

Motivation, Feedback, and Autonomy in Tandem Language Learning: An Exploratory Pilot Study among Algerian EFL Learners

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Abstract:

Tandem Language Learning (TLL) is a form of language collaboration that brings a pair of learners to a reciprocal language give-and-take, enhancing their motivation, feedback provision/reception, and autonomy. This research, part of a pilot study in a large-scale longitudinal study, investigates learners' familiarity with and interest in TLL, as well as their perceptions of its role in supporting motivation, feedback exchange, and autonomy. Four research questions are posed: (1) What is the level of familiarity of Algerian EFL learners with TLL, and how interested are they in engaging with it? (2) What are their perceptions of TLL-driven motivation? (3) What are their perceptions regarding TLL-driven feedback? (4) How do they perceive autonomy in language learning, and what role does TLL play in fostering learner autonomy? A questionnaire was administered via Google Forms to 58 Algerian learners of English. Data are analysed using SPSS. The findings suggest the need to raise learners' awareness of TLL and to further explore its use in the Algerian EFL context.

Keywords: tandem language learning; Algerian EFL context; motivation; feedback; autonomy

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1. Introduction

Collaboration in language learning has developed over the years, enabling learners from different parts of the world to work together toward achieving their language learning goals. An eminent method for language collaboration is tandem language learning (TLL). It involves language exchanges between learners having, for the most part, mutual and common language learning goals. Calvert (1999) calls it “a form of open learning” (p. 56), as learners are provided with a valuable opportunity to manage their own learning more openly through mutual collaboration with their tandem partners. In addition to fostering a collaborative learning process, this reciprocal language exchange promotes learners’ motivation, enriches feedback provision, and enhances learners’ autonomy (Appel, 1999; Brammerts et al., 1996; Little, 2001; Priego, 2011; Ushioda, 2000). In this respect, previous research has looked at TLL as more than a language practice tool. TLL has been considered a learner-centred approach that smooths the way for learners’ reciprocal interactions, mutual support, feedback exchange, while also providing more opportunities for learners to take responsibility for their learning.

Motivation, autonomy and feedback are key constructs in the context of TLL. First, TLL promotes intrinsic motivation by forming an environment in which learners feel autonomous and involved in their own learning process (Appel, 1999; Appel & Gilabert, 2002; Ushioda, 2000). Moreover, in TLL, learners benefit from their active involvement in the process of feedback exchange (provision and reception), which further enhances their sense of competence and motivation. In TLL, feedback is not only about error correction but also about collaborative learning and scaffolding where learners help each other to improve their skills through mutual feedback exchanges (Priego, 2011). Furthermore, learner autonomy, an essential element of TLL, enables learners to take charge of their learning. This self-directed learning, facilitated by the collaborative nature of TLL, develops a sense of responsibility and encourages learners to take more control of their language learning (Little, 2001). In this study, motivation, feedback, and autonomy are viewed as conceptually related constructs within TLL. However, given the exploratory nature of the study, they are examined descriptively through learners’ perceptions rather than through statistical testing of their relationships.

Although TLL has been examined with regard to motivation, feedback,

and autonomy in different foreign language learning contexts, its familiarity, perceived value, and possible relevance to Algerian EFL learners remain underexplored. Given the piloting nature of the present study, it adopts a quantitative exploratory design to explore Algerian EFL learners' familiarity level with TLL, their interest in it, and their perceptions, especially with regard to motivation, feedback, and autonomy in language learning in general and TLL in particular.

Additionally, this pilot research, which is part of an ongoing longitudinal study, aims to enlighten potential pitfalls and deficiencies, especially regarding the methodology plan for future refinement. To the best of the authors' knowledge, TLL is scarcely researched in the Algerian EFL context, which presents an appealing gap to fill. Put differently, this pilot study explores the potential of TLL in unleashing learners' motivation, enriching feedback, and fostering autonomy, providing insights into adopting practices that may enhance these elements.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Defining TLL :

TLL can be defined as an approach to learning a foreign language, where two partners agree to work together, each helping the other with the language they aspire to master. Each partner is a native or proficient speaker of the other's target language. Together, they partake in meaningful communication, helping and supporting each other through. As Aranha and Wigham (2020) indicated, it involves communication between speakers of diverse languages, allowing participants to practice their partner's native language. This is what makes TLL contingent on reciprocal collaboration between language learners. Such a language exchange would involve different means of communication ranging from face-to-face encounters to online exchanges, such as email, chat platforms, and audio/video conferencing (Schwienhorst, 2003).

