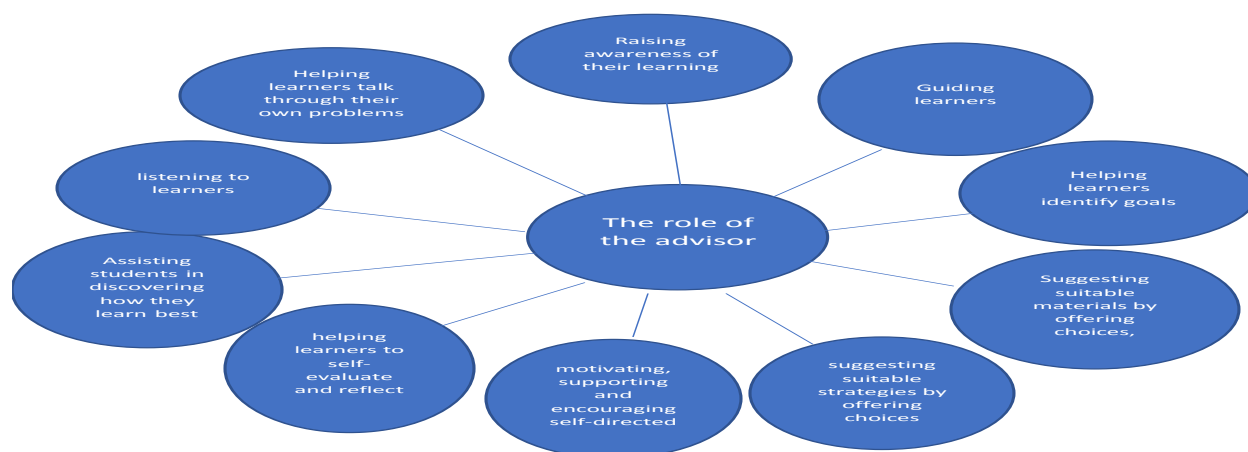


Figure 1. Functions for teachers to support students' autonomy.

Source: Modified from Mynard (2011)

Linguistic role

Once teachers have mastered the digital tools involved in Teletandem sessions, it is up to them to prepare the students. Teachers provide linguistic support to the students before, during and after the sessions. In addition, they provide materials such as: sample writing, audios, questions to help understanding the vocabulary; and they give encouragement and motivation to students if necessary.

Teachers are responsible for blending Teletandem sessions to the curriculum. Thus, teachers develop activities and materials that focus on language development, intercultural communication, and collaborative learning. The curriculum is often aligned with the student's language proficiency levels and specific learning objectives. Therefore, during the conversation session, both Teletandem partners have the opportunities to practice and apply the language structures, vocabulary, and grammar concepts they are learning in their formal language classes.

To have a successful Teletandem project, no matter in which type of institution, there are two essential elements related to difficulties that may arise during the execution of the sessions: "students' lack of vocabulary knowledge about social issues and the differences in groups' topics" (Castillo, 2018, p.270). Teachers in charge of Teletandem programs must be aware of them in order to generate the appropriate measures to minimize their influence. There is a structure for the orientation and mediation sessions if the students have difficulties in using the adequate vocabulary, (Telles 2015).

The practice of conducting Teletandem sessions allows students to break down barriers in communication in the language they are learning. The opportunity to interact with a partner from another country or cultural background through Teletandem often increases students' motivation and engagement in language learning. The authentic communication experience and the personal connection with their tandem partner create a purposeful and enjoyable learning environment. This motivation can help students overcome communication barriers and build their confidence in using the language.



Technological role

First, teachers must prepare themselves to understand the factors involved in this new digital tool. Therefore, they need to understand and be able to control digital tools with ease to support their students before, during and after the sessions, so they can use the skills developed and increase their confidence in the use of the foreign language. The teacher should have the necessary expertise to change the classroom from a static to a dynamic learning environment to have the students communicating with others. Communication that will be carried out in classes and in other environments around the world.

The teachers have to master the technologies involve in Teletandem. They must become familiar with the potential technical problems because they have to support the students during their communication through these tools and platforms.

Teachers address technical issues, guide their students on the effective use of digital tools to promote the development of digital literacy skills. This is one of the advantages of an institutional integrated Teletandem system. If the students have any problem with connection, audio, video or accessibility, the teacher can help them without interrupting the sessions to guarantee the session success.

According to Zuña, et al. (2023), teachers stated that an e-tandem integrated into the language curriculum would help to minimize technological problems in sessions. It means that when this program is part of the regular classes, the educational institutions have to provide the necessary equipment (laboratory and good internet connection) to develop the interaction. (p.8)

Although the teachers have to train themselves to execute the Teletandem sessions, the institution has to provide the tools needed for their training with adequate equipment. The integration institution-teachers is the only way to have the success of the program and guarantee the greatest educational benefit for the students. Another technological aspect to be considered is the protection of student data. When using platforms such as Google, Skype or Zoom in Teletandem sessions, it is important to protect student data.

The educational institution and teachers challenge is to develop an institutional policy to regulate the acquisition and use of technology; the rules to guarantee student data the privacy; the teachers and students freedom to choose the technology; etc. This challenge determines the development of tele-collaborative activities. (Simon, Kleban, & Rodrigues, 2017).

Mediation role

In language teaching, assessment practices represent a critical dimension through which educators measure and provide feedback on the linguistic performance and advancement of students. The evaluative scope extends to encompass oral and written assignments, oversight of communication records, and contemplative dialogues with tandem partners. Within the mediation paradigm, the responsibility of mediators is to perpetuate a continuous feedback. The mediator has to guarantee the development of linguistic precision, fluency, cultural comprehension, and holistic development.

Aligned with the insights of Cavalari & Aranha (2019), an intriguing facet emerges in the form of student-generated diaries subsequent to each Teletandem oral session (TOS), supplemented by instructor feedback before next sessions. This iterative process engenders a one-to-one discourse wherein educators navigate the contours of individual student progression. The reflective diaries, as underscored by Ramos & Carvalho (2018), have manifestly emerged as a mediator-practiced strategy. This strategy stimulates the exchange of written compositions amongst interactants to foster dynamics correction. Additionally, this pedagogical tool



assumes the role of illuminating instances of other partnerships and contributes to a contextualized comprehension of their introduction (Ramos & Carvalho, 2018, p. 44).

