



**Learning foreign languages in teletandem:
Resources and strategies**
*Aprendendo línguas estrangeiras em teletandem:
Recursos e estratégias*

João A. TELLES
(UNESP – Universidade Estadual Paulista, Brazil)

ABSTRACT

Teletandem is a virtual, collaborative, and autonomous context in which two speakers of different languages use the text, voice, and webcam image resources of VOIP technology (Skype) to help each other learn their native language (or language of proficiency). This paper focuses on learners' studying processes and their responses to teletandem. We collected quantitative and qualitative data from 134 university students through an online questionnaire. Results show the content of students' learning processes, resources, activities, and strategies. We conclude with a critical discussion of the results and raise pedagogical implications for the use of teletandem as a mode of online intercultural contact to learn foreign languages.

Key-words: *teletandem; tandem learning; foreign language; foreign language teaching and learning; telecollaboration.*

RESUMO

Teletandem é um contexto virtual, autônomo e colaborativo no qual dois falantes de línguas diferentes utilizam recursos de tecnologia VOIP (texto, voz e imagem de webcam) para ajudar o parceiro a aprender a sua língua materna (ou linguagem de proficiência). Este trabalho enfoca os processos de estudo e respostas dos alunos ao contexto do teletandem. Dados quantitativos e qualitativos de 134 estudantes universitários foram coletados através de um questionário online. Os resultados revelam o conteúdo dos processos de aprendizagem, atividades, estratégias e recursos adotados pelos alunos. Concluímos com uma discussão crítica acerca dos resultados e levantamos implicações pedagógicas desta modalidade de contato intercultural online para aprender línguas estrangeiras.

Palavras-chave: *teletandem; aprendizagem em tandem; ensino e aprendizagem de língua estrangeira; telecolaboração.*

1. Introduction

Teletandem is a mode of telecollaboration - a virtual, collaborative and autonomous context for learning foreign languages in which two students help each other to learn their own languages (or language of proficiency). They do so by using the text, voice and webcam image resources of VOIP technology (such as Skype), and by adopting the three principles of tandem learning: autonomy, reciprocity, and separate use of both languages (Brammerts, 2003, Telles & Vassallo, 2006). Within this virtual context and under the supervision of a teacher-mediator, teletandem partners collaborate online and make their own choices regarding the path, rhythm and content of learning the language and culture of each other.

By using both quantitative and qualitative-interpretive methodology, the objectives of this paper are twofold: (a) to provide a description of the students' processes and strategies of studying a foreign language and culture during the teletandem intercultural contact, and (b) to analyze the participants' responses to the practice of teletandem.

In the first part of the paper, we provide an overview of the theoretical framework of learning foreign languages in teletandem.

In the second part, we present an overview of its methodology and the methods used to attain both objectives. In the third part, from quantitative and qualitative perspectives, we conduct the data analysis of the students' study practices and their responses to the teletandem context. We conclude with a problematization of the analysis results and raise some implications for the pedagogical use of teletandem as a mode of online intercultural contact for practicing and learning foreign languages. We expect that both the results and the discussion may be relevant to the studies on tele-collaborative practices and to the professional development of foreign language teachers.

2. Theoretical framework

As a mode of what Bellz & Thorne (2006) and O'Dowd (2006, 2007, 2011) and associates call *telecollaboration*, teletandem adopts the three principles of face-to-face learning of foreign languages in tandem – use of one language at a time, autonomy and reciprocity (Brammerts, 2003). We transferred these principles to the online environment (Telles, 2006; Vassallo & Telles, 2006; Telles & Vassallo, 2006) by using voice, text and webcam images provided by VOIP technology (at the time, Windows Messenger; today, Skype, Google Hangouts, or Zoom). We named that new mode *teletandem* (Telles, 2006; Telles & Vassallo, 2006) even though we later found out that the word *tele-tandem* (with a hyphen) had been previously used by Macaire (2004) to mean a quite different mode of telecollaboration between French and German groups of school children.

As we developed the project *Teletandem Brasil: Foreign languages for all*¹ (Telles, 2006) from a socio-cultural perspective, we focused on the vygotksyan concepts of *ZPD – zone of proximal development*, *scaffolding*, and *mediation* (Vygotsky, 1989). The studies conducted by the project aimed at understanding the characteristics of peer interaction in teletandem (Santos, 2008; Carvalho, 2008; Silva-Oyama, 2010; Benedetti, Consolo e Abrahão, 2010), how partners negotiated

1. Funded by FAPESP – Fundação de Amparo a Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo (São Paulo State Foundation for the Support of Research): <http://www.bv.fapesp.br/pt/pesquisas/?q=%22Teletandem%22&count=10&format=&index=&q2=&page=1>

the telecollaboration (Garcia, 2013), and how teachers mediated these interactions so that their students could learn about the target language, culture and relationship with partners (Salomão, 2011a; 2011b, 2011c). We published these articles and dissertations in Portuguese, funded by FAPESP – Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo².

