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Enjoyment as a key to success? Links between e-tandem language learning and tertiary students' foreign language enjoyment

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Abstract

This paper reports on crossing borders virtually via an e-Tandem scheme and presents the findings of a study, in which students of English from an Austrian university were paired with students of German from the UK and the USA. Drawing on data from 19 in-depth interviews, the study aims to identify links between e-Tandem language learning and foreign language enjoyment (FLE) (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014, 2016). A category-based qualitative text analysis (Kuckartz, 2014) revealed that a majority of the interviewees felt e-Tandem language learning contributed to their FLE. Furthermore, a range of reasons underlying students' perceived enjoyment of learning a language in Tandem emerged: having authentic conversations in the target language with L1 (first language) users (Dewaele, 2018), perceiving each other as cultural mediators and a difference from language classroom contexts on the level of power relations, which made students feel more at ease. Helping each other, receiving one-on-one feedback and perceiving improvement in their linguistic mastery were furthermore mentioned as factors they felt boosted their enjoyment and so was developing friendships with L1 users. According to the interviewees, these aspects specifically increased their interest and enjoyment in using and

learning the language and their eudaimonic happiness. The findings demonstrate that e-Tandem language learning can be a resource to enhance perceived enjoyment in foreign language learners at tertiary level and they illustrate that social and private components of FLE seem to be interlinked.

Keywords: foreign language enjoyment; individual differences; LX user; positive psychology in SLA; tandem language learning

1. Introduction

Emotions had been neglected in SLA (second language acquisition) research for a long time, partly due to the false assumption of cognition being uninfluenced by emotion but also due to their complexity (Resnik, 2018) which makes researching them a challenging endeavor. Emotions were, consequently, frequently “the elephants in the room – poorly studied, poorly understood, seen as inferior to rational thought” (Swain, 2013, p. 205). With the introduction of positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) to SLA research (e.g., MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012a, 2012b; MacIntyre & Mercer, 2014), a new leaf was turned over in the field’s emotion research. Despite an awareness among language educators that, for instance, establishing positive classroom environments and developing and maintaining students’ motivation and positive emotions are crucial in fostering learning progress, research on the role of positive emotions in FLL (foreign language learning) had remained scarce for a long time (MacIntyre & Mercer, 2014). Formerly, SLA researchers mostly focused on the role of negative emotions in the learning process, with foreign language anxiety (FLA) being among the most widely studied concepts (e.g., Dewaele, 2007, 2010; Gkonou, Daubney, & Dewaele, 2017; Gregersen, MacIntyre, & Olsen, 2017; Horwitz, 1986, 2000; MacIntyre, 2002).

The interest “in positive psychological states” (Csikszentmihalyi, 2006, p. 3), shared by proponents of the movement, is of great relevance to FLL as “positive and negative are not opposite ends of the same spectrum” (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012b, p. 193). For example, experiencing FLE in the classroom (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014) does not necessarily imply a complete lack of foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA). Positive psychologists therefore stress the need for investigating positive emotions too for their different powers and influences on the language learner (MacIntyre & Mercer, 2014; MacIntyre, Gregersen, & Mercer, 2016).

The present paper follows this trend by investigating the links between FLE and e-Tandem language learning, where two speakers of different L1s (first languages) mutually support each other in the process of learning the target language

(TL), making use of digital media (e.g., Skype). It sheds light on how such an e-Tandem scheme can be used to complement university courses in higher education.

The paper is structured as follows: After explaining the concept of e-Tandem language learning, elaborating on its benefits and providing the reader with an overview of previous research in the field, FLE is explained in greater detail. This is followed by a description of the project design, the presentation of the research questions, the methodology used and the participants. Afterwards, the results of the category-based qualitative content analysis (Kuckartz, 2014) are presented, which are then discussed in light of the literature review. Finally, the results will be summarized and ramifications will be addressed.

2. Literature review

2.1. E-tandem language learning

E-Tandem language learning, frequently described as online collaboration or telcollaboration, refers to a more specific form of the latter (El-Hariri, 2016) and is based on the core principles of learning in Tandem, namely, reciprocity and autonomy. Reciprocity encompasses both Tandem partners' commitment to their own and their partner's learning (Little, 1999a), while autonomy refers to both partners' ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning, which presupposes a degree of metacognitive awareness and metalinguistic knowledge (Little, 1996). Our approach is inspired by Little's and Dam's concept of learner autonomy (e.g., Dam, 1995; Little, 2013). Both consider learning a social phenomenon rooted in collaboration and believe autonomy induces the most effective way of learning, making e-Tandem language learning the perfect arena for improving these skills in learners. Whereas a certain extent of autonomy is a precondition for Tandem language learning, it ideally also develops further in the course of interaction between the partners.