Traditionally, tandem learning involves pairs of native speakers of different languages who become tandem partners, each interested in the other's mother tongue; they help each other with their language goals through practice and collaborative work (Appel, 1999; Brammerts et al., 1996; Calvert, 1999; Little et al., 1999; Ushioda, 2000). However, the recent definition of TLL has extended to acknowledge non-native speakers who are proficient in a target language as tandem partners (McClung & Barr, 2021; Telles & Vassalo, 2006).

This extension makes TLL a flexible approach that accommodates different linguistic backgrounds.

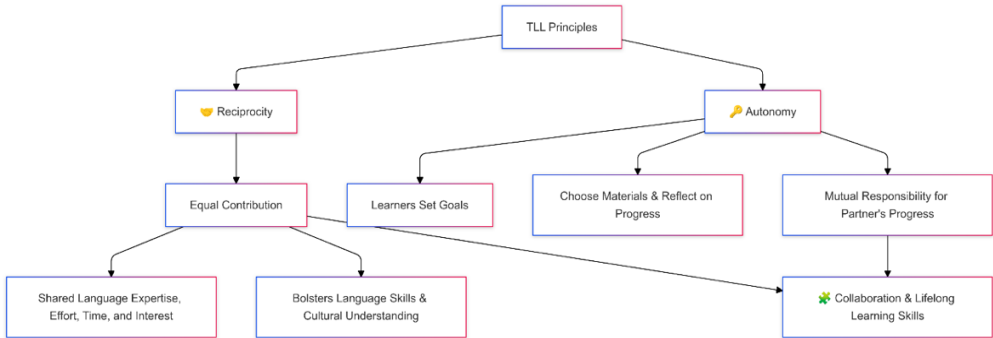
2.2. Principles of TLL: Reciprocity and Autonomy

The building blocks of TLL are reciprocity and autonomy (Little & Brammerts, 1996). On the one hand, reciprocity is the equal contribution both partners invest in their tandem interactions. This principle suggests that tandem partners benefit equally from their language exchange, which include shared language expertise, effort, time, and interest (Brammerts et al., 1996). The tandem partners’ collaboration makes reciprocity imperative for the tandem exchange to be successful (O'Rourke, 2007).

On the other hand, autonomy is simply the learners’ ability to be responsible for their own progress. It enables the learner to set personal language learning goals, select the most convenient materials, and reflect upon his/her progress (Little, 2001; Schwienhorst, 2003). According to Schwienhorst, tandem partners are not solely responsible for their progress; rather, they should shoulder responsibility for their partners’ progress, as well. This mirrors the mutual support between partners. Joining together the principles of autonomy and reciprocity, TLL emerges as a distinguished interactive method, which cultivates a collaborative environment aiming to foster language skills and develop lifelong learning skills (Little & Brammerts, 1996; Némethová, 2020).

The following flowchart, which is created using Mermaid platform, may suit the visual reader; it represents how the principles of reciprocity and autonomy work in TLL. It outlines the core contributions of each principle and their combined impact on fostering a collaborative learning environment.

Figure N°1. Reciprocity and Autonomy in TLL



2.3. TLL: Motivation, Feedback, and Autonomy

TLL cultivates learner motivation, facilitates feedback exchange, and promotes learner autonomy. In a tandem learning setting, motivation is seen as the learners' actual engagement with their tandem learning process (Vassallo & Telles, 2006). TLL positively influences learners' motivation, as indicated by Ryan (2014). According to many studies, tandem exchanges are highly motivating since they offer authentic communication and the chance to connect and learn about different cultures, which many learners value (Develotte et al., 2008; Schug & Torea, 2023).

In language learning, motivation is classified into *extrinsic* and *intrinsic* motivation. *Extrinsic motivation* is driven by external outcomes and rewards (such as grades), whereas *intrinsic motivation* stems from an internal sense of fulfilment (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation are paramount in TLL. Guillén (2015) found that encouraging learners' intrinsic motivation by moving beyond grades and credits empowers them to take charge of their learning progress, a view further corroborated by Ushioda (2000), who linked intrinsic motivation to greater learner autonomy. Further, structured tandem projects are said to foster intrinsic motivation by augmenting learners' responsibility and their active engagement with their tandem partners (Cruz, 2023). Other elements that enhance learner motivation in TLL are: authentic input and peer feedback received from native speakers (Guanoluisa & Viera, 2021; Kabata & Edasawa, 2011; Serrato & Rodriguez, 2020) and task-related elements, such as interest and complexity (Appel & Gilabert, 2002; Little et al., 2002).