In the past ten years of the project, we have implemented teletandem in three ways: institutionally, institutionally non-integrated, and institutionally integrated teletandem (Cavalari & Aranha, 2014). The three distinctions are important. First, because they situate the actions of the *Teletandem Brasil Project*. These actions differ from many private/business initiatives of online collaboration to learn foreign languages that are available on the internet (such as *Live Mocha* or *Talk Abroad*, for example). Frequently, these initiatives do not offer links between institutions. Second, because the three distinct modes of implementation have an impact on the ways, on the responsibility, and on the seriousness with which the students consider the practice of teletandem. Basically, the *Teletandem Brasil Project* has always been institutional, that is, the practicing students were always enrolled in the courses of both universities. We started in the non-integrated modality, meaning that the students practiced teletandem as an extra-curricular activity, as an *add-on* to the foreign language curriculum and syllabus. As we consolidated the partnerships with the collaborating universities abroad, we developed an institutionally integrated teletandem. In this third modality, students on both sides of the collaboration are enrolled in the courses of the higher education institution; the teletandem activities are integrated in the curriculum and syllabus of the regular foreign language course and they can receive certification once they have completed all the requirements of the teletandem sessions.

Teachers' pedagogical support may have a relevant impact on how students respond to teletandem sessions. Throughout these ten years, our research group came to an understanding of this pedagogical support as *reflective conversation* (Yonemura, 1982; Black & Halliwell, 2000) conducted by the language instructors that focus on (a) learning

2. See academic production of the Teletandem Brasil Project at <http://www.teletandem-brasil.org/page.asp?Page=25>

strategies (Silva-Oyama, 2010), and (b) the linguistic and cultural aspects that emerge during teletandem conversation (Telles, 2015, Luvisari-Murad, 2011; Costa, 2015, Zakir, 2015, Andreu-Funo, 2015). For our groups of students, this kind of reflective conversations is done through what we call *orientation sessions* (Candido, 2010) and *mediation sessions* (Salomão, 2011; Elsterman, 2015; Garcia, 2013; Araujo, 2012; Souza, 2012). *Orientation sessions* are conducted by the teachers *before* teletandem sessions start. Their focus on what tandem learning is about and its principles - autonomy, reciprocity, and non-mixture of languages. Basic language learning strategies and ways of behaving for learning foreign languages are also presented to the students by the teacher. *Mediation sessions*, in turn, are conducted by the teachers *after* each teletandem session. They focus on aspects of the target languages, the students' learning processes and the cultural aspects and themes that emerge (implicitly or explicitly) during the interactions. Mediation sessions can be conducted in either the native or target language, depending on the students' level in the latter. The practice of conducting teletandem mediation sessions requires knowledge about intercultural contact, discourse and communication. These themes are extensively discussed in Paulston et al. (2012) and Jackson (2014).

3. Methodology

Applied Linguistics research on the potentials of telecollaborative practices of foreign language learning, such as teletandem, has flourished in the last decade. Many of these studies used qualitative and interpretive case study approaches (Salomão, 2011a, 2011b), as in the case of the project *Teletandem Brasil: Foreign languages for all*³ (Telles, 2006). However, little research on this theme has presented results by using quantitative methodology (Santos, 2008, as one of the few exceptions). Perhaps, this characteristic could be due to the particular strength of qualitative case study research – the ability to study a case in depth and its affinity to descriptive-interpretive goals (Given, 2008:68) in order to obtain detailed descriptions of the ways that the pairs of students collaborate in online tandem learning. From

3. www.teletandembrasil.org

quantitative and qualitative perspectives obtained through an online questionnaire, this paper focuses on *how* and *what* students claim to learn in teletandem. We inquired about their actions and on what they say they do during the teletandem process. Therefore, we pursue these objectives from the perspectives of the students and not the investigator's.

The article explores three occurring phenomena during teletandem intercultural interactions: (a) the students' studying processes of foreign language learning and culture; (b) what they claim to learn during the teletandem sessions; and (c) their responses to the practice of teletandem.

We believe that a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods of research provided us with important details of how students study in teletandem and how they respond to this (relatively new) mode of tele-collaboration. Both may provide relevant cues to how students learn and thus to how foreign language acquisition takes place within this online interactional context.

3.1. Participants

Data were collected from 134 students after they had completed 8 weeks of teletandem practice, one hour per week - half an hour in each of the two foreign languages. Most students were practicing institutional implemented teletandem, meaning that the interactions were carried out between both universities and that most students on both sides were assessed and received grades in the foreign language courses they were taking. Figure I, below, describes the institutional profile of the participants.

As Figure 1 shows, most participants were Brazilian and American university students, though we had a relevant number of Brazilian teenagers (26) who answered the questionnaire as part of a process evaluation of our effort in implementing teletandem sessions in Brazilian public middle schools (Teletandem Junior Project).

It is important to emphasize that the social background between American and Brazilian students was quite different. Most Brazilian

university students were economically challenged students of Letras (Language Arts) who took their undergraduate courses either in the morning or in the evening. The American students studied in top level higher education institutions and many of them had experience living abroad. Some had already visited Brazil; they were quite used to interacting with foreigners; and most of them spoke more than one foreign language that they had either learned or inherited from their parents (heritage speakers). Differently from the Brazilian students who spoke Portuguese as their native language, not all students on the American side had English as their native or first language. Most participants practiced teletandem to improve their oral communicative skills in the target language. *Figure 1 – Participant profiles*, below, shows the number of students and their institutions of origin.

| Students from | % | Number of students |
|--|--------|--------------------|
| Brazilian state university | 33.58% | 45 |
| American universities | 38.80% | 52 |
| Brazilian public middle school (teenagers) | 19.40% | 26 |
| Latin American university | 5.22% | 7 |
| Brazilian public school teachers | 1.49% | 2 |
| Other institutions | 1.49% | 2 |
| TOTAL | | 134 |

Figure 1 – Participant profiles.