Little (1999a) suggests three hypothetical benefits of learning in Tandem: participants actively communicate in their TL, interaction has a sharper focus on both the participants' interests and needs than usual, and partners are equally committed to their role not only of learner but also of supportive proficient speaker. Furthermore, comprehension and production skills can be improved by means of authentic communication, while cooperativeness, tolerance, and apprehension can also be advanced (Steinmüller, 1991). Not only can L1 users provide otherwise inaccessible insights into their language and culture but they can also help overcome possible communication problems (Little, 1999a).

The past twenty years have seen rapid advances in the field of online collaboration and its more specific form, e-Tandem language learning, and a number

of researchers have investigated the effects of learning a language through an e-Tandem exchange scheme on learner autonomy (e.g., Little, 2001, 2016; Schwienhorst, 2003). Other studies focused on peer feedback within e-Tandem settings (e.g., Fondo Garcia & Appel, 2016; Sotillo, 2005; Ware & O'Dowd, 2008), task design (e.g., Fondo Garcia & Appel, 2016), and the advantages of telecollaboration as preparation for study abroad programs (e.g., Kinginger, 2016). Its opportunities for fostering intercultural learning and cross-cultural communication (e.g., Hedderich, 1996; Jin & Erben, 2007; O'Dowd, 2003, 2013; Ware & Kramsch, 2005) have been widely researched too and so have been learners' perspectives on e-Tandem learning (e.g., El-Hariri, 2016; Tian & Wang, 2010). It has also been approached with a social-interactive view of autonomy based on Vygotsky's perspective of sociocultural theory (e.g., Schwienhorst, 2003; Sung & Poole, 2017), and the affective dimension of e-Tandem language learning was also discussed in papers with a focus on motivation (e.g., Appel & Gilabert, 2002; Little, 2006; Turula, 2017; Ushioda, 2000); however, to our knowledge, no studies to date have investigated the links between learning through such an exchange scheme and FLE (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014, 2016), which is the focus of our study.

2.2. Foreign language enjoyment

According to Fredrickson (2001, 2013), experiencing positive emotion plays an important role in humans' flourishing. In her *broaden-and-build theory* of positive emotions, she explains that "certain discrete positive emotions – including joy, interest, contentment, pride and love – . . . share the ability to broaden people's momentary thought-action repertoires and build their enduring personal resources, ranging from physical and intellectual resources to social and psychological resources" (Fredrickson, 2001, p. 219). The experience of positive emotions often does not last long, but it can have long-term effects. They "do more than simply feel good in the present" (Fredrickson, 2003, p. 335). Positive emotions broaden our mindsets and, for instance, possibly spark new ideas or actions; they might promote social bonds, "undo lingering negative emotions" (Rahimi & Askari Bigdeli, 2014, p. 797) and contribute to our well-being (Fredrickson, 2004). MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012b, p. 198) conclude from Fredrickson's theory that, "it seems best to conceptualize emotion along two separate dimensions, positive-broadening and negative-narrowing" as they fulfil different functions (Fredrickson, 2003). While negative emotions usually hinder progress, positive emotions often boost it. Such a conceptualization helps explain both ambivalent emotions and the fact that the presence of the experience of a negative emotion does not necessarily imply the lack of experience of positive emotion or vice versa (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012b). Recent research in SLA has

built on the newly gained insights and a number of studies have taken a holistic approach to investigating the psychology of foreign language learners, taking both negative and positive emotions into account (see e.g., Boudreau, MacIntyre, & Dewaele, 2018; Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Dewaele, MacIntyre, Boudreau, & Dewaele, 2016; Dewaele, Witney, Saito, & Dewaele, 2017).

As “positive emotions are still under-researched” (Pavelescu & Petrić, 2018, p. 74), the present paper aims to contribute to our understanding of foreign language enjoyment (FLE) (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) have recently drawn attention to its role in SLA. They define enjoyment “as a complex emotion, capturing interacting components of challenge and perceived ability that reflect the human drive for success in the face of a difficult task” (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016, p. 216). Thus, enjoyment is more than just taking pleasure in something as it is linked to personal investment, to accomplishing something relevant. Dewaele and MacIntyre (2016) concluded from their analysis of 1742 multilinguals’ FLCA and FLE ratings that FLE is composed of social and private components. While the former are linked to the setting as such (e.g., classroom atmosphere) and people one interacts with (teachers and peers), the latter are linked to personal feelings and reactions to the learning process (e.g., FLL being fun, enjoyable, having learned interesting things or having accomplished something). Their research showed that FLCA and FLE were negatively correlated (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014) and they too stress that both should be seen as separate dimensions (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016; see also Boudreau et al., 2018), supporting MacIntyre and Gregersen’s (2012b) suggestion mentioned above. Further analyses (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014) showed that learners overall tend to report higher FLE scores than FLCA scores, that FLE scores tend to increase with the overall number of languages known and that they are linked to FL mastery. Students’ self-perception in relation to the group of FL learners was, furthermore, influential: the higher they perceived themselves hierarchically in the group, the higher their FLE ratings were. A steady increase in FLE ratings was furthermore observable according to their level of education. Additionally, older learners reported higher FLE scores than younger learners and gender showed to be influential too: females scored higher than males. This trend was also confirmed when reanalyzing the data at item level (Dewaele et al., 2016): females reported having more fun in the FL classroom, were prouder of their accomplishments and agreed with learning interesting things more than male participants. The authors also identified gender-based differences in FLCA scores, making them conclude that “positive and negative emotions indeed are mixing in language classrooms” (Dewaele et al., 2016, p. 57). A recent study by Dewaele and Alfawzan (2018), with participants from UK secondary schools and Saudi universities, that is, very different contexts,