The next element to discuss is feedback. It is defined by Hattie and Timperley (2007) as a direct consequence of a learner's performance, which aids gauging performance and level of comprehension. In tandem learning, feedback is indispensable, as partners actively exchange it with each other. Alberth et al. (2019) highlighted that one of the major benefits of TLL is the opportunity to receive assistance from a native speaker. This is typically valuable in cases where teachers lack sufficient language proficiency. Therefore, tandem partners need to discuss and agree right from the start on how feedback would be provided and received. Generally, research indicates that students value receiving comprehensive feedback from their tandem partners (Resnik & Schallmoser, 2019). This makes exchanging constructive feedback between tandem partners vital in a tandem learning exchange.

Many studies have emphasised the importance of feedback in TLL (Appel, 1999; Belz & Kinginger, 2002, 2003; Little et al., 1999; O'Rourke, 2005; Priego, 2011). Take, for instance, Priego's (2011) study, which considered feedback a scaffolding tool from which both tandem partners benefit. This study highlighted explicit feedback as the most commonly used type in tandem exchanges. In a similar vein, Guillén's (2015) study concluded that learners exhibited a strong inclination toward corrective feedback, particularly recasts (implicitly rephrasing an error) and repetition. On the whole, research emphasises the considerable weight of feedback in the success of a tandem exchange so long as it facilitates addressing errors and promotes collaboration between tandem partners.

The last point to consider is autonomy in TLL. As has been mentioned earlier, autonomy is one of the milestones in TLL, embodying a fundamental principle. In the context of TLL, autonomy is defined as the ability to detach oneself from conventional instructional approaches, engage in reflective thinking, make well-informed decisions, and act independently (Little, 2001; Némethová, 2020). Autonomous learners are able to set their learning goals, choose the content, the methods, and the techniques they wish to use, as well as gauge their learning progress (Némethová, 2020). Ushioda (2000), in turn, argued that learner autonomy fosters intrinsic motivation and enhances learners' engagement. In short, motivation, feedback, and autonomy are interrelated elements in TLL. Each element complements the other, thereby contributing to an interactive and efficient language learning experience.

Worthy of note, empirical evidence, including studies by Appel (1999), Ushioda (2000), and Priego (2011), shows that motivation, feedback and autonomy are interrelated and not separate elements within TLL. This interrelation can also be understood in light of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which holds that motivation is supported when learners experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000). It can be conjectured that relatedness in itself might well trigger feedback bidirectionally because the latter cannot happen unless learners relate with others cooperatively. In TLL, these elements may be reflected in learners' control over their learning, their feedback exchange with tandem partners, and the social connections they establish through reciprocal interaction. Appel (1999) demonstrated that authentic communication with native speakers, reciprocal feedback exchange and learners' control over their learning process motivated learners, which reflects the way

feedback and autonomy support motivation. Similarly, Ushioda (2000) found that autonomy fostered intrinsic motivation, as learners became more involved in tandem exchanges when they took control of their learning. From a sociocultural point of view, feedback exchange acts as a kind of scaffolding that helps learners to develop and progressively reach higher levels of autonomy (Vygotsky, 1978; Priego, 2011). Therefore, motivation, feedback and autonomy are mutually supportive and are central to successful TLL experiences. However, in the present pilot study, these constructs are examined descriptively through learners' perceptions rather than through statistical testing of the relationships therein.

Although previous research on TLL provided valuable insights into the significance of this approach in language learning, particularly regarding motivation, feedback, and autonomy, it is not without limitations. While many studies have focused on the role of native speakers as tandem partners (Cruz, 2023; Guillén, 2015; Little et al., 1999; Little & Ushioda, 1998; Priego, 2011; Ryan, 2014), the role of proficient non-native speakers has been greatly overlooked in tandem interactions. Proficient non-native speakers could efficiently serve as tandem partners, especially when access to native speakers is limited. Additionally, numerous studies, such as Ryan (2008), Guillén (2015), and Nazaretsky et al. (2024) espoused qualitative or self-reported data, which may involve biased responses, not to mention the small sample sizes (Resnik & Schalmoser, 2019; Cruz, 2023), which hinders the generalisability of results.