Further expounding on the temporal dimensions inherent to the Teletandem process, Ramos & Carvalho (2018) accentuate that the mediation sessions materialize the interaction. This sequential arrangement defines a distinct chronology wherein mediation is positioned as a subsequent phase which infuses the linguistic exchange.

These authors state the nexus between evaluation practices and mediation within the Teletandem environment constitutes a multifaceted dynamic pedagogical strategy. This strategy consists of a personalized feedback and reflective instruments to stimulate the process of linguistic and intercultural exchange. In this strategy, the mediator's intervention is extremely necessary and the preference for a language teacher to intermediate the process becomes more evident (p. 43).

The authors also indicate that the mediator's role is to stimulate the reflection and raise awareness according to the students' needs to set specific learning goals. These needs can be related to linguistics content (grammar and vocabulary), intercultural aspects (social practices and behaviors), teaching learning strategies, and strategies agreed by partners to overcome the difficulties. At this point, the importance of Teletandem as a context of reflection upon the teaching and learning process is a unique experience in teachers' training. (p. 43).

The mediation sessions constitute a fundamental juncture which stimulate substantial results in intermediate and extended temporal spheres. In this environment, learners have the opportunity to identify the facets which generate uncertainty. They can also rectify the errors to enhance their performance. This dynamic has a great importance not only for subsequent Teletandem sessions, but in other contexts characterized by the application of the acquired language.

These mediation sessions typify an incubator for ongoing refinement. They foster the trajectory of gradual proficiency increase. In this environment, the complexities of language comprehension, application, and interaction are practically overcome and the learning process is improved. The proactive engagement in these mediation settings is synonymous to an investment that culminates with a good language use and a linguistics competence improvement. This is equivalent to an improve of the linguistic development and language cognitive domains.

According to Ramos & Carvalho (2018), this process exhibits a complex reciprocal synergy. It not only enhances the efficiency of immediate interactions within the Teletandem paradigm but also significantly extends its reach. The process also illuminates the broader expanses of linguistic use. Thus, the mediation sessions are an indispensable locus for ongoing growth which, at the same time, expands linguistic mastery proficiency and language versatility.

Challenges for teachers in Teletandem programs

In this context, it is essential to recognize the advantages and disadvantages of Teletandem sessions in higher education. Cavalari (2018) presents some of the challenges for teachers in relation to tele-collaborative media, such as Teletandem, which are summarized in Table 2.



Table 2. Challenges that affect teacher to fulfill the role.

Challenges	Description
Time issues	• Tele-collaborative practice seems to be time consuming • Require additional time and effort from both teachers and students
Lack of institutional interest, recognition and funding	• Educational institutions may think that these types of programs only represent an economic expense, i.e., they do not see them as an investment, and therefore do not allocate the necessary funds
Technological problems related to teacher literacies	• Ensuring that the necessary technology, such as videoconferencing equipment and stable internet connections, is in place.
Organization of groups	• Size of student groups, proficiency level of learners • Appropriate tasks
Assessment and accreditation	• What and how to assess tele-collaborative learning • Setting independent and collaborative goals • Discussing session logistics with the other schools

Source: Modified from Cavalari (2018)

However, in the research of O'Dowd (2013) strategies are also shown to overcome those barriers (quoted in Cavalari, 2018, p. 422):

- Building-up reliable and steady partnerships: Teachers should identify schools or classes that are a good match in terms of language learning goals, proficiency levels, and cultural diversity. Seek out partner institutions that are committed to the Teletandem process and share similar educational values.
- Raising awareness and prestige of the tele-collaborative exchange in the local institution and beyond, meaning that the activity is recognized as important and relevant, and that it is rewarded in internal promotion procedures.
- Using tele-collaboration creatively to adapt to local institution's needs which involves the incorporation of cultural and local content into Teletandem sessions to make them relevant and engaging for students.
- Achieving credit or recognition for the students' tele-collaborative work clearly communicate these to the students and ensure they understand the expectations.
- The assessment criteria should include aspects such as language proficiency, intercultural competence, collaboration skills, and the quality of the tele-collaborative output. Assess students' performance based on these criteria and provide constructive feedback.
- Linking tele-collaboration to broader international activity at the institution. Tele-collaboration could include study abroad programs, exchange programs, or partnerships with international schools. It could also highlight the connection between tele-collaboration and these programs to showcase the global perspective and intercultural learning opportunities offered to students.

Integrated Activities in EFL and Teletandem lessons

During Teletandem implementation, the instructor's role emerges to guarantee the synchronization of the cultural facets with the cultural components of the curriculum. The educator designs purposeful activities to foster intercultural competence meticulously weaving the cultural comprehension according to the curriculum predefined cultural objectives.

Teletandem framework design, as Hernández, Hidalgo, and Espinosa (2022) state, depends on variables encompassing course specifications, learners' educational aspirations and contextual demands. Because of



this, an approach to include the educative diversity and a teaching dynamic context is needed. The instructors must cultivate an intimate understanding among their students to develop a curriculum meticulously adapted to the group academic level needs. This pedagogical strategy is effective to organize the Teletandem sessions to incorporate both linguistic and cultural dimensions associated to the specific group learning goals. The articulation of activities and resources in each educational institution is adopted to its cultural idiosyncrasy, adjusted to the student demands. On the other hand, the organizational configuration of Teletandem implementation depends on the heterogeneity according to the contextual attributes of each academic setting. The results obtained in three UNESP (São Paulo State University) institutions —Assis, São José do Rio Preto (SJRP) and Araraquara— show the diversity of the existing Teletandem systems. That is to say, the instructor's strategic interaction with cultural and curriculum contours defines the effective design of Teletandem implementation to reinforce the dynamic synergy between pedagogical design, intercultural enrichment, and contextual adaptability.

Table 3. Organizational proposals for a Teletandem program.