demonstrated that FLE had a slightly stronger effect than FLCA on performance in both contexts. Their qualitative analyses additionally highlighted the important role of learners' perceptions of their teachers and their teaching practices. Dewaele et al. (2017) have also shown that teaching practices are highly influential and can have a positive impact on FLE.

Learning another language is an emotional as well as cognitive process (Pavelescu & Petrić, 2018, p. 74). Given the insight that "more frequent L2 use with positive emotions directly impacts acquisition" (Saito, Dewaele, Abe, & In'nami, 2018, p. 1), it is imperative for foreign language teachers to focus on enhancing students' positive emotions to maximize their language learning experience (De Smet, Mettwie, Galand, Hilingsmann, & Van Mensel, 2018). Therefore, the study included in the present paper aims to advance our understanding of why e-Tandem schemes could be a resource that produces perceived enjoyment in foreign language learners when using them to complement language classes in higher education.

3. Project design

Students studying English at degree level at an Austrian university and students of German at UK and US universities were invited to participate in the e-Tandem scheme. The idea was to pair students sharing a similar discipline and, thus, similar interests and a shared passion for studying foreign languages, to keep problems that might arise due to living in different learning contexts and environments (Schwienhorst, 2003), such as diverging learning aims and outcomes, at a minimum. Furthermore, their shared background as modern languages students widens the range of opportunities for them, such as the possibility to compare technical terminology (St John, 1996), or the difference between studying in Austria, in the UK, and in the USA.

Participants were contacted via e-mail or in class and provided with a detailed handout on our approach to e-Tandem language learning as such, including its benefits, learner autonomy and its importance in FLL. Those students who decided to participate were asked to join a Facebook group that was set up for our e-Tandem scheme. Facebook was used for various reasons: it facilitates synchronous communication, it is an integral part of most students' daily life, its events function allows for an engaging presentation of tasks, and it can serve as a platform to get to know each other as friends, thus reducing the risk of trivialising the e-Tandem partnership (Schwienhorst, 2003) as a result of perceiving each other as pen-friends. Via Facebook messenger, the participants were introduced to their Tandem partners and then they were sent weekly invitations to organize Skype or WhatsApp meetings and discuss a range of topics, such as themselves as language learners, their expectations of their Tandem partners, studying in their countries, (popular) culture or

the media coverage of current political debates, such as Brexit. After the first five weeks, participants were expected to have developed the skills needed to continue on their own and only received two more reminders to arrange meetings.

4. Description of the study

4.1. Research questions

To investigate links between e-Tandem language learning and FLE, this paper will examine the following research questions:

1. What do students enrolled in language degrees at tertiary level enjoy about e-Tandem language learning when used to complement LX (foreign language) classes in higher education?
2. What lessons can be taken for use in other teaching and learning contexts?

4.2. Data collection and methodology

Six months into the project, the students participating in the e-Tandem scheme were contacted via e-mail by our research assistant and asked whether they were willing to give an interview to share their experiences. Out of the 104 participants who had participated in the project at that time, 19 students agreed to be interviewed. Thus, it needs to be highlighted at this point that the interviewees were self-selected and it could be the case that students whose Tandem experience was a highly positive one were more likely to volunteer. Still, this does not diminish the importance of the insights provided by them as to if and what they enjoyed about e-Tandem language learning.

The aim of the in-depth interviews was to provide an emic perspective (Pike, 1954) by letting students explain their thoughts in their own voice (Dewaele, 2015; Dewaele et al., 2016). This is considered crucial as, according to Feldman-Barret (2006, p. 24), “verbal report, even with all of its failings, may be the only means of assessing the experience of emotion. If we want to know whether a person is experiencing an emotion, we have to ask them.”

