PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA
MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH
Abdelhafid Boussouf University Center - Mila

Institute of Letters and Languages
Department of Foreign Languages
Branch: English

Teachers' Perceptions about the Development of EFL Learners' Intercultural Communicative Competence through Tandem Learning

The Case of Teachers of English at Abdelhafid Boussouf University Centre-Mila

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment for the Requirement of the Master Degree in
Didactics of Foreign Languages

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2025

Dedication

In the Name of ALLAH, the most Merciful and the most Compassionate

I wholeheartedly dedicate this humble work to:

My dear self, for surviving the lows and bearing the doubts

The quiet strength behind every triumph of mine, my beloved parents. No words could ever tell how grateful i am for your presence in my life

The purest soul and the kindest heart, my cherished sister

My favorite spirit and safest home, my precious brother ***Amir***

My dearest friends and loved ones, and whoever left a trace of hope along my path

Ghada

Dedication

In the name of ALLAH, the most merciful and compassionate

I dedicate this work to:

My cherished father, ***Mr. Amour****, who has been a source of strength, support, patience, and motivation for me throughout this entire experience. I am truly blessed to have you as my life support.*

My mother. ***Ms. Hedda****, the woman who taught me the meaning of sacrifice and love. My guiding light, who has always taught me to keep God first and to strive for excellence. I thank you for your guidance and love.*

My beloved siblings, ***Imen, Zakarya, and Khawla****, who encourage me and believe in me even When I doubt myself.*

My sister's husband, ***Kamel,*** *the man who is an amazing part of our family.*

My best friend ***Hiba,*** *the person who supports me unconditionally.*

My research partner and friend, ***Ghada****, whose collaboration and contributions made this work possible.*

My friends ***Housna, Doua, and Feriel****, who made university life worthwhile.*

My two special loves: ***my sweet niece****, soon to arrive and fill our lives with light, and my little cousin* ***Islem,*** *who is dear to me.*

Hadil

Acknowledgments

All praise is due to ALLAH, the Almighty, for granting us patience to accomplish this work.

First and foremost, we would like to express our profound gratitude and thankfulness to our supervisor **Dr.** ***Layla ZOUREZ*** for her valuable contribution to the fulfillment of this work. From the bottom of our hearts, we greatly appreciate every moment she spent reviewing and correcting our research.

We extend our deepest appreciation to the board of examiners **Dr.** ***Rima HADEF*** and **Dr.** ***Abderrahim BOUDERBANE*** who agreed to take part in examining and evaluating this dissertation.

Particular thanks go to all teachers at Mila University Centre, who kindly agreed to participate and allowed the accomplishment of this research.

Abstract

The development of Intercultural communicative competence can be a problematic endeavor. Therefore, there is a constant demand for effective methods and approaches that may facilitate it. Tandem learning has been around for many years already. It succeeded in enhancing the students' proficiency level and developing their intercultural knowledge. This thesis investigates teachers' perceptions about the role of the tandem approach in developing EFL learners' intercultural communicative competence. Accordingly, three research questions are raised: 1)How does tandem learning enhance EFL learners' awareness of cultural differences? 2)Do teachers welcome tandem learning as a teaching approach? 3)What are the teachers' perceptions regarding the implementation of tandem learning to develop EFL learners' intercultural communicative competence? For the purpose of achieving the study's aims and answering the research questions, a qualitative descriptive and quantitative research designs are adopted. A questionnaire is administered to fourteen EFL teachers at Mila University Centre (MUC). The main research findings display that the majority of teachers possess positive attitudes toward the improvement of EFL students' intercultural communicative competence through the application of the tandem learning approach. That points to their supportive stance on implementing this approach for intercultural development. The research ultimately provides a wealth of recommendations for pedagogy and future research to shed light on the effectiveness of tandem learning in fostering the students' intercultural communicative competence.

