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NEW TOOLS FOR ETANDEM IN LANGUAGE LEARNING: A THEORETICAL STUDY

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Abstract: The study¹ aims to provide theoretical knowledge about current websites and internet applications that can be used for eTandem language learning, which emerged with widespread internet use in the 90s and has continued to renew itself over time. This paper provides an introduction of the eTandem language learning, discussing the structure of eTandem, potential benefits, and findings from studies on eTandem's role in collaborative learning activities. Further on the websites, social media platforms, and applications that can be used as new tools for eTandem as well as the research focus are introduced too. In conclusion it is stated that some of these applications are directly created for eTandem language learning. In contrast, others have been adopted over time for language learning through the opportunities they provide. Also, it is highlighted that there is a need for more research studies in order to identify difficulties that partners may encounter in adapting eTandem language learning to changing conditions, along with the given recommendations. It is believed that this theoretical study will contribute to the field of language learning and teaching by reaching a broad audience with current tools that can be used for eTandem language learning, which adapts to time and conditions and focuses on the comfort of partners.

Keywords: *language learning; eTandem; websites; applications.*

Introduction

In today's world, where internet technology is constantly advancing and internationalization is becoming more critical, learners can learn languages online with the support of native speakers without the limitations of time and place. Traditional classrooms for foreign language instruction can come with various difficulties, one of which is self-directed learning, where the responsibility of learning falls on the student. In these face-to-face environments, individual differences, learning paces, where needs are not taken into account, thus

¹ Acknowledgment: This study is based on the master's thesis "Contribution of electronic tandem (etandem) language partnership to international students' writing skills: A case study" written under the supervision of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Gürkan Morali.

achieving the desired success in foreign language instruction can be difficult. Classroom procedures may cause foreign language learning anxiety (Young, 1991). Therefore, classrooms are places where foreign language learning anxiety is experienced (Horwitz et al., 1986). On the other hand, online language practice with peers at the desired time and place can allow learners to develop their target language without anxiety. Yang (2018) found that peer support can enhance foreign language skills and knowledge and support interactive learning. eTandem language learning supports self-directed and mutual learning through various websites and mobile applications. This study aims to examine the use of eTandem in language learning theoretically. Cziko (2004) has conducted a theoretical study on eTandem, but his proposed tools for eTandem language learning have lost some of their relevance today. Some of these tools do not provide instant feedback and are less interactive and user-friendly. In his study, Sarı (2018) examined four websites created directly for eTandem language learning and two applications not created for eTandem language learning but have the qualifications to serve this purpose. The developments in internet technology and the increasing desire to learn a foreign language from native speakers did not limit eTandem language learning to the tools in this study. Numerous websites and applications that enable collaborative language learning with the assistance of native speakers have been developed in response to the growing demand for language learning. It is thought that these tools, which are thought to contribute to language learning, can raise awareness among learners, instructors, and scientists doing academic studies in this field. Therefore, this study aims to contribute to the related literature by discussing current tools that can be used in eTandem language learning.

1. eTandem

eTandem is a shortened form of the term “electronic tandem.” It is a virtual, collaborative, and autonomous method of learning a foreign language that helps two language partners learn each other’s languages using text, voice, web cameras, and any other video communication resources (Vassallo & Telles, 2006). eTandem language learning is the process of two people who speak different languages learning each other’s languages through electronic ways. This can include various language exchange applications or tools such as online chat, video conferencing, email, instant messaging, or mobile apps. eTandem is based on the core principles of tandem learning: reciprocity, responsibility, and autonomy (Calvert, 1999). Reciprocity means that the communication is conducted in both languages and includes the commitment of language partners to each other’s learning (Tang et al., 2021). In this regard, language partners are responsible for each other’s learning in return for their assistance (Larson, 2019). Responsibility means sharing equal time, energy, attention, tolerance, and understanding between language partners (Calvert, 1999). Another principle of eTandem for language learning is autonomy. According to Kötter (2003), autonomy is the capacity of an individual to take charge of their own learning in accordance with their own requirements and objectives. Thus, language partners who are aware of their responsibilities have control over their own learning experience. In terms of autonomy, learners should

be able to decide what and when to speak and give feedback, taking on their own roles (teachers or learners) during this process (Lewis & Kan, 2021; Tang et al., 2021). According to Appel and Mullen (2000), the value of tandem language learning depends on how well these principles are met.