Activities	Institutions		
	Assis	Araraquara	SJRP
Preparation meeting	face-to-face	face-to-face	face-to-face and by means of tutorial videos
Teletandem oral session	one hour; weekly (Skype or Zoom)	one hour; weekly (Skype)	one hour; weekly (Skype)
Mediation (support)	face-to-face meetings after each TOS, or by means of forums	online feedback offered to learning diaries (Moodle)	online feedback offered to learning diaries (Google Docs and Drive) and face-to-face meetings
Questionnaire	-	at the end of the experience (Moodle)	pre- and postquestionnaires (Google Forms and Drive)
Collaborative task of writing	-	-	students wrote texts in their mother tongue and revised texts written in Portuguese (Google Docs and Drive)

Source: taken from Cavalari (2018)

Data analysis

The interview data was exposed to an exhaustive examination. This examination is supported by thematic analysis. According to Caulfield (2019), the thematic analysis generates a depth inspection of the data. This inspection is directed toward the discernment of recurrent thematic motifs, conceptual nuances, and salient meanings that iteratively emerge in the learning process.

This analytical approach facilitated a detailed exploration of participants' perspectives, related to the research principal subject. A guide was prepared to apply the interview to the selected teachers and students. The interview was saved in audio documents. The content of the audios was transcribed. The transcription was analyzed to confirm the data. After this data analysis was made to identify appropriate patterns and relationships. To improve the result validity, triangulation method was used, comparing data collected from teachers and students' responses. Finally, the outcomes were written to be presented in a coherent document. Triangulation was used together with the thematic analysis. According to Heale & Twycross (2018), triangulation demands of a methodical effort to catch and understand the human behavior. This result is accomplished through the variety of divergent methodological methods to obtain complete and balanced explanation to guarantee the reader understanding.



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This methodological principle coordinated the harmonious confluence of heterogeneous data sources. **Triangulation personalizes the analysis of the data obtained.**

The integration of these disparate perspectives, as culled from the interview modality, endowed the study with a panoramic vista, encapsulating a comprehensive composite image that intricately elucidated the congruence and interconnections pervading the data constellation.

Analysis and Discussion of Results

Answer to the research question “*How do teachers’ roles impact the effectiveness of the institutional Teletandem program at the Technical University of Cotopaxi?*” two interviews were applied, one focused on the teacher’s perspective and the other in the students of the program perspectives in which the relevant information related to the teacher’s role in the Teletandem sessions was analyzed.

Based on the results obtained from the interview guide and following the steps of thematic analysis the most interesting and relevant data collected has been organized in categories and subcategories in order to analyze in a better way.

Table 4. Categories & Subcategories.

Themes (categories)	Subcategories
A Guidelines and expectations for the meetings	Behavioral aspect
	Preparing students
	Implicit objectives
Learning goals	Structured guide
	Learning from the experience
	Cultural topics
Themes to talk to in the sessions	English book topics
	Free choice topics
	Practicing during classes
Language practice exercises	Practicing in a minimum percentage
	Not practicing at all
	English book themes
Cultural exchange activities	Lack of vocabulary and knowledge
	Knowledge-sharing
	Internet Resources
Linguistic support	Skill practicing
	Book content
	No integration
Blending teletandem into the English classes	Pandemic experience
	Level of expertise
	Technological problems
Digital tools	Feedback before interactions
	No feedback
	Reports
Error correction and feedback	
Reflective activities	



Discussions

No reflective activities

Category: Guidelines and expectations for the meetings

Subcategory: Behavioral aspect

ET1: En el ámbito del comportamiento. Primero, que los chicos tienen que llegar a tiempo, deben utilizar bien su tiempo, deben ser muy respetuosos con los otros chicos. En segundo lugar, prepararlos en algún tipo de tópico, un tema que ellos puedan desarrollar. Al inicio se trata por lo regular de ayudarles con lo que son las presentaciones para que los chicos conozcan quiénes son, qué edad tiene, de dónde son, etc. [In the behavioral aspect. Firstly, the students have to arrive on time, they must use their time well, and be very respectful to the other students. Secondly, prepare them for some kind of topic, a theme that they can develop. In the beginning, it is usually about helping them with what the presentations are so that the students get to know who they are, how old they are, where they are from, etc.]

S2: Nos dijo como deberíamos portarnos, algunas frases útiles para romper el hielo, y dijo que seamos nosotros mismos y practiquemos nuestro inglés. Nos dio buenas instrucciones. [The teacher told us how we should behave, some useful icebreaking phrases, and she advised us to be ourselves and practice our English.]

She gave us Good instructions.]

Subcategory: Preparing students

ET2: Se les prepara y ellos saben que preguntar y como hacer las preguntas. Ellos van muy motivados a su entrevista para obtener información. [Students are prepared so they know what to ask. They go motivated to participate in the interview to get information]

S1: En mi primera experiencia en el programa, por ejemplo, fue interesante porque la teacher nos fue preparando de que nos iba a preguntar o sobre qué podíamos interactuar con los chicos, incluso fuimos repasando preguntas, respuestas, o sea, fuimos ya preparados con un tema específico ya para interactuar con los chicos de Miami. [In my first experience participating in the program, for example, it was very interesting that the teacher warned us about on what they could ask us or what we could say, we even got some questions ready, so, we were prepared with a specific topic to interact with the UM students]

S3: Al principio nos pidió llegar 5 o 10 minutos antes, y nos explicó que íbamos a tener 15 minutos hablando en español, y 15 minutos hablando en inglés, también nos comentó que no debíamos cambiar el idioma hasta que acabe el tiempo. [The teacher asked us to be 5 or 10 minutes before the meetings start. Then, she explained to us that we would speak for 15 minutes in one language and then switch to the other, but we could not do it before time.]

S4: Nos enseñó sobre que se va a tratar, que se va a incluir, como comportarnos y cómo actuar en la interacción. [The teacher taught us about what the meetings were about, what topics/themes were going to be addressed, and how we should act and behave during the interaction.]

In the interviews, practices and perspectives of both teachers and students regarding preparation and guidance for Teletandem sessions are evident. These excerpts illustrate how teachers approach students' preparation and how students perceive these practices.

From the interviews with the teachers, the importance of instilling values of punctuality and respect in students, as well as preparing them on relevant topics for the sessions, is highlighted. Teachers strive to ensure that students are well-prepared to interact.



This involves guiding them in formulating questions and developing topics that enable substantial and enriching conversations.

On the other hand, in the interviews with the students, a general appreciation for the guidance and preparation provided by teachers is observed.