Despite an awareness of research having shown that multilinguals tend to perceive and verbalise emotions differently in the different languages (e.g., Dewaele, 2010; Resnik, 2018), all interviews were conducted in English even though participants could choose the language of preference themselves. The interviews included general questions on: (1) students’ language learning history, (2) their experience with e-Tandem language learning, and more precise questions on (3) their perceived language enjoyment, (4) their experience with autonomous

learning, and (5) the role of anxiety in their language learning experience. These were followed by specific questions on (6) the most enjoyable aspect of e-Tandem language learning, (7) suggestions for improvement of the scheme, (8) the then current frequency of meetings, and (9) whether they had visited their Tandem partner or intended to do so. The interviews were recorded digitally and then transcribed, amounting to a corpus of 73,850 words.

Kuckartz's (2014) thematic qualitative text analysis was chosen as an analytic framework, and categories were formed deductively and inductively, employing MAXQDA2018 (VERBI Software, 2018) for the process of coding. This means, based on the research questions, main topical categories were developed deductively for links between Tandem language learning and FLE before data were collected (perceived positive effect on FLE; no perceived effect on FLE, perceived negative effect on FLE). Initially, 20% of the data were assigned to the main categories by both researchers, which, according to Kuckartz (2014, p. 72), should be sufficient for a first test of "the applicability of the topics and categories." After having established the applicability, all of the data was coded by both researchers using the main categories in a next step. Both coders first analyzed the data independently and then convened to discuss their codings and find a "consensus regarding the most appropriate coding" (Kuckartz, 2014, p. 74). During this phase of the coding process, it became clear that none of the data could be assigned to the third main category (perceived negative effect on FLE), while most of the data was assigned to the first main category (perceived positive effect on FLE). Therefore, it was decided to establish refined sub-categories for the main category "perceived positive effect on FLE" only. Rather than deriving them based on hypothesis or theories (Kuckartz, 2014), the sub-categories were then constructed inductively based solely on the empirical data to provide an undistorted account of the interviewees' utterances. Thus, the data were analyzed exploratively with no preconceptions (Mercer, 2011) and the following categories were formed via "feedback loops" (Mayring, 2000, p. 3): authentic communication; cultural mediation; being at ease; developing friendships with L1 users; supporting others; improvement; motivation; practice and feedback. As mentioned above, the data were examined by means of a category-based qualitative analysis (Kuckartz, 2014), as it allowed "to preserve some methodological strengths of quantitative content analysis (such as a quantification of the findings) and widen them to a concept of qualitative procedure" (Mayring, 2000, p. 1).

The project and related research tools obtained ethical approval from the Social Sciences, Humanities and Law Research Ethics Subcommittees at King's College London. It was considered to be of minimal ethical risk, despite some of the interviewees having been students in some of the researchers' modules, as participation was voluntary and interview data was anonymized. Additionally, students were contacted by and communicated with a research assistant, who

had received training in how to conduct the interviews by one of the researchers. This way of organizing and conducting the interviews should help avoid students' feeling obliged to participate and should give space for honest answers. Additionally, students received a detailed information sheet, were asked to sign a consent form and were informed about the possibility to withdraw from the study within 2 weeks after having given the interview.

4.3. Participants

The interviewees were 19 students, 9 of whom were studying English and 10 of them German at tertiary level; they all participated in the e-Tandem scheme between Austrian, UK and US universities in spring or autumn 2017. Their age ranged from a minimum of 20 to a maximum of 32 years, the mean age being 22.47 ($SD = 2.80$). Female participants ($N = 13$) outnumbered the male ones ($N = 6$), which reflects females' great interest in language-related jobs (Wilson & Dewaele, 2010) and, consequently, language degrees, but also the proportion of female and male students studying German at AS- or A-level/studying languages at degree level in the UK (Office for Standards in Education [Ofsted], 2015; Universities and Colleges Admissions Service [UCAS], 2017) and of students pursuing a humanities degree in Austria (Unit for Reporting and Analysis of the Austrian University, personal conversation).

On a scale from 1 to 5 in the different skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing), the interviewees rated their proficiency in the target language as relatively high. The Austrian students' overall self-perceived proficiency amounted to an average of 15.58 (min. = 14.00, max. = 16.75, $SD = .92$), while the students of German in most cases perceived their target language mastery as lower, the average being 13.08 (min. = 9.75, max. = 17.50, $SD = 2.35$). This divergence can partly be explained by the German language students' later onset of acquisition of the target language. Despite studies demonstrating that the sooner does not necessarily equal the better (see, e.g., Pfenninger & Singleton, 2017), in this case, the amount of exposure to the language was also considerably lower for the German as a foreign language (GFL) students, which is also partly reflected in their self-reported current use. While all English as a foreign language (EFL) students reported using English several hours a day, half of those studying German ($N = 5$) explained they used the language less often than on a daily basis.