3.2. Data collection instrument

Data was collected through an online questionnaire containing 15 questions. We chose to look at the three phenomena from the quantitative perspective of the 134 responses to an online questionnaire powered by e-surveys.com. This instrument allowed us to see the tendency of students' choices and reactions to learning foreign languages in teletandem. On the other hand, adding free answers to some of the questions in the questionnaire allowed us to explore the students' responses in order to obtain the qualitative-interpretive perspective of the phenomena – *students' studying and learning processes*,

their personal responses to the practice of teletandem and what they claim to learn about language and culture during the teletandem sessions.

Two of the fifteen questions of the questionnaire were dichotomous (yes or no) questions, seven were multiple choice, and six were open-ended text questions. The answers were anonymous, and a password was required to access the questionnaire. The questions were the following:

1. *I am a student from (the student had to choose his/her institution)*
2. *Did you like the teletandem approach to learning foreign languages in teletandem?*
3. *Please, justify your previous answer.*
4. *Did you like your teletandem partner?*
5. *Please, justify your previous answer.*
6. *Which were the most positive points of your teletandem process?*
7. *Which were the most negative points of your teletandem process?*
8. *What have you learned during your teletandem process?*
9. *Which resources have you used during your teletandem sessions?*
10. *If you used any other resource that is not listed above, please, specify.*
11. *In what activities did you and your partner engage as you practiced teletandem?*
12. *If there were any other activities that are not listed above, please, specify.*
13. *Would you do teletandem again?*
14. *How would you like to practice teletandem? (You can choose more than one alternative)*
15. *Did you feel you had pedagogical assistance from your instructor during your teletandem process?*

3.3. Data collection procedure

After a process of eight weeks of teletandem practice, once they completed their last session, the students remained in the labs and answered the 15 questions.

3.4. Data analysis procedures

Analysis followed both quantitative and qualitative-interpretive procedures. The open-ended questions in which the students could express themselves freely about their teletandem experiences were analyzed from the perspective of qualitative-interpretive approaches (thematization and categorization). They were, then, contrasted with the quantitative questions for possible insights.

4. Results

The results show information regarding (a) students' personal responses to the teletandem context, (b) the content of students' studying processes, (c) the resources, activities and learning strategies used by the students while interacting in teletandem. First, we will report the quantitative results of the questionnaire and, then, we will present the analysis of the qualitative results. Due to restrictions of space, our results focus only on the three themes, above. The data were very complex and supplied several other themes and sub-themes that we will explore in other publications.

4.1. Students' personal responses to the teletandem context

Personal response to teletandem was considered from the perspectives of (a) enjoyment in being in the virtual context in order to practice and to interact with the partner in the foreign languages and (b) the relationship with the foreign teletandem partner.

Student enjoyment regarding the teletandem context was almost unanimously positive (98.51% - 132 students out of 134), if we only consider the two most positive answers to the question *Did you enjoy learning foreign languages in teletandem?* 80.60% (108 students) responded that they enjoyed teletandem *very much* and 17.91% (24 students) said that *they did*. Table 1, below, shows a synthesis of this information.

Table 1 – Did you enjoy learning foreign languages in teletandem?

| | % of respondents | Number of respondents |
|---|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| Yes, very much. | 80.60% | 108 |
| I did. | 17.91% | 24 |
| So so | 0.75% | 1 |
| Not much | 0.75% | 1 |
| Number of respondents | | 134 |
| Number of respondents who skipped this question | | 0 |

The students were asked to justify these responses to teletandem. Out of 134 students, 110 submitted their justifications to their answers. These justifications were analyzed by means of a qualitative-interpretive approach based on *recursiveness*, *lexical choices*, and *grouping of the emerging themes* in students’ justifications for enjoying teletandem sessions. We grouped these justifications into four relating themes: (a) language learning; (b) culture learning; (c) learning how to study; and (d) socialization. *Figure 2*, below, provides a summary of each of these four categories.

| | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Language Learning | have constant attention, be corrected, speak freely and more fluently and comfortably, have freedom to choose what to talk about, learn how to structure phrases, practice what is learned in class with a native speaker, improve pronunciation, practice language in real life situation, develop vocabulary and listening abilities, learn and practice new vocabulary, expressions and structures, get more confidence, listen to different accents, improve fluency, be exposed to formal and informal language (slang), practice language in a real context, experience language and culture from the native’s perspective, focused attention onto the partner’s accent, practice without fear of making mistakes, learn about speaking in different interactional contexts, have face to face conversation that helps learning, learn and speak more than in a classroom, share explanations and ask questions (at the moment, as session progresses), focus on chatting and having fun (which makes learning easier) instead of just being focused on learning. |
| Learning about culture | learn about a foreign culture; talk about Brazil with Brazilians; have contact with language and culture through a native; learn about American, Brazilian and other cultures; have the opportunity to meet people from different countries and talk with them; learn about young people of Brazil and the way they live; get in touch with different people and new customs; know a different country. |

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| | |
|------------------------------|---|
| Learning how to study | <p> speak two languages in a single session; try to help the partner learn their language; feel encouraged to study more; solve doubts with partner; keep a study routine; be constant and build up study habits; reflect about one's own development; self-evaluate their learning; reflect about weak and strong points when learning and set up their own objectives; share the same objectives; detect and face barriers; know what they can and cannot do with the language; exercise the ability to interact with someone who is also learning; share explanations; ask questions to solve doubts; have a feel of what has been learned. </p> |
| Socialization | <p> know a person from a different country (know new people with different customs); practice the language without fear of making mistakes; knowing a country's culture from the partner's point of view; start a friendship with the partner; count on the partner's punctuality get online; interact with a new person from a different culture; use the foreign language; feel their own increase of interest in the foreign language; express themselves freely; acquire confidence when speaking the foreign language; share the same objectives; send e-mail messages on the weekends; have fun organizing and balancing our sessions. </p> |

Figure 2 – The four categories of justifications to why students enjoyed teletandem sessions.