This pilot study has several limitations pertinent to the theoretical framework that should be acknowledged. The pilot study is preliminary, and its theoretical framework is chiefly explanatory as it defines key concepts central to the study, including TLL, along with its core principles and presents examples of key studies related to motivation, feedback, and autonomy in TLL. Therefore, the analysis is not profound. The study provides a useful framework as a starting point. Nevertheless, further research is required to explore the intricacies of TLL.

3. Methodology

3.1. Context:

This study was conducted in the Algerian EFL context. It adopted a quantitative exploratory pilot design. This design was deemed appropriate as the study sought to elicit preliminary descriptive insights rather than test causal relationships or evaluate the effectiveness of TLL at this stage. Its main objective

was to explore learners' familiarity and perceptions of TLL, regardless of their academic specialty, age, or professional status, to cover diverse insights from those keen on having a language learning exchange. It focused on learners' motivation, feedback, and autonomy, being essential factors in TLL, to understand their views regarding these aspects in language learning and tandem language learning. Building on this, four research questions are raised:

(1) What is the level of familiarity of Algerian EFL learners with TLL, and how interested are they in engaging with it?

(2) What are their perceptions of TLL-driven motivation?

(3) What are their perceptions and preferences regarding TLL-driven feedback?

(4) How do they understand autonomy in language learning and what role does TLL play in developing it?

3.2. Participants:

The current pilot study used convenience sampling for practical reasons and to save time as the participants were recruited through social media platforms using a Google Forms link. The inclusion criterion was being an Algerian learner of English as a foreign language who is willing to participate in the study. The sample consisted of 58 EFL learners from different majors. The study intentionally selected English learners from different academic disciplines, not just English majors, to obtain a broad spectrum of ideas concerning TLL, but also because of the rarity of finding participants with TLL experience.

3.3. Procedure:

3.3.1. Instrument: In this pilot study, a questionnaire was used to collect data from the participants. The questionnaire was administered via Google Forms. It was divided into three sections. The first section collected data on the participants' general background information, such as age, gender, professional status, and field of study. The second section was dedicated to collecting data about TLL, including the participants' familiarity therewith and interest therein. The last section explored different perceptions regarding motivation, feedback, and autonomy in tandem language learning. A space was further provided for participants to provide any additional comments.

3.3.2. Analysis: Raw data were analysed using SPSS, as the questionnaire primarily engendered quantitative data. Because only three participants reported their participation in TLL, inferential statistical procedures were not reckoned appropriate for the current analysis. Therefore, descriptive statistics were used to provide an initial understanding of learners' perceptions and to identify patterns for future refinement of the large-scale longitudinal study. The analysis was organised according to the four research questions. Frequencies were calculated based on the nature of the question. Additional comments were interpreted as supplementary information to quantitative data. Notably, some responses were flagged and excluded from the analysis during data cleaning due to their inappropriate nature or the participant's misunderstanding of the questions. Specifically, some participants who did not indicate involvement with TLL still answered questions intended exclusively for TLL participants. Consequently, these responses were flagged for exclusion from the analysis, ensuring that only those who reported participation in TLL were included in the final dataset. This step was taken so that the results avoid being skewed.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results:

4.1.1. Participants' information: It is important to present an overview of the participants' information to provide context for the research findings. The study consisted of 58 participants ($N = 58$) representing different demographics. The demographic trend is toward young adults with an average age of 27 ($M = 26.97$) and strong female participation (82.8%). The participants are categorised into three groups: employed individuals (48.3%), graduates who have completed their studies but are not yet working (20.7%) and students who are still studying at university (31%). Students are distributed across various academic levels as follows: 1 participant studies in the fifth year of Medicine and another studies in the sixth year of Medicine; 2 participants are in a first-year Master's programme, while 3 are in the second year Master's; and 9 participants are in their second year B.A.; while 2 are in their third year B.A.

4.1.2. Tandem Language Learning

4.1.2.1. 4.1. Familiarity with and Interest in Tandem Learning

Participants' Familiarity with TLL

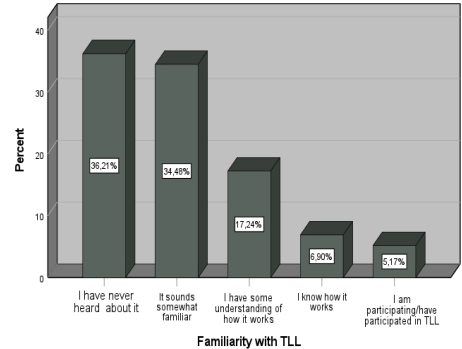
The following illustrations present the descriptive statistics and distribution

of responses pertaining to the respondents' familiarity with TLL. Table 1 presents the mean and standard deviation, while Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of responses in terms of percentages.