Key words: intercultural communicative competence, perceptions, tandem learning

List of Abbreviations

BASIC: Behavioral Assessment Scale for Intercultural Competence

CALL: Computer Assisted Language Learning

CCAI: Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory

CLT: Communicative Language Teaching

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

ICC: Intercultural Communicative Competence

ICSI: Intercultural Sensitivity Inventory

IDI: Intercultural Development Inventory

MKO: More Knowledgeable Other

MUC: Mila University Centre

Q: Question

TL: Tandem Learning

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General Introduction

1. Background to the Study

The inextricable relationship of language and culture has profoundly transformed the nature of foreign language learning to become a multifaceted process that covers both of the linguistic proficiency as well as the cultural awareness. Learners cannot be proficient in the target language unless they are familiar with its culture. For that, one of the competences that learners are expected to gain, especially in today's globalized world, is the intercultural communicative competence (ICC) which encompasses the necessary knowledge, attitudes, and skills that guarantee an effective interaction among participants belonging to variant ethnic groups.

Throughout the years, there has always been a quest for workable ways that may actually serve to fulfil the purpose of making learners intercultural speakers who are able to understand and navigate unfamiliar cultural contexts without falling into misunderstanding and offense. within this scope, researchers have suggested that direct communication between individuals who come from unsimilar cultures is, in fact, a great strategy to train one's ICC. Tandem learning is one approach that has been implemented in the field of Foreign Language Learning where direct interaction between speakers of different languages takes place in an attempt for each of the participants to teach the other their respective language. Since the tandem model relies mainly on a collaboration among learners originating from diverse cultures and an authentic exposure to the foreign language use, some researchers have devoted their investigations to find out whether learners' ICC can be successfully boosted through tandem learning.

Among the studies which have been conducted to link the impact of tandem learning with the development of ICC is that of Woodin (2013) and Sabbah-Taylor (2017) who showed that there exists a firm interconnection between the learning of a second or a foreign

language and the development of the learners' ICC under the requirement of the presence of cultural sensitivity as well as the implementation of a conversational analysis on all what is received from the part of the learner which can be attained when interacting through tandem process. Other research has been done to uncover the opinions of educators concerning the topic. Brammerts (2003), in his examination of the relationship between the two variables, highlighted the teachers' positive views on tandem learning as a profitable method to raise learners' cultural awareness and communication abilities in the context of foreign language learning. Additionally, Thorne (2006) concerned himself to explore the digital aspects of tandem learning and determine the perspectives of instructors around its use for enhancing interculturalism. The findings of this study indicated that teachers perceived the combination of technology and tandem learning as offering increasing opportunities for intercultural interactions allowing students to engage in mutual exchange of genuine cultural contexts with a high possibility of the foster of learners' ICC. Furthermore, the results reached by Müller-Hartmann &Schocker-v Ditfurth (2003) in harmony with those reached by Dooly (2008) showed that teachers reflected on the role of tandem learning in ameliorating the linguistic and the cultural knowledge of students along with their own role in the context of tandem learning project. This reflection revealed that educators have positive perceptions regarding the approach since it provides opportunities for intercultural interaction as well as enriches the learners' autonomy permitting them to take lead of their own learning experience. However, teachers reported that although they are offered a space to step back and abandon their authority in the tandem model, a minor intervention from their part is still required to guide the students and prevent any possible cultural stereotypes or misunderstanding from arising.

2. Statement of the Problem

Language and culture are said to be the two faces of the same coin. Therefore, teaching culture is a mandatory notion when it comes to learning a foreign language. In this context, the concept of interculturalism has gained a great attention in the field assuring the necessity for learners to develop what is known as ICC because of its vital intervention in ameliorating students' comprehension of the target language and attaining a successful interaction in intercultural settings. In this Respect, research is constantly targeting the suitable strategies that can be implemented for the purpose of improving EFL learners' ICC. One of the collaborative and direct language learning methods is the tandem learning (TL) approach. TL has been proven to be a successful way that has the potential to significantly enhance learners' cultural awareness. As suggested by Wagner (2007), opting for TL in multilingual classrooms allows students to actively promote their understanding of the cultural differences as well as build up flexible communication abilities that adjust to the divergent cultural contexts.

There has been a considerable amount of research done on the issue at hand in foreign educational institutions. However, the issue around which this study revolves is understanding how teachers of English view the use of the tandem approach for language learning in order to develop the intercultural communicative competence of EFL learners at MUC. Put differently, this study is willing to investigate teachers' perceptions about the relationship between the two variables and whether they accept the use of tandem approach for the mentioned issue. In the same vein, it is worth mentioning that continuing to have a restricted overview of these insights might prohibit the implementations of such approaches in Algerian educational settings leading to the lack of access to one of the potentially advantageous methods to train one's ICC.