In addition to complementing the quantitative evidence, the qualitative analysis helped us to elucidate the students' enthusiasm and nearly unanimous positive attitude towards teletandem sessions.

In regards to whether they enjoyed or not the relationship with their partners, the answers were not so unanimous and enthusiastic as enjoying the context of teletandem. Nevertheless, most students (93.29%) were highly positive when talking about their partners. Among these, 72.39% (97 students) said that they liked their partners very much and 20.90% (28 students) simply said that they liked them.

Table 2 – Did you like your teletandem partner?

| | % of respondents | Number of respondents |
|---|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| Yes, very much. | 72.39% | 97 |
| I did. | 20.90% | 28 |
| So so | 3.73% | 5 |
| Not much | 1.49% | 2 |
| Not a bit. I wished I had another | 1.49% | 2 |
| Number of respondents | | 134 |
| Number of respondents who skipped this question | | 0 |

A careful qualitative look through the justifications to whether they enjoyed their partners provided an overview of what a good teletandem partner does and his/her qualities. Both are summarized in Figure 3, below. In the task of obtaining the two categories, adjectives and the words “help” and “helpful” (both of which pretty much imply “collaboration”) were central and recursive in the justifications.

What a good teletandem partner does: brings many topics to talk about, always corrects the partner, helps the partner to develop and/or to improve his/her grammatical, oral and comprehension skills, makes the conversation flow, solves doubts, asks and answers questions, corrects mistakes, touches several aspects of a theme, makes efforts to learn, has a clear and understandable voice in his/her language, teaches new words.

Qualities of a good teletandem partner: curious, easy-going, nice, patient, talkative, helpful, friendly, understanding, polite, sweet, intellectual, attentive, good sense of humor, has much in common with me, nice company, similar personality, communicative, collaborative, charismatic, mature, responsible, sensible, kind, knowledgeable about his/her country and culture, has similar age, is punctual to get online, is dedicated and interested in learning the partner’s language.

Shortcomings of a teletandem partner: the opposites of the above.

Figure 3 – The qualities of a good teletandem partner and what he/she can do.

On the other hand, qualitative-interpretive look into the few justifications for not enjoying the teletandem partner very much or not at all (and, consequently, even wishing to change partner) can also provide relevant information about (a) how the principle of reciprocity⁴ of tandem learning operated during the online interactions for students who did not completely enjoy their teletandem partners, (b) how students felt about their partners, and (c) about what good partners are expected (not) to do. Drawn among the students’ justifications, the four excerpts below, give us evidences about these issues, particularly on the theme *how the students dealt with their partner’s (or their own) limitations of oral proficiency in the foreign language*.

4. The three principles of tandem learning are autonomy, reciprocity and no mixture of languages (Brammerts, 2003; Vassallo & Telles, 2006). Reciprocity is defined as mutual support and interdependence between the two partners based on equal commitment “in such a way that both benefit as much as possible from their working together” (Brammerts, 2003:29).

Excerpt 1 (from an American student)⁵

She [the partner] improved, but it was very difficult to talk with her, because she was shy. At the beginning, she didn't want to talk about anything with me, and then she over prepared [the sessions]. She read the question she had on a piece of paper and I answered them... We never had a real, normal conversation. I tried to change partner, but I always had to talk with the same person. I had a cool partner the last time I interacted in teletandem, so I did not lose my expectations towards the project. In addition, she had just a year of English, so we just spoke Portuguese. That was good for me, but I think we should practice both languages. (93) [Ela melhorou, mas foi muito difícil falar com ela a causa da vergonha dela. Ao começo não queria falar nada comigo e depois preparou demais [as sessões]. Ela leu as perguntas que tinha no seu papel e eu respondi... A gente nunca teve uma conversa real, normal. Eu tentei trocar de parceira mas sempre tive que falar com a mesma pessoa. A última vez que fiz Teletandem, tive uma parceira bem legal então essa vez não perdi esperança no projeto. Também ela só teve um ano de inglês então a gente só falou em português. Isso foi bom para mim, mas eu acho que se deve praticar as duas línguas.] (93)⁶

In Excerpt 1, the American student deals with the limitations of his partner's oral proficiency in English. His Brazilian partner adopts two strategies to overcome her limitations in the target language: she switches between silence during the conversation and what her American partner complains as “over-preparation” of the teletandem session (writing questions on a piece of paper). The American partner feels that these strategies affect the flow of their conversation and that they take away the spontaneity of their teletandem interaction (*We never had a real or normal conversation.*). This seems to lead her American collaborator to some impatience and interaction domination during the online intercultural contact (... *so we just spoke Portuguese*). The American partner expected to have what he calls “a normal conversation” either in Portuguese (his target language) or in English

5. Whenever it is the case, the original excerpt in Portuguese follows its translation. The same for all the other translated excerpts.

6. The numbers in parentheses after the excerpts refer to the participant's number in the questionnaire. Example: in this case, the excerpt refers to the ninety third respondent of the questionnaire.