Table N° 1. *Descriptive Statistics for Familiarity with TLL*

Statistics		
N	Valid	58
	Missing	0
Mean		2.10
Std. Deviation		1.135

Figure N° 2. *Distribution of Responses to Familiarity with TLL*



The results, as demonstrated in Table 1 and Figure 2, indicate that the overwhelming majority of the participants exhibited limited to no knowledge of TLL. Expressly, 36.2% of the respondents reported having never heard of it, while 34.5% indicated that it sounded somewhat familiar. A small proportion (17.2%) reported having some understanding of how TLL works, while even a smaller percentage, 6.9%, reported otherwise. Moreover, only 5.2% of the respondents reported being actively involved in a tandem experience. These findings indicate that a significant proportion of the participants are unaware of TLL, with only a small fraction reporting understanding or actual involvement. The mean score and the standard deviation, as presented in Table 2, further support this. The mean score of 2.10 suggests that participants have a low to moderate level of familiarity with TLL. The standard deviation of 1.135 indicates variability in the respondents' familiarity level with the concept.

Those who reported taking part in TLL (5.2% or 3 participants of the sample) rated their level of satisfaction with the experience on a Likert scale from “not satisfied” to “extremely satisfied”. All three selected the “very satisfied” category, resulting in a mean satisfaction rating of 4 (M=4) and standard deviation of 0 (SD = 0.00), indicating no variability in the responses. This indicates that all of the members of this small group experienced a high level of satisfaction with their TLL experience.

Participants' Interest in Participating in TLL

The participants were asked to express their interest, or the lack thereof, in participating in TLL after being provided with a comprehensive definition of its meaning and purpose. Their responses are illustrated in Table 2 to follow.

Table N° 2. *Participants' Interest in TLL*

	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
No	3	5.2%
Yes, if it is an assignment for my language class	23	39.7%
Yes, I want to participate in tandem learning	29	50.0%
I am already participating in tandem learning	3	5.2%

Table 2 shows that half the participants (50%) expressed an unconditioned interest in participating in tandem learning. Further, 39.7% indicated that they would be willing to participate if it were incorporated into a language class assignment. Only 5.2% were already engaged in tandem learning, while another 5.2% showed no interest at all. These findings suggest a significant level of interest among learners in tandem learning, especially when adding the individuals who are already participating to the 50% of those interested. It becomes evident that over half (55.2%) of the participants are clearly inclined toward TLL. Additionally, formal tandem learning appears to be appealing to learners, although the current involvement in TLL remains relatively low.

4.1.2.2. Language Partners and Digital Tools

For those already participating in TLL, they were asked with whom they were participating. One participant skipped this question, while the remaining two reported that they were participating with their friends: “My friend from the UK” and “A friend”. Again, this small group was asked a question about their use of online apps and websites. Two of the three participants that were involved in TLL mentioned that they used websites and applications as part of their learning process. One participant (33.3%) did not respond to this question. This suggests that digital platforms are a key part of their tandem learning process.

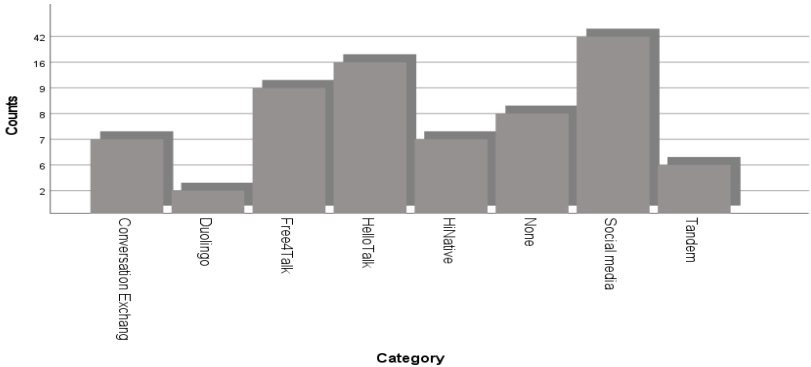
In other questions directed to the entire sample, the respondents were asked about whether they experienced difficulty in finding native speakers or language learners to partner up with. Their responses showed a split in the difficulty of

finding native speakers for language learning. Half (50%) of the participants reported no difficulty in finding native speakers to practise with, while the other half indicated that it is challenging. This suggests that while some learners have easy access to native speakers, many face barriers.