3. Aims of the Study

Being interculturally competent is of a paramount significance for EFL learners. Thus, the present study aspires to identify how teachers at Mila university centre view the adaptation of a tandem learning approach as a tool to cultivate EFL learners' ICC. Moreover, it seeks to investigate the extent to which does tandem learning contribute to raising EFL learners' awareness of the target cultural patterns along with the potential differences which may show between one's and the other's culture. Put otherwise, it aims to reveal the efficacy of tandem learning in providing EFL learners with opportunities to practice their knowledge of different cultures as well as ameliorate their attitudes and skills to appropriately interact with individuals of other cultures based on teachers' opinions.

4. Significance of the Study

The significance of current study stems from it's being concerned with the complete realization of the development of Foreign Language Learners' intercultural communicative competence which has gained unparalleled attention in the modern globalized era as one of the crucial aspects in communication across cultures. Furthermore, this research sheds light on the nature of tandem learning as an approach that effectively contributes to boost learners' cultural awareness. Additionally, this research's importance derives from the fact that it takes into account the teacher's attitudes about the development of EFL learner's intercultural communicative competence through tandem learning. On the whole, the present study seeks to raise the opportunities of EFL learner's success in educational and pedagogical concerns towards the application of tandem learning in promoting intercultural awareness.

5. Research Questions

The current study aims to find answers of the following questions:

1. How does tandem learning enhance EFL learner's awareness of cultural differences?
2. Do teacher welcome tandem learning as a teaching approach?

3. What are the teachers' perceptions regarding the implementation of tandem learning to develop EFL learners' intercultural communicative competence?

6. Research Methodology

In order to achieve the research aims and answer the research questions, teachers' questionnaire is used to help obtaining the information required to complete this work.

The questionnaire is administrated to teachers of English at the department of foreign languages-AbdELhafid Boussouf MUC to figure out their major perceptions towards the potential impact of tandem learning in fostering learners' intercultural awareness and developing their intercultural communicative competence. It is dispensed to 14 teachers who are able to provide valuable viewpoints to the issue.

7. Structure of the Study

This dissertation is made up of two chapters. The first chapter is dedicated to the literature relevant to the topic. It is further subdivided into two sections. While the second chapter is devoted to the current research's fieldwork.

The first section of the first chapter is concerned with providing theoretical insights into the first variable which is the Intercultural Communicative Competence. To begin with, this section is commenced by defining the concept of intercultural awareness and the intercultural communicative competence. Following that, a discussion of the ICC's major components, types of models, and issues of teaching it is introduced. Besides, this section seeks to provide a variety of methods and tools which are said to be appropriate for developing, practicing, as well as assessing the competence. While the second section of the first chapter delves into the concept of tandem learning. It opens up by providing a definition for the tandem approach to language learning. It then continues to explore the underlying theories supporting the model along with its underpinning pillars. Adding to that, it categorizes the types of tandem learning with offering an examination of the pros and cons of

each. Finally, the section concludes by summarizing research findings regarding the implementation of such approach in and outside the classroom.

As for the second chapter, it is addressed to explain in details the fieldwork of the present study starting by outlining the specific research questions set in attempt to reach its aim. It provides an in-depth description of the data collected through a teachers' questionnaire. An analysis of the findings is then accounted for prior to providing a general discussion of these finding to finally ending the chapter up with a conclusion that comprises the implications, limitations, and recommendations emerging from the study

Chapter One: Learner' Intercultural Communicative Competence and Tandem Learning

Introduction

In the modern globalized world, where opportunities for intercultural communication rise, language learners are in growing demand to be interculturally competent for the main goal of navigating cultural differences. *Intercultural communicative competence* allows interlocutors who possess different practices and views about the world to hold appropriate and successful interactions with fewer risks to falling into misunderstandings and conflicts. *Tandem learning* is a language learning approach that gathers speakers of different codes and ethnic origins to interact aiming to upgrade their level in each other's language. Its interactive nature allows learners to develop their communication skills, knowledge of the target culture as well as their autonomy towards their own learning since they play a binary role of being a teacher and a learner simultaneously.