(his native language). When asked to specify the negative points of his teletandem partnership, the same American student expresses his dissatisfaction by pointing at what he sees as the three problems with his Brazilian partner – excessive shyness to speak, over-preparation of sessions and lack of sufficient proficiency to have a “normal conversation” in English. Here is the way he writes about the negative points:

Excerpt 2 (from an American student)

Her shyness. And then, the way she prepared it [the session]. Thinking about themes would be nice, but not over-preparing them so that we can have a normal conversation. Besides, she could not speak a word of English. Why did they allow her to do teletandem, if she couldn't even say “My name is ____”, in English? A vergonha dela e depois a preparação dela. Eu acho que seria bom pensar em temas, mas não preparar demais para poder ter uma conversa normal. Também ela não falava nada de inglês. Por que deixou que ela fizesse Teletandem se nem podia dizer “o meu nome é ____”, em inglês?

Reciprocity, a main principle of tandem learning, seems to be lost in this partnership and dominance of one partner over the other with less proficiency, due to differences of oral proficiency levels is established, leading to disappointment, lack of collaboration and even indignation (Why did they allow her to do teletandem, if she couldn't even say “My name is ____”, in English)?.

We can also think of different styles of dealing with the limitations of knowledge in the foreign languages. However, the questions that remain are whether students should expect “a normal conversation” between two learners of foreign languages in the teletandem context. Students are practicing teletandem exactly to improve their language skills, therefore, some difficulties should be expected. But what level of difficulties? Students should be alerted of these difficulties and also instructed about learning and communication strategies in order to explore their partner's difficulties also on behalf of their own learning. This can be done during *Orientation Sessions* prior to starting a process of teletandem with the class.

Excerpt 3, below, for example, shows the American student's expectations and purposes of learning in teletandem: both should speak the languages fluently. We get the impression that, at least for

the American student, that teletandem practitioners should already have some oral competence in the target language (fluency, in this case).

Excerpt 3 (from an American student)

We had some trouble communicating and clearing things up, especially if neither of us spoke each other's languages fluently. (106)

The American student claims that both him/her and partner did not have what is claimed as “fluency” in each other’s languages, therefore, affecting the autonomy and reciprocity principles of tandem learning.

The next excerpt shows a more proficient Brazilian partner having to deal with the avoidance attitude of his American partner (keeping silent and looking at the computer screen), most probably (and not definitely) because of lack of oral proficiency in the foreign language.

Excerpt 4 (from a Brazilian student)

So-so. My partner was Jack [fictitious name], he didn't talk much, he kept looking at the computer screen, and I was the one who had to tell him to write or to say something. (20) [Mais ou menos. Meu parceiro foi o Jack [pseudônimo], ele não falava muito, ficava só olhando para a tela do computador, e eu que tinha que falar para ele escrever ou falar alguma coisa.] (20)

In sum, the qualitative analysis of the students’ justifications for not enjoying their teletandem partners showed that the principle of reciprocity of tandem learning may not be operated during the online interactions when students lack or do not share similar levels of oral proficiency in the target language. That may cause feelings of uneasiness, dissatisfaction, silence, nervousness, or competition toward their teletandem partners and dominance in the conversation⁷. Leone (2012a, 2012b, 2012c) discusses the interactional dominance during

7. See the works of Leone (2012a, 2012b, 2012c) about interactional dominance in teletandem conversations and the impact of language competence (native/non-native) on the role assumed by each interlocutor in structuring teletandem conversation.

teletandem conversations and the impact of language competence (native/non-native) on the role assumed by each interlocutor in structuring teletandem conversation. Brammerts & Kleppin (2003) also point out that there are cases of absolute beginners who have learned successfully in tandem and that a basic rule can be said: “(...) the less one partner knows of the foreign language, the better the other partner’s knowledge should be” (p.158). We add that a third language in which both partners know well enough to communicate can function as a *lingua franca* between both partners who learn their respective language.

When asked whether they would like to do teletandem again, 129 students (96%) responded they would and only 5 (3.73%) responded that they would not. This result shows a high acceptance of teletandem as a context for free practice of the target language. Table 3, below, illustrates the results regarding whether or not they would like to do teletandem again.

Table 3 – Would you do teletandem again?

| | % of respondents | Number of respondents |
|---|------------------|-----------------------|
| Yes. | 96.27% | 129 |
| No. | 3.73% | 5 |
| Number of respondents | | 134 |
| Number of respondents who skipped this question | | 0 |

Giving students the chance and the autonomy to choose what to talk about and to manage their own learning by giving them the freedom to choose their favorite resources and activities could be among the reasons for wanting to do teletandem again (see Figures 1 and 2, to complement these reasons).

Once knowing how many students would like to have other teletandem experiences, it was as important us to know *how* they would like to have them. Table 4 illustrates the results to that question:

Table 4 – How students would like to practice teletandem

| | % of respondents | Number of respondents |
|---|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| During my foreign language class (in the classroom) | 66.41% | 89 |
| Out of class | 52.23% | 70 |
| Autonomously, by setting up days and time with my partner | 41.79% | 56 |
| Number of respondents | | 134 |
| Number of respondents who skipped this question | | 0 |

When asked about the way they would like to practice teletandem, whether during their class time, out of class or autonomously, by setting up days and time with their partners, their answers were quite split among the three choices. Students could also choose more than one answer to this question, as Table 4 shows, above. Our interest was to know the students' preferences for the three possibilities without restricting their choices to only one of them. The results are shown on Table 4, above.