Additionally, 65.5% of the participants reported no problem with regard to finding learners of English to partner up with. This may indicate that, for most, finding other learners for practice is relatively easy. However, 34.5% of the participants appear to struggle with finding suitable learning partners, possibly due to factors like matching proficiency levels or availability.

The respondents were further asked if they are familiar with or frequently use any applications, websites, and platforms for their language practice. Their responses are summed up using a bar chart in Figure 3.

Figure N°3. *Use of Language Learning Applications and Websites*



The foregoing bar chart presents the notable applications and websites familiar to or used by the participants. The results show that social platforms, such as Facebook, take the lead with 42 counts highlighting their widespread use. This suggests a strong orientation toward informal learning styles. HelloTalk is the second most popular platform, with 16 mentions. This application is typically designed for language exchange and it is particularly suitable for tandem exchanges and communication with native speakers. Similar applications, such as Free For Talk (9 counts), HiNative and Conversation Exchange (7 counts each) received moderate recognition. Less commonly used applications encompass Tandem (6 counts) and Duolingo (2 counts) suggesting limited engagement. Notably, 8 respondents indicated using none of these platforms, which might point to a lack of awareness of these tools or a reliance on alternative methods.

The participants reported a variety of applications and websites as their most preferred language learning tools. Social media platforms dominated the list of preferred language applications and websites, with seven mentions. Among these platforms, Facebook and Instagram were highlighted separately, each receiving seven and two mentions, respectively. Next, Free for Talk and Hello Talk shared the same count number, both garnering six mentions. According to the comment of a participant, Hello Talk is a great language learning application, especially for budget-conscious individuals, as it offers ninety minutes of free daily practice. It permits one to connect with people from different countries, with different accents, and cultural backgrounds. The ability to encounter native speakers and speak to them via voice calls serves as a plus as well, which may improve listening and understanding skills.

HI Native and Tandem follow with five and three mentions respectively, both of which are excellent choices for connecting with native speakers and finding tandem partners. Other applications, such as Conversation Exchange, Teams, Speaky, and Discord Server appeared with minimal mentions, each mentioned only once. Overall, the preferred language learning applications and platforms are all prominent in supporting and facilitating language exchanges, typically in tandem learning contexts.

4.1.3. TLL: Motivation, Feedback, and Autonomy: This section is devoted to presenting the findings related to learners' perceptions of motivation, feedback, and autonomy in language learning and TLL. To begin with, all TLL participants (100%) answered that their engagement in TLL increases their motivation for learning English. Additionally, the participants' feedback perceptions suggest that all of them (100%) appreciate receiving feedback while learning English. What is more, an impressive 98.3% of them showed their appreciation for receiving feedback from a native speaker. This may highlight learners' appreciation of accurate and authentic input, often associated with native speakers. Besides, the three TLL participants affirmed that they received feedback from their tandem partners during their tandem interactions.

When asked about their perceived autonomy in setting and achieving language learning objectives, the majority of the participants (89.7%) expressed confidence in their ability to do so, while a relatively small percentage (10.3%) reported otherwise. This finding indicates that they might be well-suited for tandem learning, which necessitates self-regulation.

Regarding learners' independence in selecting the materials and topics for language learning, the majority of the participants (67.2%) reported having complete freedom, while 32.8% experienced limited independence. Only a very small percentage (1.7%) indicated having no independence at all. The foregoing results suggest that most learners enjoy considerable autonomy in making learning-related decisions. Again, all three TLL participants confirmed that TLL enhances their autonomy in setting and achieving their language learning goals.

On the whole, these findings suggest that TLL may support learners' motivation, feedback reception from native speakers, and autonomy in language learning, as reported by the small number of participants involved in TLL. However, given that only three participants were involved in tandem learning, the findings are certainly not fully representative.

4.1.4. Further Comments: The participants shared additional insights that extended beyond the questionnaire items in the 'Further Comments' section. Their most notable comments are summarised in the following account.

Interest in Tandem Learning

Participants' curiosity about exploring TLL has been shown in various comments. For example, one participant enthusiastically described TLL as "such a helpful and important part for language learners," while another stated, "I really want to try tandem learning". These comments may indicate the participants' readiness to explore novel ways of learning English.

Core Principles of Tandem Learning

Surprisingly enough, one of the respondents has successfully defined the two core principles of TLL, reciprocity and autonomy in a comprehensive definition in the further comments space. This mirrors a good understanding of this concept and its basic premises from the participant's part.