Students acknowledge that the guidance varies depending on the teacher and the course. Some teachers establish specific guidelines and topic recommendations, while others adopt more flexible approaches. Students value when clear instructions are given on how to behave, what questions to ask, and how to approach interactions.

In conclusion, the interviews reveal that teachers play an essential role in preparing and guiding students for **Teletandem sessions**.

Their focus on behavioral values and providing discussion topics is appreciated by students, who feel that this preparation enhances the quality of their interactions.

However, there is variability in how this preparation is approached, as some teachers are more detailed in their guidance than others.

Ultimately, teachers' focus and dedication have a significant impact on students' experience in the Teletandem program. According to Cavalari et al (2016). *"The tutorial is a vital procedure in Teletandem for, more than informing students about some procedural aspects of the project, it is intended to assist students in understanding the learning potential of Teletandem practice."*

In this case, the tutorial would be explaining to students what the meetings are about and what is the purpose of the program itself which idea is reinforced with students' information as most of them say that their teachers clarified how to behave during the interactions.

Category: Learning goals

Subcategory: Implicit objectives

ET2: Solamente se les dice a los estudiantes que el objetivo es que ellos puedan practicar el idioma, que no se sientan cohibidos de practicar, preguntar. De ahí como objetivo sería algo más implícito porque después de las sesiones lo que hacemos es tomar esa información y redactarla, para que el estudiante ponga atención y esté atento a la información y esa información pueda ser transmitida en un escrito, en un dialogo o discusión dentro del aula. [Students are told that the objective for them is to practice the language, to not feel restrained from talking or asking. Actually, the objective is implicit because after the meetings what we do is take the information from the meetings and redact it so the student pays attention to that information and it can be shared in a written assessment, a dialogue, or a discussion in the classroom.]

S2: Es más algo implícito, pero con el objetivo de ampliar nuestro vocabulario y que perdamos el miedo a expresarnos en inglés en frente de alguien más. [The objective is implicit, but with the idea to expand our vocabulary, and not be afraid of expressing in English in front of others.]

Subcategory: Structured guide

S1: La primera vez que nos reunimos con los chicos de Miami la profe nos dio una guía estructurada de un tema específico que teníamos que desarrollar, entonces si nos guió en ese aspecto. [The first time we met with the MU students the teacher offered us a structured guide that we had to carry out during the session, so, she guided us on that aspect.]

Subcategory: Learning from the experience



S3: Se estableció que debíamos interactuar y escuchar la pronunciación para mejorar nuestro speaking y listening. [It was established that we should interact and listen to the pronunciation in order to enhance our speaking and listening skills.]

S4: Solo nos dicen para aprender de la otra persona, pero algo como aprendan el presente simple así no, sino que solo aprendan de la experiencia. [The teachers just told us to learn from the other person, but there is no goal like “practice the present simple”, instead just learn from the other.]

According to the statements of the instructors, a discrepancy is evident regarding the clarity and explicit articulation of learning objectives. ET2 indicates that students are informed that the objective is to practice the language and to feel comfortable inquiring and participating. Nonetheless, it underscores that these objectives are more implicit and that subsequently, the information from the sessions is synthesized and conveyed through written activities, dialogues, or classroom discussions.

In contrast, the student interviews reflect a diverse perception of the objectives.

Some, like

S1, emphasize that instructors have provided guidance through structured guidelines for specific topics to be developed during the sessions.

Others, like S2, consider the implicit objective as expanding vocabulary and overcoming the fear of expressing themselves in English before others. S3 comments on the emphasis placed on enhancing speaking and listening skills through interaction and pronunciation.

S4 notes that instructors merely suggest learning from the experience without establishing specific linguistic objectives.

In conclusion, the interviews reflect a lack of uniformity in the communication and definition of learning objectives within the Teletandem program. While certain instructors offer guidance and structures, others opt for more implicit objectives based on interaction and experience. This variability may influence students' perception and achievement of the objectives. Setting a learning goal is an essential aspect of autonomous language learning. However, UTC teachers do not set specific learning goals for their students. Instead, it is an implicit process where students just interact but they are not aiming to learn anything specifically.

Category: Themes to talk to in the sessions

Subcategory: Cultural topics

ET1: Se considera varias temáticas, por ejemplo, hablemos de la cultura americana y la cultura ecuatoriana, que los chicos más o menos hagan un bosquejo de que podrían hablar de la cultura ecuatoriana, yo qué sé, festividades, platos típicos, fechas importantes, tal vez el tipo de presidente o en el ámbito político, como es su universidad, cuáles son las tradiciones en sí que se manejan y se practican. [Different themes are considered, for example, American and Ecuadorian culture. Students could do a draft about Ecuadorian culture talking about festivities, typical dishes, relevant dates, or even about the current president in a political aspect, but also how their university is, and what traditions they practice.]

Subcategory: English book topics

ET2: Son temas del libro que estamos tratando, por ejemplo, si en la unidad estamos hablando de daily routines nosotros utilizamos ese tema para formular preguntas y también saber las daily routines, por ejemplo, de las personas extranjeras y ver una comparación, ver sus hábitos, que es lo que hacen y comparar con los chicos con su daily routine. [The topics for the meetings are themes from the English book we are



workingwith, for example, if we are studying “daily routines” we use that topic to formulate questions and learn the topic, for example, to know what are the daily routines of the MUstudents and compare it with ours.]

S2: Nos da a elegir el tema con respecto a lo que estemos estudiando, esa vez nos hizo elegir sobre lo que habíamos hecho el fin de semana, o nos aconsejó hablar de temas de interés común, ya sea tradiciones o comida típica de allá de acá. [She gave us the choice to select a topic in relation to what we are studying, that time she made us talk about what we had done the weekend, or she advised us to talk about topics of common interest, for example, traditions, or typical food.]

S1: Para la primera reunión nos aginó un tema, por ejemplo, la información básica, en las otras reuniones ya eran temas libres que nosotros podemos elegir o conversar en ese momento. [For the first meeting the teacher assigned a topic, for example, asking about basic information, but for the other meetings, it was a topic that we could select or talk about at that moment.]

Subcategory: Free choice topics

S3: La primera sesión fue de libre elección, la segunda se trató el tema del libro, que fue del tema de holidays, de la cultura, de lo que se hacía en la otra cultura. [The first meeting was a free election, in the second it was about a topic from the book which was holidays about culture and what was done in the other culture.]