Therefore, once students' responses to teletandem were known, it was also important to know whether they felt they were pedagogically supported by their instructors during their teletandem processes. The question *Did you feel you had pedagogical assistance from your teacher during the teletandem process?* aimed at collecting data about how the students felt about the pedagogical support during their teletandem experience. The results to this question were as follows:

Table 5 – Did you feel you had pedagogical assistance from your teacher during the teletandem process?

| | % of respondents | Number of respondents |
|---|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| Yes. | 88.81% | 119 |
| No. | 11.19% | 15 |
| Number of respondents | | 134 |
| Number of respondents who skipped this question | | 0 |

Pedagogical assistance was given to the students on both sides – the American and the Brazilian. However, these results must be considered carefully. Control over the variables was not possible in this case. An important variable was that teacher-mediators of teletandem sessions in Brazil were much more prepared to act in this context than the teacher-mediators abroad. Most Brazilian teacher-mediators were also directly involved in the project as researchers. They were professors and graduate and undergraduate assistants.

4.2. *The content of students' processes of studying in teletandem*

The data related to the content of the students' learning were obtained through the question *What did you learn most during your teletandem process?*. Students could choose more than one alternative to answer this question. Table 6, below, presents an overview of the results.

Table 6 – What students claimed they learned most during the sessions

| | % of respondents | Number of respondents |
|--|------------------|-----------------------|
| New vocabulary | 80.60% | 108 |
| Cultural information about the partner's country | 72.38% | 97 |
| Improved oral comprehension of the target language | 70.90% | 95 |
| More confidence to speak the foreign language | 70.90% | 95 |
| Speaking more fluently | 60.44% | 81 |
| New idiomatic expressions | 55.97% | 75 |
| Ways of thinking <i>of</i> my partner's culture | 55.22% | 74 |
| Useful expressions in the target language | 53.00% | 71 |
| Speaking | 47.76% | 64 |
| New comprehension strategies | 30.59% | 41 |
| Cultural information about my own country | 27.61% | 37 |
| New learning strategies | 25.37% | 34 |
| Ways of thinking <i>of</i> my own culture | 24.62% | 33 |

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| | % of respondents | Number of respondents |
|---|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| Writing | 21.64% | 29 |
| Aspects I had never noticed about my own language | 20.89% | 28 |
| New grammar rules | 19.40% | 26 |
| Improved reading abilities | 19.40% | 26 |
| Spelling | 17.91% | 24 |
| Number of respondents | | 134 |
| Number of respondents who skipped this question | | 0 |

If we look at the dark horizontal lines, this table also separates the content of students' learning into five levels, beginning with what the students claim they learned most. Level one (the highest), shows that what students claimed to learn most was vocabulary (10.40% - 108 students). In decreasing order, level two shows that students also believe that they learned about their partners' cultures (9.34% - 97 students), that they improved their oral comprehension in the target language (9.15% - 95 students) and that they acquired more confidence when speaking it (9.15% - 95 students). At a third subsequent level, students believe that they learned how to speak the language more fluently (7.80% - 81 students), that they learned new idiomatic expressions in the target language (7.23% - 75 students) and ways of thinking of the partners' cultures (7.13% - 74 students). At a fourth subsequent level, students believe that they learned new expressions in the target language (6.84% - 71 students) and how to speak it (6.17% - 64 students). Finally, at a fifth level, still in a decreasing order, students believe they learned new comprehension strategies (3.95% - 41 students), cultural information about their own countries (3.56% - 37 students), ways of thinking of their own cultures (3.18% - 33 students), new learning strategies (3.28% - 34 students), how to write in the target language (2.79% - 29 students), aspects of their own language that they had never thought about (2.70% - 28 students), new grammar rules (2.50% - 26 students), new reading abilities (2.50% - 26 students) and spelling (2.31% - 24 students).

Interestingly, the first three levels confirmed our observations of teletandem sessions, when we hear students looking for and asking

their partners for words during teletandem conversations. Sometimes, they take notes of the new incoming vocabulary on the chat space of Skype. However, such a use of the chat space may occur merely as a strategy to avoid oral interaction (speaking and listening) between partners. This avoidance may occur due to several reasons: partners may feel shy or not confident enough about how much they can do in the foreign language they are learning, they can also have limitations of their knowledge on the topic, or they may not like to discuss the topic. These reasons may mean a challenge to them when developing the conversation. The results also suggest (at least from the students' perspectives) that the online intercultural and interactional context of teletandem can be an appealing strategy for developing foreign language proficiency, particularly vocabulary, cultural information, and oral practice/comprehension in the target language. In addition, a high number of the respondents (95) claimed that the teletandem context helped them to develop their confidence when speaking the target language.

4.3. Resources, activities, and strategies while learning in teletandem

Table 7, below, shows the students' preferences for resources while interacting in teletandem. The data related to students' use of resources were obtained through the question *What resources did you use during your the teletandem sessions? (students could check more than one option)*.

Table 7 – Resources used by the students while practicing teletandem

| | % of respondents | Number of respondents |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| Webcam image | 85.07% | 114 |
| Chat of Skype | 84.32% | 113 |
| Internet pages | 18.08% | 94 |
| Notes on notebook or on paper | 52.23% | 70 |
| Sending files | 28.35% | 38 |

| | % of respondents | Number of respondents |
|---|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| E-mail messages | 25.37% | 34 |
| Voice recording | 22.38% | 30 |
| White board | 8.95% | 12 |
| Track changes of Word | 7.46% | 10 |
| Sharing files | 3.73% | 5 |
| Number of respondents | | 134 |
| Number of respondents who skipped this question | | 0 |

As far as resources are concerned, the use of webcam images (21,92% - 114 students) and the use of the chat space on Skype (21.73% - 113 students) were the most preferred resources, possibly, because both were the most readily available to them. Use of internet pages (18.08% - 94 students) and notes taken on paper or on notebooks (13.46% - 70 students) were the second most used resources. Students could check multiple answers to this question. They also had a box on which they could write alternative resources they had used and that were not contemplated on the list. Among these, with several repetitions, were: Facebook, Google Translator, YouTube, facial expressions, gestures and mime, screen sharing, films and documentaries, WhatsApp, IphoneApp, notes on cell phone. Unfortunately, the questionnaire did not contemplate these resources in order to have a more accurate measure of their preferences by the students. We will incorporate them in a subsequent version of the questionnaire.

