The effect of eTandem learning on students’ English speaking competence
The present study

An investigation into the effect of eTandem language learning through synchronous oral CMC with native speakers on the improvement of Mexican students’ English speaking competence
Characteristics of the learning and teaching context

- Many learners throughout the years have enrolled in the B.A. with a low or no level of English at all.
- Few opportunities to talk to native speakers.
- Wide exposure to inaccurate non-native language models.
- No authentic language practice outside the classroom.
- Tendency for academic and bookish English teaching and learning.
- Lack of language practice in a real English-speaking environment.
What is required?

• A solution that can help learners develop their speaking skills.

• A language learning environment where authentic communication can be promoted through synchronous interaction.

• A solution that can be financially accessible so that all students can be benefited.
To investigate the effect that eTandem language learning through synchronous oral CMC with native speakers has on the improvement of Mexican students’ English speaking competence; this based on their own reflections and perceptions of improvement during and after the exchange.
What is competence?

“Competences are the sum of knowledge, skills, and characteristics that allow a person to perform actions”, (CEFRL, 2001:9).
Communicative competence, according to Canale and Swain (1980), consists of four different types of competence: grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence.

These four competences are equally important for individuals to communicate successfully in any situation by adapting themselves to the social and cultural characteristics of the context and overcoming any communication problems caused by their use of the language.
Research questions

(a) From students’ perception, does eTandem language learning through synchronous oral CMC activities with English native speakers help them improve their speaking competence?

(b) What aspects of the eTandem language learning experience do students believe contributed to the improvement of their speaking competence?

(c) What kinds of knowledge and skills do students believe they gained through eTandem language learning synchronous verbal exchanges that they had not gained through F2F speaking classes?

(d) According to learners, what aspects need to be considered to replicate eTandem language learning studies through synchronous oral CMC with English native speakers in future semesters in this particular teaching and learning context?
Motivation and Significance of the Study

- a lack of studies regarding eTandem language learning in Mexico (most research in the field has involved language partnerships from countries such as Spain, Germany, the UK, China, Japan, the United States and Brazil)

- most research however has focused on the development of learners’ writing skills through synchronous and asynchronous written CMC such as e-mail, electronic bulletin boards, and text-based chats
Elements taken/adapted from previous research:

• A Task-based Approach to eTandem Learning - free conversation with clear communicative goals (Appel et al, 2009; Long, 1989)


• Adaptation of guidelines to direct the exchange (Calvert, 1992; Lewis, 2005, Vinagre, 2007, Vinagre, 2011)
Research Methodology

• Qualitative research
• Pre and post Interviews
• Students’ portfolios:
  - Learning Plan
  - Learning Record
  - Learning Reflection
Participants and Tasks

- Five seventh-semester students from the B.A. in English Language Teaching at the University of Hidalgo
- Five English native speakers, learners of Spanish from the University of Southampton
- The tasks included an introductory task for participants to meet each other, two tasks based on a topic from the Mexican learners’ syllabus, two free tasks to be negotiated between partners, and a final task for general feedback
(a) From students’ perception, does eTandem language learning through synchronous oral CMC activities with English native speakers help them improve their speaking competence?

(b) Pronunciation
(c) Vocabulary
(d) Fluency
(e) Grammar
(f) Confidence
(b) What aspects of the eTandem language learning experience do students believe contributed to the improvement of their speaking competence?

- Interaction with native speakers
- Feedback from language partners
- Written support
(c) What kinds of knowledge and skills do students believe they gained through eTandem language learning synchronous verbal exchanges that they had not gained through F2F speaking classes?

- Knowledge (vocabulary, informal expressions, cultural information)
- Skills (authentic listening practice, speaking)

Grammatical and discourse competence
(Tian and Wang, 2010)
(d) According to learners, what aspects need to be considered to replicate eTandem language learning studies through synchronous oral CMC with English native speakers in future semesters in this particular teaching and learning context?

- Language tasks
- eTandem learning portfolio (space for writing feedback for their partners)
- Organisation for the exchange
Incorporation of carefully designed language tasks to develop the four types of competence (Canale and Swain, 1980)

Extend the length of the exchange for significant improvement

Effective language partnerships
Recommendations for further research

• Implementation of Tandem language learning projects with other schools

• Tandem networks
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Thank you!
Contact information

Martha Guadalupe Hernández Alvarado
martha_her3@hotmail.com