Autonomy in Language Learning

A participant had an opposing view regarding the ability of TLL to foster learner autonomy. He/she expressed openly that "it's not that much" and that learner autonomy can be achieved outside the context of TLL.

4.2. Discussion:

With regard to the first research question, which addressed learners' familiarity with and interest in TLL, the findings suggest that while the participants had a moderate level of familiarity with TLL ($M=2.10$), they expressed their interest in experimenting with it, especially after establishing a comprehension of the concept through a definition provided in the questionnaire. The low levels of familiarity coupled with high interest in TLL spotlight the need for more attentiveness and integration of TLL in the Algerian EFL context. Students could be introduced to and sensitised about the advantages of tandem learning through their educational institutions and language programmes. Given the positive satisfaction among TLL participants, it appears to be appealing for implementation as a complementary learning approach. This was suggested by Little and Brammerts (1996) that TLL serves as a supplement to education.

Among the key challenges reported by the participants are difficulties in finding a language learner or a native speaker to partner with. This suggests that a lack of direct access to language partners is a barrier to participation in TLL. However, digital platforms offer a practical solution to this problem by facilitating interactions with native speakers, which can sustain participation in TLL. Top on the list of these platforms are social media, especially Facebook. This finding aligns with previous research, such as Guillén (2015) and Alberth et al. (2019), which highlight Facebook as a favourable tool used for tandem interactions. In addition to Facebook, this study featured other platforms, including Hello Talk and Free For Talk, which proved critical tools for tandem learning in the studies of Teske and Rivera (2018) and Gelen and Tozluoglu, (2021). However, unlike these studies, this pilot study did not directly investigate specific platforms for tandem learning. Instead, the insights gained about learners' preferred platforms for language learning provide a groundwork for future research, particularly the main study, for they appear appealing for tandem encounters. These findings suggest that the participants appear open to practical and accessible platforms for practising English, which will be taken into consideration when the main study is conducted.

To address the second research question regarding learners' perceptions of motivation in the context of TLL, all three TLL participants reported that tandem learning appeared to positively influence their motivation. This is very much in keeping with Guanoluisa and Viera (2021), Kabata and Edasawa (2011), and Serrato and Rodriguez (2020) who pointed out that the collaborative nature of TLL, the authentic input, and peer feedback received from a native speaker may

contribute to learners' motivation. However, the limited sample size of the present study's TLL participants calls for further research to validate these findings on a broader scale.

With regard to the third research question, which focused on learners' perceptions and preferences regarding TLL-driven feedback, all participants accredited the pivotal role of feedback in language learning, with 98.3% preferring feedback from native speakers, perhaps due to its perceived authenticity and accuracy. This suggests that learners value receiving feedback from native speakers as was also noted by Resnik and Schallmoser (2019). In this study, TLL participants acknowledged that they received feedback from a native speaker during their tandem interactions, which appears to play an important role in a tandem partnership. The significance of feedback received from a native speaker was emphasised in many studies (Appel, 1999; Belz & Kinginger, 2002, 2003; Little et al., 1999; O'Rourke, 2005; Priego, 2011). Unlike these studies, which examined actual tandem interactions, this pilot study offers a preliminary overview based on self-reported data, acting as a foundation for further empirical research.

With regard to the fourth research question, which addressed learners' perceptions of autonomy and the role of TLL in fostering it, the findings exhibited a positive direction. Most participants perceive themselves as autonomous learners having the ability to set and achieve their language learning goals and to choose materials and topics for language learning. This may suggest that they feel confident in managing their learning process. What is more, the three TLL participants affirmed that TLL promotes their sense of autonomy, which features its significance in cultivating autonomy. This finding appears to be consistent with Ushioda's (2000) argument that autonomy is crucial for motivation and language development. It suggests that TLL may contribute to developing learners' independent language learning skills in different contexts.

The overwhelming majority of the participants' further comments in the 'other comments' section suggested that there is wide acceptance and significant enthusiasm to embark on a TLL journey. This may provide further support for introducing TLL as a language learning approach to Algerian EFL learners, especially as it may help with enhancing their English skills.