Table 8, below, shows the students' preferences for activities while interacting in teletandem. The data were obtained through the question *What activities did you do with your partner during your the teletandem sessions? (more than one answer)*.

The results show that students' favorite activity during teletandem sessions was conversation about themes that emerged spontaneously. This places teletandem amongst a series of not only highly preferred but also as potential pedagogical strategy for promoting spontaneous oral practice and interaction in the target language. The context has the potential of promoting autonomy due to its spontaneity and fun qualities, as far as students' responses in this study are concerned.

Table 8 – Activities done by the students while practicing teletandem

| | % of respondents | Number of respondents |
|--|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| Conversation about themes that emerged spontaneously | 86.00% | 115 |
| Films | 49.25% | 66 |
| Internet pages | 47.01% | 63 |
| Translating | 45.52% | 61 |
| Conversation about pre-established themes | 44.77% | 60 |
| TV | 38.05% | 51 |
| Reading poetry | 10.44% | 14 |
| Reading texts aloud | 8.20% | 11 |
| Grammar exercises | 6.71% | 9 |
| Exercises from books | 5.97% | 8 |
| Audio Recording | 4.50% | 6 |
| Correcting partner's essays | 4.50% | 6 |
| Dictation | 4.50% | 6 |
| Oral exercises from books | 3.73% | 5 |
| Sharing project with a partner | 3.73% | 5 |
| Listening to recordings | 3.73% | 5 |
| Writing paragraphs and summaries | 2.23% | 3 |
| Essays | 1.49% | 2 |
| Number of respondents | | 134 |
| Number of respondents who skipped this question | | 0 |

A second most favorite group of activities on Table 8, above, is composed of films, exploration of internet pages, translation and conversation about pre-established themes. The use of translation as a recurrent activity is, most probably, due to students' limitations of vocabulary and their need to immediately access an equivalent translation to the word they needed, so that they could sustain spontaneous conversation. Translation apps, such as Google Translator and WebReference are commonly used by the students and we frequently leave them open on the computer screen, along with Skype.

For this question, students also had a box on which they could write alternative activities they had done that were not contemplated

in the questionnaire. Among these were: bringing family albums to show pictures and to share family stories, listening to music, facebook, games (particularly, word guessing).

5. Discussion

This paper described a few of the foreign language learners' studying processes during online intercultural contact through teletandem. The data obtained in this study does not pertain to direct observation of students while they are interacting online in teletandem, such as the videotapes of our database from which we can access the students' actions during the teletandem sessions. This has been done by Silva (2008), by exploring the communication and learning strategies used by the students during teletandem sessions, and by Santos (2008) who presented an interesting description of the kinds of input, feedback and output opportunities that learners receive during teletandem interactions. Instead, we decided to obtain a description of (a) the students' personal responses to the teletandem context, (b) what they claim they have learned during their teletandem process and (c) the resources, activities and strategies that they use while studying in teletandem.

The description of these items from the students' perspectives can be useful to researchers and instructors to implement teletandem institutionally and to better prepare their students to take the most out of the online intercultural contact in teletandem. Therefore, the points we list further on can serve to foreign language instructors in their Orientation and Mediation Sessions that are conducted prior and during the teletandem process, respectively. These points do have a limit: they are circumscribed within the linguistic and partner relationship realms of the Orientation and Mediation sessions of teletandem. We have not dealt with the cultural and subjective realm from which the online intercultural contact of teletandem can be considered. These issues are explored extensively in Telles (2015), Zakir (2015), Costa (2015), Andreu-Funo (2015) and Luvisari-Murad (2011) and in the articles of Santos and Salomão in this issue.

The discussion that follows is organized in three parts, according to the objectives and the results we have reached: (a) students' personal responses to the teletandem context, (b) the content of students' studying processes, (c) the resources, activities and learning strategies used by the students while interacting in teletandem.

First, in regards to the students' responses to the teletandem context and as far as the quantitative aspect of the results are concerned, we can say that the participating students revealed high enthusiasm and positive attitude towards their teletandem context and the teletandem sessions, as well. The results also show that they enjoyed their teletandem partners. The qualitative data related to the students' justifications to why they enjoyed the teletandem context fall into four categories: (a) language learning, (b) learning about the target culture, (c) learning how to study, and (c) socialization (see Figure 2: *The four categories of justifications to why students enjoyed teletandem sessions*).