eTandem can be conducted both institutionally and independently, with language partners deciding on their own learning goals or without specific goals (Serrato & Rodriguez, 2020). In institutionally-run eTandem, a language teacher guides the process (Mary Frances, Huguet-Jérez & Bakieva, 2018). During academic eTandem, teachers typically plan language learning activities focused on students' learning and target language level gains. The teachers are often in a guiding role during these tandems, but create an area where students can collaborate with others in authentic situations, encourage them to collaborate, and provide support during language exchanges (Pörn & Hansell, 2020). In independent eTandem, language partners decide where, when, and what to work on. They take on the roles of teacher and student in turn during language exchange and are equally responsible for each other's learning. eTandem can be chosen by anyone who wants to learn a second or foreign language. There are no limitations based on characteristics such as age, gender, profession, nationality, etc. However, two essential criteria affect the success of language learning in this regard. First, those who want to learn a second or foreign language through eTandem must have at least basic-level skills in the target language. Otherwise, students may not meet on common ground, and an ineffective language partnership may occur. When the tandem is established between partners who have similar language skills in a second or foreign language, it helps learners use their language with less timidity with a peer going through the same process (Brammerts, 1996). Secondly, students are expected to have the ability to communicate in electronic environments. Accordingly, skills such as the ability to open an application in an electronic environment, communicate, initiate sessions, share screens, make translations in the target language as needed on the internet, etc., are factors that increase the success of an eTandem language partnership. These skills correspond to 21st-century skills of collaboration and communication. The target audience's aim and profession significantly affect eTandem language learning. For example, a person who wants to learn Turkish as a foreign or second language and study at a university in Türkiye may give more weight to written communication. In comparison, a French singer may want to learn Turkish by giving more weight to oral communication. Therefore, the target audience of eTandem varies according to its goals. eTandem provides opportunities for second or foreign-language learners to improve their skills. During eTandem sessions, each participant speaks their partner's language as their native language or at an advanced level. They support each other in their target languages by taking turns, thus making learning reciprocal (Cappellini et al., 2020). For example, language partners may receive corrective feedback on errors in writing or speaking skills from proficient native speakers. In this case, the proficient native speaker provides peer support and plays a teacher role. On the other hand, when the partner receives support in their target language, they take on the student role.

Communication in eTandem can be either synchronous or asynchronous. Language partners can communicate synchronously through websites explicitly created for tandem learning or through non-specific but available applications such as Discord, Facebook, Skype, Snapchat, etc. They can communicate asynchronously by sending messages without receiving an instant response from their partners. Language learners can come together with people who speak their target language as their mother tongue at any time and develop their language skills without having to travel to the country where the language they want to learn is spoken and meet the costs of this situation (Andujar, 2019).

Students can obtain unique language inputs and outputs through interactive activities using internet communication tools and improve their language skills (Warschauer, 1997). Several studies investigate the role of eTandem in cooperative learning activities. These studies have shown that peer support has positive effects on language learning. Rahimi and Fathi (2022a) investigated the effect of eTandem on the development of the English-speaking skills of foreign language learners and their willingness to communicate. Research results revealed that eTandem and traditional classes improved English learners' speaking skills and willingness to communicate. Still, the eTandem group outperformed the traditional group in speaking skills and willingness to communicate. Guanoluisa and Viera (2021) found that the eTandem project increased students' motivation toward language learning and positively affected their language and culture learning. In addition, it has been determined that students have positive attitudes toward language learning and are willing to participate in the language learning process. On the other hand, it was stated that some problems related to implementation affected the process. Castromayor and San Jose (2019) aimed to explore students' experiences using tandem language learning and how this experience facilitates their writing skills. As a result of the research, it was found that the participants had a meaningful experience in tandem language learning. In addition, it was revealed that the participants enjoyed sharing, learned to admit their mistakes, developed self-confidence, and increased their knowledge of English grammar. Tolasa, Ordóñez, and Guevara (2017) presented the findings of a project that explored the potential of an online tandem program to improve foreign language learning for two groups of students learning English and Spanish. The results revealed that the students achieved statistically significant gains in writing in a foreign language and showed positive attitude changes towards foreign and mother tongue learning. Ware and Kessler (2013) investigated the impact of eTandem language exchange (both oral and written) on second-language learners' interactions and teacher decisions in secondary contexts. The findings show that eTandem contributes to student interaction and provides opportunities for teachers to guide students. Pomino and Gil-Salom (2016) conducted a study in which they encouraged foreign language learners to speak with native English speakers and gain knowledge about their academic lives and cultures. They found that most students were less anxious when speaking or writing with a native English speaker. Mahfouz (2010) researched the

perceptions of using email exchanges with native English-speaking partners to improve the writing proficiency of university students in Jordan and found that the perceptions of using email interactions with native English speakers to improve writing proficiency were generally positive. Hauck and Youngs (2008) studied simultaneous and non-simultaneous telecollaboration for 10 weeks in an online audio-graphic classroom with second-language learners who spoke the same native language. The results showed that simultaneous and non-simultaneous telecollaboration improved students' interactive activities.