S4: Normalmente ellos nos brindan un tema, pero de ese tema toca saltarse a otro porque el tema suele ser corto y la conversación duran media hora, y de ahí toca buscar otro tema para no tener un silencio incómodo. [Normally teachers gave us the topic, but during the meetings, we have to switch from one topic to another because the first is normally too short and the conversations last half an hour, so we have to find another topic otherwise there will be an uncomfortable silence.]

The excerpts from the teachers' interviews reveal a range of approaches concerning the selection and assignment of topics for Teletandem sessions. ET1 mentions the consideration of various thematic areas, encompassing both American and Ecuadorian culture, as well as political and university-related aspects. ET2 emphasizes that the topics are derived from the English textbook content being studied, specifically linked to the unit's theme.

In contrast, the students' opinions also exhibit diversity with regard to topics. Some students indicate that specific topics, such as education or cultural subjects, have been assigned by their teachers, while others note that they are given the option to choose or that topics naturally emerge during the conversation.

The interviews unveil that, for both teachers and students, the choice and allocation of topics can vary. Some teachers propose specific topics, while others promote free choice or adapt topics based on the conversational dynamics.

Students also experience this diversity, with some being provided assigned topics and others enjoying the freedom to select subjects that interest them. This array of approaches can influence the session dynamics and the level of preparedness among participants.

UTC teachers approach the themes for the meetings in two ways: culture (Ecuadorian or American) and topics from the English book. As highlighted by Biondo (2011) “If we eliminate the use of themes there is the worry that by opting for spontaneous conversation the session could exclude the pedagogical intent and become a simple chat between two friends.”. Therefore, it is essential for students to follow a topic to talk about in the sessions. Most of the students said that for some meetings there was a topic, but for others, it was up to them to decide what to talk about, then, some inconveniences like switching from one topic to another or improvising can take place.



Category: Language practice exercises

Subcategory: Practicing during classes

ET2: Eso lo hacemos normalmente durante la clase, durante la clase practicamos el vocabulario, la gramática y luego con ese aprendizaje formulamos las preguntas y ellos están listos para hacer esa interacción, no hacemos como decir una interacción previa para que ellos vayan. [We do language practice exercises during the classes, let's say, we practice vocabulary and grammar, and with that, we formulate the questions so students are ready for the interaction, but we do not do a previous interaction to the meetings.]

S3: Se realizó un roleplay en la misma clase, una clase antes de recibir el e tandem nos dio como una práctica entre nuestros compañeros. [We did a roleplay a class before participatin in the e tandem. It was like a practice between our classmates.]

S4: En el anterior semestre la teacher Mercedes nos daba lo que sería juegos ya sea para poder avanzar en vocabulario o gramática. [The previous semester one teacher gave us games in order to advance in vocabulary and grammar.]

Subcategory: Practicing in a minimum percentage

S1: Se desarrollan las actividades, pero no, así como quisiéramos, más bien en un porcentaje mínimo, de acuerdo a cada docente. [The activities are developed but not as we would like, rather in a minimum percentage according to each teacher.]

Subcategory: Not practicing at all

S2: En la oportunidad que tuve lastimosamente no hubo tiempo porque fuimos directo a lo que nos correspondía, es decir, conversar. [In the chance I had unfortunately there was no time because we went straight to what corresponded to us, I mean to talk.]

The excerpts from both teachers and students shed light on the provision of linguistic support and preparatory activities for the Teletandem interactions.

According to ET2's perspective, language practice is integrated into the regular classroom activities. This entails practicing vocabulary and grammar, culminating in the formulation of questions for the Teletandem sessions. However, ET2 underscores that no specific preliminary interactions are held solely for preparation. Conversely, the students' viewpoints unveil mixed experiences. S1 adds that activities are conducted but often fall short of expectations and vary based on individual teachers. S2 reveals an instance where the time constraints during the sessions did not permit prior practice activities. On the other hand, S3 cites a roleplay conducted in the same class as a practice session before engaging in the e-tandem. S4 highlights the implementation of games as preparatory tools for vocabulary and grammar enhancement.

The comparison illustrates a divide between teachers and students regarding the extent and nature of linguistic support. While some teachers integrate language practice within the classroom curriculum, students' perceptions highlight varying degrees of preparatory activities. These findings underscore the potential variation in pedagogical approaches to linguistic support for Teletandem interactions, suggesting that a more consistent and comprehensive approach might enhance the overall experience.

The results show that language practice exercises are not focused on the Teletandem sessions but on language teaching. The teachers should provide materials such as: sample writing, audios, questions to help understanding the vocabulary; and they give encouragement and motivation to students if they are less motivated (Huilca, 2022)



23). By doing so, the students can feel more comfortable and prepared to overcome difficult situations in the meetings as they had practiced specifically for these kinds of scenarios.

Category: Cultural exchange activities

Subcategory: English book themes

ET2: Todo depende del tema que esté en el libro y la asignatura porque como yo doy inglés vemos los temas del libro. [It all depends on the topic we are checking in the book and the subject because as I teach English, we review the topics from the book.]

S3: La licenciada hizo que interactuáremos con diferentes provincias y de ahí nos daba a elegir un tema del internet, buscando información en Google sobre la tradición de otro país. [The teacher made us interact with different provinces and from there she gave us to choose a topic from the internet searching for information in Google about the customs of other countries.]

S4: Ella nos ayuda ya que en los temas que nos da nos posteriormente nos dice cuestiones culturales, también nos da tips o trucos para poder intercambiar ideas con la otra persona. [She helps us since in the topics we address we talk about cultural aspects later on. She also gives us tips or tricks to be able to exchange ideas with the other person.]

Subcategory: Lack of vocabulary and knowledge

S1: No pudimos tocar esos temas porque ya se desarrolla mucho el vocabulario, en estos temas no tenemos todo el conocimiento para poder conversar amenamente de esos temas. [We did not approach those topics because the vocabulary is more complicated. In this topic we do not have enough knowledge to talk pleasantly in that area.]