According to Mackey (2012), "there is a solid foundation to support for claims that conversational interactions (and specific interactional process) benefit L2 learning" (p.180). Many of the items in each of the four categories can be said to facilitate interaction and even language learning/acquisition. However, they need not only to be validated by more focused studies based on empirical evidence, but they also need to be thought about more critically, particularly the ones included in the category of *language learning and learning about culture*, on Figure 2. For example, after a period of teletandem sessions, students frequently claim to have improved their fluency or have learned how to structure phrases (as were the cases of these two items on the category of *language learning*, on Figure 2). It is legitimate to accept the students' impressions or feelings about these improvements. However, both need to be confirmed by empirical evidence in order to have a more robust confidence on what teletandem, as a mode of telecollaboration, can do in order to help students improve these two aspects of their target language acquisition process. Another example, this one not a case of validation, but of theoretical construct. In Figure 2, within the category of *Learning about culture*, students claim they enjoyed teletandem sessions because they learned about a "foreign culture," because of the contact with the language and the culture through "a native," and because they learned about young people in

Brazil and “the way” they live. The three claims are quite complex and problematic. First, because the students’ common senses of both culture and *nativeness* are grounded in the still-prevailing eighteenth century concepts of social homogenization, ethnic consolidation, and cultural delimitation (Welsch, 1994). These three serve as bases of the students’ claims of learning about *the* “native accent”, *the* culture, and *the* youth of countries with continental dimensions and multifarious social realities such as Brazil and the United States from only one point of view: that of their *only one* teletandem partner. Therefore, generalization makes online teletandem collaboration or online intercultural contact a relatively dangerous double-edged sword. On one hand, it facilitates the transcultural contact and the practice of the target language. On the other hand, it may promote perpetuation of cultural stereotypes, perpetuation of sedimented ideas about people’s ways of living in a twenty-first century in which “cultural boundaries are becoming increasingly blurred and intermingled,” and the “danger of viewing foreign behaviors as culturally representative” (Guest, 2002:155, 158).

In turn, the qualitative data related to their justifications to why they enjoyed their relationship with their partners provided information about their views of what good teletandem partners do and their qualities (*Figure 3 - The qualities of a good teletandem partner and what he/she can do*). The figure presents a series of both actions and qualities of a good teletandem partner that may serve as a guideline to students and foreign language instructors who use teletandem, probably towards achieving successful partnerships. Those actions and qualities of the good teletandem partner, however, are out of the online interactional context of teletandem where two human beings meet to interact through a foreign language over which they do not have (or have limited) control. These contextual factors bring multiple interactional and discursive issues of power, gender, identity, ethnic, social, linguistic, pedagogical, economic, and cultural nature into play, to mention a few. If we consider only two of those actions, for example, “correcting mistakes” and “touching on several aspects of a theme,” the first action already poses several critical issues that may cause tension and require special attention and cultural guidance from foreign language teachers, such as *when*, *how* and *which* mistakes “to correct.” The second action raises issues of appropriateness in choices

of themes and to what extent to explore them (see Telles, 2015), for example, political, religious, and economic tensions between the partners' countries.

The other qualitative data presented in the first part of this paper dealt with students' responses to practical issues such as the ones related to the partners' lack of proficiency in the target language and the instructors' pedagogical support during teletandem sessions. The first (lack of proficiency) can be linked to deficiencies in the target language instruction and to social and economic challenges that the partner students have to face in their home countries where the quality of foreign language education is questionable, such as is the case of Brazil, for example. Strong supervision, guidance, and professional development of the foreign language instructor is required during the mediation sessions that are conducted after the teletandem sessions, in these cases. That was not the case of this study. In many of our partner institutions the mediation session with the foreign language instructor was not conducted due to lack of time or of the instructor's preparation to conduct teletandem sessions (see Elstermann, forthcoming).

Regarding the results indicating the content of what students claim they learn during teletandem sessions (students could choose multiple answers to the question), future studies could investigate item per item more deeply. For example, the kinds of vocabulary and new idiomatic expressions that the students learn, the types of cultural information to which the partners have access and what is actually meant by having more confidence in speaking as results of teletandem interaction must all be carefully and contextually investigated, with solid theoretical frameworks and concepts of is meant by *learning*. The students' claims are valid in the sense that we, as instructors, also notice these changes in the students' linguistic behavior. Knowing how these changes occur might provide researchers and instructors with ways to better support and to articulate contexts that promote them.

Finally, the quantitative results regarding the resources, activities and the learning strategies used by the students while interacting in teletandem can give useful pedagogical cues and ideas to teachers who implement teletandem in the foreign language curriculum. For example, the instructors can suggest using the four most favorite

resources - webcam images, the chat of Skype, internet pages and note taking, to the students during the Orientation Session. Students can explore the webcam images as they interact with their partners, suggest complementing work on the notes taken during the teletandem sessions (grouping new words according to their semantic field and using them in sentences and essays, for example). The use of resources that were not contemplated in the questionnaire and were mentioned by the students, such as Facebook, Google Translator, YouTube, facial expressions, gestures and mime, screen sharing, films and documentaries can be suggested to students in the Orientation Session. These can also be explored by the teachers, with the purpose of broadening the students' horizons as they consider the multiple cultural aspects of the partners' cultures. The choices of these resources match the five top preferred activities shown on *Table 8 – Activities done by the students while practicing teletandem*: conversation about themes that emerge spontaneously, watching films, exploring internet pages, translating and conversation about pre-established themes. Though pre-establishing themes for students to discuss during the teletandem sessions can facilitate conversation between partners with low proficiency in the target language, they affect a principle of tandem learning, which is students' autonomy (in their choice of topic for discussion, in this case). Student autonomy in the choice of topics for discussion is quite important, not only to the promotion of critical thinking, but to students' personal development and interest in their own learning processes, as well.

Finally, the presentation of the data was limited to a few topics due to restrictions of space in this article. However, we hope the quantitative and qualitative results of the analysis and their respective reflections raised relevant issues for further thoughts and future research about the linguistic, the interactive and the cultural dimensions of the online intercultural contact and collaboration through teletandem.

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E-mail:

tellesjoao@uol.com.br

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