Implications

Several implications can be drawn from this pilot study. First, there was a low familiarity level with TLL despite learners' interest in participating in it, which makes it appealing to introduce TLL to Algerian EFL learners, be that via educational institutions, language programmes, or tandem projects. In addition, the ability to harness language learning platforms, such as HelloTalk and Free For Talk may cater for barriers pertinent to finding tandem partners, typically native speakers. Besides, according to the results of this study, TLL appears to have potential in supporting learners' motivation, autonomy, and feedback experiences. Notwithstanding the limited number, these preliminary findings may encourage the integration of TLL into language learning, either formal or informal, to address different learner preferences. Lastly, further research with larger sample sizes is encouraged to validate these preliminary insights.

Limitations

This pilot study was confronted by several limitations that should be taken into account when interpreting the results. First, the small sample size and the limited number of participants who had engaged in TLL (only three) hindered the ability to perform inferential statistical analyses and draw generalisable conclusions about the Algerian EFL learner population. Moreover, certain inconsistencies in the results arose due to the participants' misunderstanding of some questionnaire items. For a reminder, this is but a pilot study, and these inconsistencies had to be flagged during the analysis in SPSS, which necessitates refining and clarifying the questionnaire items in future research endeavours.

As part of a larger-scale study, this pilot offers valuable insights to improve the design and methodology of the actual longitudinal study. Modifications will include refining the questionnaire to ensure better comprehension and recruiting a more diverse and representative participant group. These measures would enhance the reliability and validity of results in the main study, ensuring a more robust exploration of TLL in the Algerian EFL context.

Needless to say, this pilot study yielded beneficial conclusions about the language platforms to prioritise in the larger-scale study. Language exchange platforms, namely Facebook, Hello Talk and Free For Talk were the top preferred ones by the participants. They are advantageous when it comes to locating and interacting with tandem partners. Therefore, they look promising to be integrated in the large-scale study. Their use might overcome such barriers as finding native speakers and peers for language collaboration.

Recommendations

As far as the recommendations are concerned, several points are taken into consideration. To address the low familiarity level with TLL, it is strongly recommended that educational institutions and language programmes introduce and sensitise learners about the promising benefits of this approach. Learners can, then, establish a good understanding of the precepts underlying TLL and make the most of it. Research may as well form tandem projects and recruit as many students as possible to assess the potential of this approach.

For more reliable results in the future, the questionnaire items should be revised so that any inconsistencies triggered by ambiguities are avoided. Likewise, the top cited platforms in the pilot study (Facebook, Hello Talk, and Free For Talk) are a good choice to be incorporated in future tandem exchanges. They would facilitate establishing partnerships with tandem partners, be they proficient or native speakers of English.

Additionally, broader implications can be considered for stakeholders. Educators play a critical role in guiding and facilitating tandem exchanges. Teacher training initiatives could sustain the effectiveness of TLL, especially when it comes to the provision of feedback and learner autonomy. Educators can be trained on arranging and facilitating tandem partnerships for students and strategies for feedback provision, enhancing learner motivation and promoting autonomy. Remarkably, at the policy level, curriculum designers could consider integrating TLL into formal education by including structured tandem exchanges within language curricula. Educational institutions could collaborate with other institutions abroad for mutual collaboration between their students and invest in improving accessibility when it comes to digital resources, such as access to a stable internet connection, digital platforms and applications, and the required devices. Additionally, future research should examine the role of TLL in improving language proficiency, promoting motivation, enriching feedback, and enhancing learner autonomy

5. Conclusion

To conclude, this pilot study attempted to explore Algerian EFL learners' familiarity and interest in TLL, their perceptions regarding motivation, feedback,

and autonomy, and the significance of TLL in promoting these factors. The study uncovered substantial findings. The first point is that TLL is not familiar to many EFL Algerian students. However, they seem to exhibit great enthusiasm for engaging with it. Those participants embarking on a TLL journey, however few they were, ascertained the positive influence TLL has on their motivation for learning English. Moreover, most participants expressed their appreciation of receiving feedback in language learning, particularly from a native speaker. Those partaking in TLL affirmed that they did receive feedback from their tandem partners, which is a positive point. Furthermore, insights concerning learners' autonomy indicated that most learners have a good sense of autonomy in their language learning, while TLL participants confirmed that TLL did enhance their autonomy. It can be cautiously concluded that TLL could serve as a promising complementary tool for supporting language learning endeavours among Algerian EFL learners. Finally, the results of this pilot study serve as a foundation for future research efforts. TLL could be a promising approach for Algerian EFL learners, potentially enriching their motivation for language learning, allowing more opportunities for feedback exchange, and supporting their autonomy.

6. Footnotes and bibliography

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