5. Results

After answering questions on their language learning history, respondents were asked to indicate their self-perceived overall FLE. A majority of students ($N = 10$)

stated they felt their FLE was very high, 6 students perceived it to be high, while 3 rated it to be medium. In their accounts of the impact of e-Tandem language learning, 16 students mentioned they felt that the Tandem scheme had a positive effect on their own FLE; Ying (32, TL German), for instance, explains it as follows:

It's a good experience, like every week, like sometimes I call my language partner because I have some questions and I ask her or just a normal chat to catch up with what's going on in her life and sometimes she calls me 'I need to talk to her now, in German!'. It's really nice knowing that somebody's thinking about you and they will also help you. Yeah, you feel really nice, definitely.

Three students reported no self-perceived impact on their FLE due to not communicating regularly or their FLE being perceived so high they thought it could not possibly be increased any further. One of them (Rich, 21, TL German), for instance, expanded on it as follows: "I already really, I really enjoyed learning German and like speaking German, so, it [the e-Tandem scheme] didn't stop me from enjoying German [laughing]." All interviewees were convinced that e-Tandem language learning can generally foster FLE though. Emma's (24, TL English) comment on why she thinks it can increase FLE summarizes their explanations quite nicely: "Yeah, I think so, yeah, cause whenever we talk to people it's nice. Em, cause, that's what kind of makes life colorful [laughing]. Em, and of course it's em, yeah, it helps, it helps."

Ben (20, TL German) too explained that he is convinced of e-Tandem language learning bearing the potential of boosting learners' FLE at tertiary level because he, for example, feels understood by his tandem partner, with whom he has much in common:

I definitely think so. Em, just because you speak to someone, who learns, someone of your own age . . . , they understand how difficult it is, because sometimes when you speak to some older Germans who, I don't know. They might have learned French or something and they didn't speak any English and they're quite harsh when they just think 'He isn't German, he has some problems to learn German.' Yeah actually I am, but they are not trying to help me at all.

None of those interviewed reported perceiving a negative effect on their own FLE, and the small number of interview extracts assigned to the category "no perceived effect on FLE" are summarized in the figure above. Indeed, most interviewees ($N = 16$) highlighted perceiving a positive effect of e-Tandem language learning and a range of explanations as to why they felt the Tandem scheme has increased their own FLE or general statements on its potential to increase FLE were elicited. Thus, most of the data gathered were assigned to the

category “perceived positive effect on FLE,” the sub-categories of which are presented in the following subsections.

5.1. Authentic communication

The fact that e-Tandem learning provides a platform to interact with an L1 speaker in an authentic way was particularly prominent in the dataset and the majority of the 19 interviewees ($N = 16$) linked it to a perceived increase in their level of FLE. Jana (21, TL English), for instance, reported: “because, em, the students [. . .] are exposed to authentic language input. And they can finally see *why* they are learning the language, in which ways it can be useful. They can really see how it is used in real life.” Lena (25, TL English) felt that the possibility to both apply and test her language skills with an L1 user had increased her enjoyment of learning the language: “It always makes learning a foreign language more enjoyable if you know people who speak that language and that you can test your skills with [laughing].” She continues explaining “then you see . . . you’ve learned this language . . . if you can *really* communicate with people.”

In this context, most participants ($N = 13$) mentioned that successful authentic communication with L1 users provided reassurance and gave them confidence. Gil (21, TL German), for example, concluded “there is no better way to realize that your hard work is paying off and you are now speaking with someone who is a native speaker of the language.”

5.2. Cultural mediation

Another recurrent theme in the interviews was a sense that cultural mediation has had a positive impact on students’ language enjoyment. Almost two thirds of those interviewed ($N = 12$) stated that they felt gaining first-hand insight into the TL culture boosted their FLE. Tom (24, TL German), for instance, said: “I think it’s great having a very different window into the language and the culture of the partner – in a way that you don’t get anywhere else.”

Interestingly, many interviewees established a link between becoming friends with someone perceived as an “ambassador” of the target culture, a perceived increase in motivation and in enjoyment. Ellie (20, TL German) comments:

It was a big help for speaking and to sort of learning about cultural differences and it really increased your motivation as a result of getting to know the other person and becoming friends with them and being able to talk to them I would say.

Students also appreciated the possibility to receive first-hand information on differences between the university systems. Rich (21, TL German), for instance, said: “it was really good to hear . . . how the uni system works” and it provided an opportunity to gain insights he would otherwise never have had access to.