Subcategory: Knowledge-sharing

S2: Totalmente porque a medida que intercambiamos nuestro conocimiento con alguien más a la vez podemos reforzar lo que creemos saber de ese lugar, y al dar nuestra opinión expandimos nuestra forma de hablar. [Totally, as we exchange our knowledge with someone else we can reinforce what we believed about that place, and we can offer our opinion and our way to talk.]

The interviews provide insights into the influence of cultural topics in Teletandem sessions, highlighting both the guidance of instructors and the perceptions and experiences of learners.

In the interview with ET2, emphasis is placed on the alignment of thematic selection with the content of the textbook and the subject matter being taught. In contrast, student perspectives unveil a range of viewpoints. Student testimonies underscore diverse approaches. S1 articulates that certain cultural topics were not addressed due to lexical intricacies, whereas S2 underscores how knowledge-sharing bolsters comprehension and enables the expansion of linguistic expression. S3 recounts an instructor's facilitation of interactions across diverse provinces, allowing students to select topics through online searches, thus nurturing the exploration of foreign traditions. S4 spotlights the provision of cultural support and intercultural communication enhancement guidance by instructors.

In conclusion, the interviews underscore the significance of infusing cultural themes within Teletandem sessions. While instructors can furnish direction and resources, student comprehension and engagement with these themes may fluctuate contingent upon vocabulary familiarity and personal interest.

Recognition of disparities in proficiency levels and perspectives remains pivotal for an efficacious and enriching Teletandem experience. According to the student's responses, the teachers suggest talking about cultural features during the sessions as it is an interesting aspect for both sides. However, it is not mandatory.



On the other hand, one of the teachers explains that it all depends on the topics from the book. If the topics are in concordance, it is logical for students to talk about them. Biondo (2011) suggest that some themes are productive for learning about the culture and ideological aspects of a people and in this sense, we need our partner's collaboration and involvement

Category: Linguistic support

Subcategory: Internet resources

ET2: Con los estudiantes que tengo inglés con ellos sí se realiza eso, a ellos les doy una página donde ellos van practicando a la vez listening, van practicando lo que hemos visto en el libro también para que ellos vayan practicando su adquisición del idioma, pero páginas en sí relacionadas para poder interactuar con personas extranjeras con temas no. [I offer linguistic support to the students I have the English subject with. I offer them a website so they can practice listening but also what we had seen in the book, and at the same time so they practice their acquisition of the language. But I have not recommended them pages to interact with foreign people.]

S2: Nos recomienda entender artículos del internet o del propio libro para utilizar el vocabulario. [The teachers recommended we understand internet articles or from our own book to understand the vocabulary]

S3: Nos enviaba links, también a revisar unas páginas y buscar en YouTube en caso de necesitar más información. [The teacher sent us links. Also, some websites, and to look in YouTube videos in case we needed more information.]

S4: Nos ayuda con recursos visuales electrónicos, por ejemplo, videos, para aprender mediante lo tecnológico. [The teachers help us with visual electronic resources, for example, videos to learn through the technology.]

Subcategory: Skill practicing

S1: Nos hacen writing, listening e incluso pronunciar oraciones, o sea sí, si nos ayudan en ese aspecto. [The teachers made us do writing, listening, and even pronouncing some sentences, so, they help us in that aspect.] Based on the empirical findings, it became evident that a noticeable deficiency in linguistic support was evident on the part of instructors prior to the Teletandem sessions.

This observation aligns with the assertion posited by Hansell et al. (2021), who underscore the dual responsibility of educators. Notably, they are not only tasked with stewarding their designated pedagogical realm but also charged with cultivating students' linguistic proficiency within the target language, which, in this instance, is English.

Nevertheless, the pedagogical assistance extended by instructors is characterized by a lack of explicit intentionality, materializing as a more generalized provision. The pedagogical intervention offered by instructors remains circumscribed within the confines of prescribed educational resources, primarily tethered to the materials encompassed within the instructional curriculum. Conversely, even though online resources were shared, their efficacy lacks strategic specificity, falling short of a deliberate alignment with domain-specific focal points.

The aggregated insights provided substantiated the necessity for a refined pedagogical paradigm, wherein instructors adeptly orchestrated calibrated linguistic scaffolding. This approach entailed the deliberate provision of targeted linguistic support, strategically arranged in preparation for the forthcoming Teletandem interactions.

The articulated pedagogical framework entailed a discerning integration of conventional instructional methodologies and the innovative facets intrinsic to the Teletandem milieu.



This symbiotic amalgamation forged a comprehensive and enriched milieu for language acquisition. The assimilation of Teletandem into the English classes emerged as a potential avenue to achieve this pedagogical integration.

Category: Blending Teletandem

Subcategory: Book content

ET1: Sí, pero no al 100 por cierto, pero, por ejemplo, si tomamos algún ejemplo del libro donde estamos hablando de la cultura, puedo yo alinear eso al tópico que los chicos van a desarrollar, entonces de alguna manera ya tienen un poco de vocabulario, tienen frases, collocation words, algo de la gramática que les permita desarrollar, y eso aplicarle en el e tándem. [I integrate it but not 100%, for example, if we take a theme

from the book where we are talking about culture I can aline that topic with what students, are going to develop in the meetings, so in a way they have some vocabulary, for instance, phrases, collocation words, and some grammar to use in the meetings.]

ET2: Justamente es por los temas, por ejemplo, si estamos viendo el tema de daily routines entonces las preguntas van a estar enfocadas en investigar y obtener información sobre la daily routine que tienen ellos, y luego ellos realizan un escrito, entonces también es producción del writing. Un escrito con esa información que ellos obtuvieron. Entonces compaginamos esa parte siempre con la enseñanza del idioma inglés. [All depends on the topic, for example, if we are reviewing the topic of “daily routines” then the questions are going to be focused on investigating and getting information about the daily routines that the MU students have, then students do writing with the information they got. Then, we collate the information with the language teaching]

S3: Sí las integraba puesto que lo que nos dijeron en las sesiones era lo mismo que nos decía la profesora. [The teacher integrated it as what we received in the sessions was the same as in classes.]

Subcategory: No integration

S1: Bueno, bajo mi punto de vista no hay integración porque cada uno recibe su sesión y ya no se toca más el tema. [Well, in my point of view there was no integration because each one received the session and did not address the theme anymore.]

S3: Sí las integraba puesto que lo que nos dijeron en las sesiones era lo mismo que nos decía la profesora. [The teacher integrated it as what we received in the sessions was the same as in classes.]