2.1. Tools for eTandem

Recent advancements in information and communication technology provide various applications for language learners to develop the skills they need. These applications have the potential to serve mobile learning. Mobile learning offers to learn through portable devices without the limitation of location and time. Mobile learning uses mobile devices in education (Hockly, 2012). Learning occurs at any time and location where mobile devices can stay in communication. Therefore, mobile learning eliminates the need to be bound by time and place and provides an environment for those who want to learn a language through eTandem to develop their language skills. Sari (2018) identified two different tools that can be used for eTandem language learning through mobile learning tools. According to this study, the first tools include websites and smartphone applications created for eTandem. The second type of tool is information and communication technology tools that have not been explicitly developed for eTandem language learning but have functional features for language learning and have been adopted over time. Some of these tools can be used in independent eTandem, and some can be used in institutional eTandem.

2.1.1. Websites

Many websites and applications are created for eTandem language learning on the internet. These sites are designed for mobile learning and e-Tandem language learning. Language learners can use these websites to specify their native and proficient languages in their profiles and search for partners according to their learning goals. Most websites also have mobile apps that can be downloaded via Android and iOS smartphones. The names of some websites for eTandems are as follows: "tandem.net", "tandemcafe.com", "hellotalk.com", "speaky.com", "hinative.com", "idyoma.com", and "hilokal.com". In addition, these websites are also created in a structure that allows language exchange: "aupair.com", "blablalanguageexchange.com", "conversationexchange.com", "elemelingua.com", "eunice-university.eu", "easylanguageexchange.com", "languageexchanges.com", "mylanguageexchange.com", "onlinelanguageexchange.com", "tandemfor-culture.org", "openlanguageexchange.com", etc. In addition to the websites mentioned, various tools are not created explicitly for e-Tandem learning but can be utilized for language exchange with the opportunities they provide. These tools will be introduced in the continuation of the text.

2.1.2. WhatsApp

Launched in 2010, WhatsApp is one of the most common mobile applications, with one billion daily active users (Andujar, 2020). Recently, it has been widely used with smartphones. WhatsApp provides users free messaging, voice, and video call features via an internet connection, which can help foreign language learners improve their language skills in corporate eTandem. The voice and video call feature allows language partners to communicate online from other countries. The messaging section allows supportive emojis, symbols, and files. It enables language partners to express their feelings and thoughts more easily in their target language and allows them to share files for informational purposes while supporting the academic structure of language learning. It can also contribute emotionally to foreign or second language learning by making students feel more comfortable speaking or sharing their interests compared to the face-to-face classroom environment (Ferreira-Meyers & Martins, 2020).

2.1.3. Snapchat

Developed by Stanford University students in 2011, Snapchat is an instant messaging application with a photo messaging feature that self-destructs shared photos (Schoja, 2016). Besides sending videos and photos, Snapchat has many features like Snapkidz, an app for kids. It is a social media application that allows users to take photos or short videos and support them with various notes, audio-visuals, or stickers. Log in on all iOS and Android operating systems devices is simple. After logging in, the application's "Snaps" location map allows users to meet people nearby, providing opportunities for those who want to learn a new language or improve their language skills. The photos and videos shared on Snapchat are not permanent. These shares disappear within short periods, as determined by the user. This feature allows language partners to make freer and more humorous jokes. Users can also use the characters they want in this application, which supports photo editing. The fact that shares are not permanent, the ability to match with nearby people with the help of a map, and the ability to support shares with funny expressions make Snapchat a preferred option for many users, and it provides the opportunity to use the target language freely. The increase in student satisfaction can encourage language students to practice and participate in the lesson (Freyn, 2017).

2.1.4. Skype

Skype is a free software application that uses internet-based voice communication technology. Launched in July 2004, Skype is a free, downloadable, simultaneous voice and written communication tool that allows for file-sharing capabilities with multiple people (Elia, 2006). The main benefit of using this application for eTandem language partnerships is the ability to access target language users that the partners may not be able to meet face-to-face in their own countries or cities. Skype can also be a useful tool for facilitating communication among people who are not geographically far apart. Even when talking with people

in the same country or city, it is possible to take advantage of the opportunities of eTandem learning through Skype. The voice and high-resolution video call function, call recording, live subtitle feature, smart messaging, screen sharing, and private conversations can benefit language partners in eTandem. On the other hand, the lack or inappropriateness of the topics to be discussed may negatively affect the language change (Cziko, 2004). This can result in not achieving the expected level of productivity from the language exchange. As a result, guiding students on what to discuss is critical to ensure a productive process in institutional tandems. Students' language levels and goals can be considered, and they can make decisions about the topics they will discuss. Language partners can choose topics based on their learning goals, language proficiency, and capabilities in individual tandems.