Others also indicated gaining a deeper understanding of political events and people’s perception of these in the target culture (e.g., Brexit) as a booster of enjoyment:

It was cool . . . to just have someone to talk English to next to my studies and, in particular someone who’s in the country and can tell me about, ehm, like has first-hand information about different topics, like political issues in the country or can explain his [their] perspective on what’s happening in the country as well. (Jana, 21, TL English)

5.3. Being at ease

Just over half of the interviewees ($N = 10$) reported feeling at ease when speaking with their Tandem partners and they stated that less pressure than in the classroom made them enjoy the language more. For example, Emma (24, TL English) commented:

I felt relaxed and I enjoyed talking. I didn’t think a lot about error-making or anything like that . . . And it wasn’t a situation where there was somebody judging you, but a person who just also wants to improve their language skills.

Joana (23, TL German) also highlighted that she felt the change of context made her enjoy speaking the TL more and she perceived it as “a bigger help and a more enjoyable help as well because it’s not something that you perceive strictly as purely academic, but it’s something that makes you feel like you’re at ease.”

5.4. Developing friendships with L1 users

While more than three quarters of the interviewees ($N = 14$) had visited each other or were intending to do so, almost half of them ($N = 9$) said the e-Tandem scheme led to new friendships, which they felt boosted their FLE. Joana (23, TL German) had met her Tandem partner various times both in Austria and the UK, and according to her, one of the main advantages of the scheme is the option to get “to know more persons that later in life could actually turn out to be friends that you’re gonna have for life. So it’s nice . . . the whole thing has actually been a new discovery of a new person.” For Ying (32, TL German), too, the newly gained friend who is an L1 user of the TL was crucial: “I think the most amazing part is we became friends, like not just language partners, or tutors. It’s a friendship. That really makes me happy.” Rich (21, TL German) highlights that forming friendships in another language is usually difficult, and

that the e-Tandem scheme helped in this regard: "It's like you don't have to worry to make a friend in German, because the program has made a friend for you."

5.5. Self-perceived improvement

Approximately a quarter of those interviewed ($N = 5$) mentioned they felt making progress on the level of language competence due to regular meetings with their e-Tandem partners contributed to their FLE. When, for instance, Emma (25, TL English) talks about how she felt when she attended a module on phonetics and oral communication skills, she comments: "I thought my pronunciation was awful and I, I didn't enjoy talking a lot and I kind of didn't feel confident talking in class. . . . But . . . the Tandem thingy helped there a lot." Self-perceived improvement as a perceived enjoyment booster was, mostly, linked to pronunciation ($N = 4$). Maria (21, TL English) mentioned in this context:

There are always some words which are really hard for you, and my partner and I just did one session where we just . . . pronounced some words . . . in like half an hour German and English and yeah it just like [laughing] really helped. She said it 10 times, and then I said it again. Yeah, it was really helpful [laughing]. And, I think I improved.

5.6. Receiving feedback and helping each other

According to four interviewees, receiving feedback from L1 users was among the most enjoyable aspects of participating in the project. For example, Pablo (20, TL German) reported sometimes speaking the TL with his fellow students to practice but he feels whenever he is corrected by his Tandem partner, he knows "for a fact that for the most part it's correct . . . because it comes from a native speaker. Unlike with some of my fellow students, when we practice we are not too sure." Another prevalent notion in five interviews was the perceived joy brought about by mutual support in the learning process; although some of these students mentioned they enjoyed receiving feedback, the ability to provide support seemed decisive. This is nicely illustrated in Jana's (21, TL English) example:

Yeah, also helping one another. Because he moved to Berlin two months ago and he sent me many forms he had to fill out for his housing, for the contract or at university, when he had to register for the courses and for me it was the same thing because I couldn't find accommodation when I was in, on a small island in Scotland, and he helped me and phoned friends.

Being in a similar situation was perceived in a positive way too, as mentioned by Elisabeth (22, TL English): "It helps if you see that the other person is not that proficient as well and you can support . . . and help each other." In her case, this is clearly also linked to feeling at ease.

6. Discussion

The findings from the category-based qualitative content analysis of 19 interviews indicate perceived positive links between e-Tandem language learning and foreign language enjoyment (FLE). The vast majority of students ($N = 16$) mentioned they felt a boost in their FLE due to participating in the e-Tandem scheme. Two interviewees, who did not report such a rise, explained the probability of a further perceived increase was low as their FLE had already been at a very high level before participating in the scheme. At this point, it needs to be mentioned that we depended on students' willingness to be interviewed and, thus, self-selection bias is a problem that needs to be treated with caution here. It is likely that those who volunteered were students whose e-Tandem experience was highly positive overall. However, this does not diminish the valuable insights gained with regard to what they perceived as contributing to their enjoyment.

In this context, it is interesting to note that 16 of the interviewees stated they felt their FLE had been very high overall, with only 3 indicating a medium level of perceived enjoyment. Given all participants were in tertiary education and studying the TL at degree level, this supports findings of previous studies, in which the level of education and FL mastery have shown to be positively linked to FLE (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014).