S4: En sí no tanto, hacemos la reunión y cuando esta termina se sigue con la clase planificada en el silabo. [Not really. [We participated in the meetings and when these were over, we continued with the class planned in the syllabus.]

Teachers' integration of contents is based on the book's topics and the own syllabus developed by the teacher. The students' point of view establishes that there is no such thing as integration, at least not a clear one. Mantara et al (2021) indicates that blended learning refers to the use of technology with a mix of pedagogical methods or philosophies. Therefore, Teletandem uses technology to take place, but it is not integrated into the learning curriculum of the institution it will be difficult for teachers to integrate both activities as they are not directly related. The approach adopted revolved around the specific thematic content under consideration. For instance, in the context of examining subjects such as daily routines, inquiries were tailored to probe and acquire insights into the participants' respective daily routines. Subsequently, the students engaged in a writing task, which, in turn, facilitated the development of written proficiency. This involved utilizing the acquired



information to craft a written composition. Thus, there was a deliberate amalgamation of thematic exploration and English language instruction within this framework.

Category: Digital tools

Subcategory: Pandemic experience

ET1: Bueno, ha sido de gran ayuda el hecho de ingresar dentro de la pandemia, porque si bien es cierto que de alguna manera hemos utilizado computadoras, proyectores, programas, plataformas, y cosas por el estilo, pero no lo hacíamos al 100 por ciento, como fue en el tema de la pandemia, eso permitió que de alguna manera los docentes mejoremos nuestro proceso de enseñanza. [Well. It has helped a lot the fact to ingress in pandemia because in a way we improved our knowledge of computers, programs, and platforms and that fort of things.]

S4: Según lo que vimos en la pandemia ellos utilizaban de la forma adecuada para seguir aprendiendo con la tecnología. [According to what we witnessed in the pandemic the teachers use the technology in an adequate way to keep learning with it.]

Subcategory: Level of expertise

ET2: Creo que no mucho porque creo que se necesita tener mucho conocimiento como se soluciona ese tipo de problemas, creo que en tecnología tengo algo básico para poder solucionar esos problemas. [I think I do not master much technology I think you need a wide knowledge about how to solve certain problems. I think that when it comes to technology, I have basic notions to solve problems.]

S1: Tienen un manejo adecuado de plataformas ya que nos mandan a investigar/consultar, o que incluso podamos deberes o interactuar por medios de estas plataformas. [The teachers have an adequate level of digital platforms as they send us to investigate, or even to do homework or interact using these tools.]

Subcategory: Technological problems

S2: Han sido muy condescendientes cuando no he tenido el equipo necesario. Digamos no ha funcionado la cámara o el micrófono me han sabido comprender. [The teachers have been very condescending when I have not had the necessary equipment. Let's say when my microphone or camera was not working, they understood the situation.]

As Teletandem takes place in a virtual environment it is fundamental for teachers to manage technological tools and platforms with certain proficiency. Biondo (2011) explains that Teletandem is an alternative proposal of tandem learning which makes use of technological tools available in the internet for videoconferencing, such as Skype, MSN, ooVoo, among others.

For instance, among UTC and MU students Zoom has always been the used platform.

Students and teachers agree on the fact that the pandemic forced teachers to work in virtual spaces, and as a consequence, they improved their dominance over these. The UTC teachers claim to not have the best expertise in technological tools. However, students state that their teachers' knowledge has been enough so far and they do not present disagreement.

Category: Error correction and feedback

Subcategory: Feedback before interactions

ET2: En este caso yo casi no he tenido mucho acceso a poder ver los errores de los chicos. En alguna ocasión ingresé y yo creo que no, no lo he hecho, así un feedback de las cosas, pero sí he hecho un feedback antes de las presentaciones en ver que las preguntas estén bien. Nosotros lo elaboramos en el aula, y ahí sí les doy un feedback.



[In this case, I have not had much access to see the students' mistakes. On some occasions, I logged into the session, but to be honest I have not done feedback. Although I have offered feedback before the meetings by checking the students' questions. We elaborate the questionnaires in classes and then I offer the feedback.]

Subcategory: No feedback

S1: Cuando acaban las sesiones no se toca más el tema. [When the meetings are over, we do not address the theme anymore.]

S4: No hay feedback como tal. Cuando acaban las sesiones se continua con las clases normales. [The is no such thing as feedback. When the sessions end, we continue with the normal classes.]

According to Mantara et al (2021) the main focus is the teacher in maximizing his role as a learning facilitator is to provide interventions in the form of feedback when students make mistakes. But if teachers do not log into the sessions, it is impossible for them to even imagine in which specific aspects of the language their students are struggling with. Mantara et al (2021) in relation with the before add that giving feedback on a digital platform is easily done.

Through zoom or through google meetings, teachers can still both intervene directly and provide feedback when something goes wrong, and giving this feedback itself becomes the focus of the learning process. Nevertheless, feedback does not only come from the teacher as highlines by Serrato et al (2020) students appreciated obtaining feedback from native speakers: "...Someone who knows the language very well can correct you and teach you new things"

Category: Reflective activities

Subcategory: Reports

ET1: Hacer que ellos hagan un reporte, dicho reporte se ha compartido dentro del aula para que ellos fortalezcan a través de las experiencias a través de comentar las mismas como estas han ayudado al proceso de aprendizaje, dependiendo del tema. Insisto, en otros momentos se les puede mandar a que escriban algo, un journal, un seguimiento del proceso, y claro, también para motivación a los chicos que sea una parte de la evaluación, como un task. [To make students do a report. This report is shared in classes with their classmates. The idea is to make students strengthen their skills by asking them to comment on their experiences and how these experiences have helped them in their learning process. I insist, on other occasions, they could write something, a journal, a process monitoring, of course, to motivate students these activities are a part of the evaluation process as a task.]

S3: Nos mandan a hacer informes de que nomás preguntamos, como fue, que nomás se nos preguntó. Todo en base al cuestionario. [The teacher assigned us to do a report about what we asked, how it went, and what the MU students asked us. All in relationship with the questionnaire.]

Subcategory: Discussions

ET2: Después del e tándem lo que nosotros hacemos es discutir que les pareció, qué aprendieron, qué encontraron de novedoso. [After the e tandem we discuss what were their impressions, what did they learn, or what did they find novel.]