2.1.5. Twitter

Twitter is a widely adopted social media application where users can announce their thoughts about global events or situations through short messages called "tweets." In the application, English dominated initially; the content could be presented in many languages later. As of 2017, it continued serving its users in 40 languages (Rosell-Aguilar, 2018). Users who log in to the application can communicate with others with the same interests by defining them. eTandem users who come together to learn a language can support each other's language skills simultaneously or asynchronously through the messaging section and chat rooms on Twitter. Language partners face off on grammar structures and vocabulary in the target languages on topics they are interested in through tweets. Thus, it is possible to support language skills in authentic environments. Various symbols and emojis that facilitate the expression of feelings and thoughts can attract the interest of eTandem language learners and enrich their linguistic content. Harmandaoglu (2012) has also stated that Twitter, which has practical language learning and teaching features, can be an effective and efficient tool when used appropriately for educational and personal purposes.

2.1.6. Facebook-Messenger

Facebook is an application where people from different countries or cities can virtually meet and establish friendships and communication. Its main contribution to eTandem language learning is that partners can match and improve their language skills through audio, video, and written communication on Messenger. Users who download the application should create their profile, including a photo, personal information, and location. This way, trusting relationships can be established, and friendships can be made faster. Facebook Messenger also helps users communicate more easily by offering free stickers and graphic editing options. Especially beginning-level language users can support their messages using stickers, making expressing their feelings and thoughts easier. Partners who have not yet mastered the target language can support their messages and express themselves more easily using the application's features.

2.1.7. Discord

Discord is an online group chat room that allows users to communicate with other players from various parts of the world while playing online games. The website states that the platform was created to form a unique, reliable, and fun environment where users can feel a sense of belonging. The application can also be used for eTandem language learning, where partners can improve their language skills by interacting. However, it should be noted that informal language may be used in chat rooms. Therefore, language partners who want to practice each other's languages can organize meetings with a specific purpose.

2.1.8. Zoom

Zoom is an online platform that allows people to communicate with each other in real-time (Agapova, 2020). Zoom has various features to enhance video conferencing experiences and supports written chat. This can aid in improving the written or spoken language skills of language learners in corporate and independent eTandem settings. Zoom has become very popular recently, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, as millions of people used it for work meetings and millions of students for online classes. Zoom can also assist people who meet on different social media platforms but want to learn each other's languages. Its features, such as screen sharing, using supportive symbols in written messages, sending files, and recording sessions, can provide opportunities for language learners to improve their target languages in eTandem.

Conclusion

In recent years, mobile learning has been increasingly utilized to support language learning through eTandem. eTandem is an online language exchange program that enables learners to improve their language skills cost-effectively and functionally. Using symbols and graphic modification forms in eTandem helps learners express their emotions and thoughts more effectively, which can help overcome the fear of making mistakes and feelings of shyness and embarrassment while communicating in the target language. These features make eTandem a beneficial complement to traditional language courses. Furthermore, learners can come together in eTandem to meet their own goals, move at their own pace, and benefit from recorded sessions. In this way, eTandem combines learner autonomy and peer support, thus facilitating the development of communication competence for language learners. eTandem allows learners to collaborate on various websites and applications using advanced internet resources, where they can support each other in their proficient languages simultaneously or asynchronously. Some of these websites and applications were created explicitly for eTandem learning. In contrast, others have been adopted by language learners and teachers over time due to their features that support mutual language learning and their users' preferences. These sites and applications can be used in both institutional eTandem and individual eTandem, depending on the needs of the learners. These language exchanges, in which learners come together according to their goals and support each other's learning, support autonomous and mutual learning. These interactions

can also help develop cultural awareness and reduce prejudices against language learning. eTandem's structure, which provides support from proficient speakers in the target language and allows for feedback on language skills, is thought to contribute to language learning and teaching. eTandem can also support learners' social and linguistic adaptation, especially as more and more students choose overseas academic experiences. Furthermore, in institutional eTandem, providing partners with guidance on using information and communication technologies can positively impact student success. Given the great need for eTandem in language learning, it is necessary to conduct studies to identify partners' difficulties.

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