It surfaced that the most salient factor that participants perceived as affecting their language enjoyment was *authentic communication* in the TL, one of the benefits of Tandem language learning suggested by Little (1999a) and mentioned in a number of studies in the field (e.g., Cziko, 2004; Sung & Poole, 2017; Turula, 2017). This result is also consistent with Kohn and Hoffstaedter's (2017) findings who investigated the usefulness of lingua franca telecollaboration projects at secondary level. In their study, students too mentioned being able to interact in authentic settings, in which they were not anxious about making mistakes, as a source of satisfaction. Similar to our students, authentic communication in e-Tandems consequently also seems to reinforce joy in less advanced foreign language users as it gives them a sense of accomplishment, boosts their confidence as well as it demonstrates a meaningful use of the language concerned.

Additionally, gaining first-hand insight into the TL culture was an aspect the interviewees reported thoroughly enjoying, which is likely to be linked to having had authentic conversations. Students appreciated this "window into the language and the culture of the partner" (Tom, 24, TL German), with whom they reported enjoying discussing contemporary cultural topics (e.g., political issues or popular culture) they were interested in. This demonstrates that e-Tandem language learning allows students to take on the role of *cultural mediators* (Roberts, Byram, Barro, Jordan, & Street, 2001) themselves, who provide authentic

insights into their cultural backgrounds, but it also allows them to benefit from the expertise of their partners.

In order to exploit this potential of learning a language on exchange fully, careful consideration and planning is required from the teachers too when designing the tasks: not only do the tasks need to be appropriate for the respective age group and proficiency level of the learners, but they also need to cover content the students are genuinely interested in and they need to allow for having natural conversations (El-Hariri, 2016) to make such a project a joyful experience and to prevent students from dropping out (Little, 1999b). The fact that their own interest in a specific topic, such as culture, can be pursued further in e-Tandem settings as they also provide a platform for students to choose their theme of discussion autonomously (Little, 1999a) and to include material they consider beneficial (Kohn, 2018) might have further contributed to an increase in the participants' self-perceived FLE. In a similar e-Tandem scheme carried out at secondary level, the oral medium for communication was conducive to students' autonomous selection of material they were interested in (Kohn & Hoffstaedter, 2017) and it can be argued that in the present e-Tandem scheme, synchronous oral communication might have also facilitated a focus on topics that were of genuine interest to participants.

Another recurring theme as to why students mentioned that they enjoyed learning their languages in Tandem was that the power relations were different from classroom contexts, where they reported experiencing higher levels of foreign language anxiety, including fear of failure in the form of making mistakes, which partly resulted from judging their own competence in relation to the group and the power relations between teacher and students. With their Tandem partners, they *felt at ease*. This also seems to be the case in less experienced learners, as shown in previous studies (e.g., Kohn & Hoffstaedter, 2017). Even though our students differed in their self-rated proficiency in the TL concerned, as mentioned in their biodata description above, interviewees from the UK, the US and Austria reported feeling at ease. Nevertheless, it is advisable to ensure similar levels of language proficiency in future Tandem schemes in order to counteract the possible danger of some students dropping out as differences in TL proficiency are likely to affect power relations and might affect students' motivation and self-concept too. Despite the fact that power relations are always at play in Tandem schemes (C. Kramsch, personal conversation, December 8, 2017) also in the sense of one person being expert and the other one learner of the TL, the change of roles, which is usually absent in foreign language classrooms, seems to contribute to students' well-being. This is also one of the reasons for students mentioning that they enjoyed *receiving extensive feedback*. The feeling of being in the same boat as their partners made them appreciate

peer feedback rather than feeling anxious about it and they described it as *helping and supporting each other* rather than as being corrected. According to the interviewees, positive reinforcement, including praise and encouragement, often made them feel good about certain language skills (e.g., pronunciation) they had not felt confident about before and, consequently, made them feel they enjoy the use of the foreign language more. This nicely illustrates the potential of positive emotions to undo lingering negative ones (Rahimi & Askari Bigdeli, 2014) but also, more generally, the broadening power of positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2003; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012b). It could conceivably be argued that students highly benefit from extensive one-on-one feedback and encouragement given outside the classroom by a Tandem partner, as also indicated by a quarter linking perceived improvement of their language skills on various levels through learning in Tandem with a perceived increase in FLE. Even though only 5 interviewees established this link between self-perceived language proficiency and FLE, it needs to be mentioned at this point that when students who participated in the e-Tandem scheme filled in a web survey, a vast majority reported observing an overall improvement of language skills through learning in Tandem (Schallmoser & Resnik, in press).