S2: Solemos hacer discusiones. [We usually do discussions.]

Subcategory: No reflective activities

S1: Últimamente no, pero en las sesiones del semestre pasado sí solíamos hacerlo. [Lately no, but in the previous semester we used to do it (reflective activities).]





S4: según mi experiencia, es que después de las sesiones e tándem solo informamos que sí se realizó la sesión y eso es todo. [According to my own experience, after the sessions e tandem we just inform what we had done in the session, but that is all.]

Reflective activities were integral to the post-teletandem session phase, wherein students embarked on activities that encompassed introspection and contemplation. The pedagogical design encompassed the facilitation of reports and discussions by the instructors subsequent to the Teletandem meetings.

This approach effectively engendered a conduit for students to engage in retrospective analysis of the salient occurrences during the Teletandem encounters. Cavalari & Aranha (2016) underscored the potency of diaries as a refined instrument capable of gauging potential challenges encountered by students within this domain. The cogency of maintaining diaries permeates two interconnected objectives. Firstly, diaristic practice is instrumental in nurturing the ethos of autonomous learning, wherein continuous introspection fosters an evolving engagement with the learning process.

Secondly, diaries bestow an invaluable window for foreign language (FL) educators to appraise instances warranting pedagogical intervention during interactions. This strategic alignment between reflective diaristic engagement and pedagogical intervention is germane to the dynamic landscape of Teletandem pedagogy.

Aligned with this paradigm, the concept of mediation sessions emerges as a salient aspect.

Telles (2015) expounded on the facets of mediation sessions, elucidating that these sessions, orchestrated by instructors subsequent to each Teletandem interaction, pivot around pivotal dimensions.

This encompasses a focus on elements intrinsic to the target languages, the trajectory of students' learning endeavors, and the undercurrent of cultural dimensions and themes that percolate—whether implicitly or explicitly—throughout the interaction trajectory. This theoretical tenet is buttressed by the articulation of Cavalari & Aranha (2019), who espouses the perspective that mediation pursuits endeavor to furnish students with an academically nurtured contextual scaffolding. This scaffolding, elucidated through teacher-guided mediation, serves as a compass for contemplation, affording students the opportune space to ponder over their teaching and learning encounters during the Teletandem sessions.

The next argument answers the research question: "How do teachers' roles impact the effectiveness of the institutional Teletandem program at the Technical University of Cotopaxi?" The role of educators has a significant impact on the effectiveness of the institutional Teletandem program at the Technical University of Cotopaxi. The analysis of interviews conducted in Teletandem sessions has revealed several key aspects to comprehend the impact of the sessions on learning. Firstly, educators play a crucial role in preparing students for these interactions, guiding them in behavior, question formulation, and session navigation. However, there is variation in approaches, as some educators provide structured guidelines while others opt for more flexible frameworks. It means, some teachers can allow their students to improvised during the sessions from the beginning to the end. Some educators emphasize language practice and fostering comfortable interactions, though these objectives often remain implicit. This discrepancy leads to differing perceptions among students; some appreciate the provided guidance, while others find objectives lacking definition as the teachers do not specify the purpose of the sessions. Cultural themes integrated into Teletandem sessions are also relevant.

Some educators encourage exploration of cultural topics such as festivals, culinary traditions, and cultural practices during interactions. However, certain students find that vocabulary complexity hinders discussions on specific cultural subjects.



Additionally, the level of linguistic support from educators during interactions varies among students. While some students mention the use of role-playing or interactive activities as preparatory techniques, others highlight the lack of linguistic support beyond prescribed textbook content.

The interviews highlight diverse approaches and perspectives within the Teletandem program. Educators have a pivotal role in guiding students, but there are variations in articulating objectives, incorporating cultural themes, and the interactions themselves.

These findings underscore the importance of clear communication, thoughtful linguistic support, and adaptation of strategies to individual differences, all contributing to a successful and enriching Teletandem experience.

Research Impacts

The conducted interviews shed light on several dimensions of research impacts, highlighting their significance in shaping educational practices, learning objectives, cultural understanding, and linguistic interaction.

The outcomes encompass an assessment of tangible results arising from academic inquiries. The analysis of interviews with educators and students unveils a tapestry of impacts spanning both the microcosm of the classroom and the broader realm of intercultural communication.

The preparatory aspects elucidated by educators underscore their pivotal role in guiding students through effective interaction strategies. The diverse approaches reported by instructors, ranging from structured guidance to flexible frameworks, signify nuanced ways in which they ready students for tandem sessions. Nevertheless, student perspectives reveal a disparity in linguistic support, as some express a lack of linguistic assistance beyond textbook content.

Moreover, the interviews provide insights into the realm of learning objectives. Discrepancies emerge regarding the clarity and communication of these objectives. Educators emphasize implicit language practice and interaction as key objectives, while student responses depict a spectrum of perceptions regarding the specificity and articulation of these goals.

Cultural integration emerges as an influential component of research impacts in the tandem context. Educators foster the exploration of cultural topics, cultivating intercultural awareness and understanding among students. However, the complexity of vocabulary and depth of cultural knowledge may limit the breadth of discussion on cultural subjects.

The dynamics of interaction gain relevance as students recount their experiences in tandem sessions. Some students report pre-session language practice activities, such as simulations and games, serving as preparatory exercises. Nonetheless, evident variation exists in the linguistic support provided by educators, affecting students' ability to effectively engage in intercultural dialogue.

Conclusions

In Teletandem programs, the teacher roles are versatile and crucial to have a productive tandem learning experience. Teachers serve as interaction facilitators, intercultural mediators, activity designers, goal setters, feedback providers, promoters of autonomy, adapters, and creators of a supportive environment.

The effective execution of teachers' roles in the Teletandem program significantly impacts students' participation and engagement in interactions. The analysis of interviews conducted in Teletandem sessions has revealed that educators play a crucial role in preparing students for these interactions, guiding them in behavior, question formulation, and session navigation. However, there is variation in the approaches





employed by educators, with some providing structured guidelines while others opt for more flexible methods. Furthermore, a disparity in the clarity and explicit delineation of learning objectives has been identified, influencing students' experiences.

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