Another prominent theme linked to students' self-perceived language enjoyment was that they frequently mentioned having *developed friendships with L1 users*. A majority of the interviewees had already visited each other after six months, which reflects the interpersonal dimension of emotions and their internalization from interaction with others (Swain, 2013, cited in Pavelescu & Petric, 2018). The findings of the present study in particular showed that friendships seem to be a resource that produces hedonic enjoyment and increases eudaimonic happiness and if friendships with users of the TL are formed, these social bonds promoted by positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2001) bear the potential of increasing students' interest in the language and culture and, consequently, their motivation and pleasure taken in learning and using the language (see also Saito et al., 2018). The abovementioned demonstrates too that the social and private aspects FLE is composed of are clearly interlinked (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016). Furthermore, experiencing positive emotions also contributes to the expansion of an individual's world view (Fredrickson, 2013), which can, in turn, lead to an increased interest in both the target culture and building friendships with TL speakers. It can therefore be suggested that learning in Tandem can trigger a self-perpetuation of positive emotions. The resulting augmentation of positive emotions can, consequently, induce an increase in a variety of resources: psychological, cognitive, physical, and social ones, with positive connections and friendships just being examples (Fredrickson, 2013).

Interestingly, students emphasized the importance of building friendships with *L1 users*, who have also been mentioned frequently with regard to all other themes. This is furthermore supported by the fact that some of those who had been matched with foreign language (LX) users (Dewaele, 2018) of the TL when the program started in 2017 dropped out. Despite previous research having shown the benefits of lingua franca Tandem schemes in secondary school settings (Kohn & Hoffstaedter, 2017), such as the development of intercultural communication skills (Kohn, 2018), our students seemed to hold on to the somewhat idealized L1 user (Cook, 2016) as a point of reference. This is not unusual (Young & Walsh, 2010) as language courses in the respective countries, especially at degree level, are still most often modeled on L1 varieties. Additionally, their comparatively high level of LX competence seems to make them trust L1 users more as a source of knowledge of the TL, as Pablo (20, TL German) nicely explained when saying that he then knows “for a fact that for the most part it’s correct . . . because it comes from a native speaker.” Clearly, students’ awareness of advantages of lingua franca conversations (Kohn, 2018) needs to be raised in the future to help counteract the abovementioned misconceptions.

Overall, the interviews demonstrated that e-Tandem language learning can be used successfully as a resource to increase the foreign language enjoyment felt by highly advanced LX users, who study the TL at tertiary level. It is clearly one possible way of reinforcing the “surge in FLE” that Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014, p. 250) noticed in highly proficient LX users in their quantitative analyses.

7. Conclusion

This study investigated tertiary students’ perceived FLE analyzing data gathered with 19 in-depth interviews. The findings suggest positive links between students’ perceived FLE and e-Tandem language learning. Furthermore, they underline the importance of the social dimensions of FLE (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016) as aspects that contributed most to the enhancement of participants’ perceived enjoyment were primarily linked to interpersonal relations: The opportunity to have authentic conversations in their respective TL with L1 users gave them a sense of accomplishment and of meaningful use of the language (Kohn, 2018), while the participants’ perception of each other as cultural mediators (Roberts et al., 2001) raised their interest in the target language and its respective cultural background. In addition, students felt there was a positive shift in power relations during the e-Tandem sessions, which made them feel at ease and appreciate extensive one-on-one feedback by peers. Developing friendships with L1 users played another key role in enhancing both the participants’ perceived FLE and their eudaimonic happiness and draws our attention to the benefit of social bonding, which can act as a helpful incentive for the continuation of LX use.

Furthermore, the findings of this study support the idea that tasks should be considered beneficial by the participants and of interest to them (Kohn, 2018; Kohn & Hoffstaedter, 2017). Therefore, it is not only advisable to design authentic tasks but also to take the students' age as well as their level of proficiency into account. With regard to the proficiency level, it can be suggested that the participants' level should be similar so as to avoid detrimental effects of unequal power relations, such as dropping out due to a decrease in motivation. It also emerged that there is a need for raising awareness among participants in Tandem schemes that lingua franca communication can be beneficial (Kohn, 2018) as well.

Overall, the findings show that e-Tandem language learning bears the potential of boosting tertiary learners' perceived FLE but they also illustrate the crucial role of positive emotions in successful FLL. In future studies, more light could also be shed on the link between the social and private elements of FLE and links between e-Tandem language learning and emotion research should be investigated more holistically too, taking, for instance, FLA into account to improve our understanding of the benefits of implementing such a scheme in higher education. It might also be useful for future research to explore such links in other educational settings with less proficient language learners, for instance in secondary schools, as findings from previous studies (Kohn, 2018; Kohn & Hoffstaedter, 2017) point towards similar results.

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