This chapter offers a detailed theoretical overview on both variables of ICC and tandem learning. It consists two separate sections each of which is designated to examine one of these variables. In the first section, a thorough definition of the concepts of intercultural awareness and ICC is provided before moving to the latter's different models as well as its significance in the process of language learning. Further, the different methods and tools that can allow the development of the notion are discussed, alongside the potential drawbacks that might get in the path of doing so. Finally, an explanation of the how ICC can be assessed is presented. The second section is all about tandem learning. It provides researchers' definitions of the approach. Additionally, it explains the theories that back up its forms and principles which are discussed as well. Moreover, the section delves deeper into the implementation of tandem in EFL context before it ends up with its relation to intercultural communicative competence as well as the notion of perception.

1.1.Section One: Intercultural Communicative Competence

1.1.1. Definition of Intercultural Awareness

Intercultural awareness is classified as the fundamental foundation of intercultural communicative competence (ICC). As widely defined, it is the ability to recognize that the world consists of a blend of diverse cultures. Intercultural awareness involves being consciously aware of this diversity. As stated in the Council of Europe (2001), the concept of intercultural awareness is "knowledge, awareness and understanding of the relation (similarities and distinctive differences) between the 'world of origin' and the 'world of the target community" (p.103). Moreover, research shows that ICC contains two main components: awareness of one's culture such as traditions, history, attitudes, beliefs, values, behaviors and awareness of other's culture. In this context, Byram (1997) defines intercultural awareness as the " relativization of one's own and valuing of other's meanings" (p.35). This is consistent with the same assumption that intercultural awareness suggests realizing one's culture without neglecting the other.

Given the foregoing, intercultural awareness is an essential key to effective communication. It eliminates the opportunity for misunderstanding and hostile interaction, leading to potential conflicts across cultural boundaries (Neuliep, 2003). According to Belay (1993), the awareness of the multiple identities of the other is the first step to becoming an enlightened global citizen who takes into consideration cultural diversity and shows respect among cultures. It enables the individual to reduce confusion, and nervosity in intercultural contexts (Chen & Starosta,2006).

Intercultural awareness is a cognitive ability that guides the individual's behaviors towards appropriateness and effectiveness. Feire (1970) suggests that awareness is not just knowledge but also the ability to recognize the self-vis-à-vis anything else. Nevertheless,

knowledge, positive attitudes, and skills can influence it positively (Fantini, 2000). In short, intercultural awareness is the cognitive capacity to identify cultural differences and preferences to select the appropriate pattern of behavior in an intercultural setting.

In summary, understanding a given culture through cognitive learning should be the basis for individuals to reach intercultural communicative competence. Intercultural awareness is the key component of cross-cultural understanding that is not limited to the acknowledgment of norms, behaviors, and traditions of his or her culture but also those of the other's culture as well.

1.1.2. Definition of Intercultural Communicative Competence

In pursue of unveiling what intercultural communicative competence is, a variety of definitions is offered by researchers expounding their distinct views on the concept. One simple yet inclusive definition is that of Wiseman (2002) who describes ICC as "the knowledge, motivation and skills to interact effectively and appropriately with members of different cultures"(p.208) emphasizing three basic elements of ICC as cultural awareness, willingness to carry on communication with presenters of other cultures along with the necessary communication skills of interpretation and adaptation. Following the same line of thought, Lambert (1993) defines an interculturally competent person as someone who is knowledgeable of other cultures, aware of the cultural differences between his/her own culture and that of others, shows respect towards these differences, and is perfectly able to manipulate them in order to appropriately engage in intercultural environments.

Additionally, Byram (1997) suggests that ICC is the combination of three components encompassing knowledge, skills and attitudes that pave the way for effective cross-cultural interaction. This definition is further supported by Tran (2015, p.30) who proposes that:

> ICC is the ability which enables one to effectively and appropriately interact in a language other than one's native language with others from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. It consists of language competence (linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse competence) and intercultural competence (attitudes, knowledge, skills, and awareness) that help one to be able to successfully integrate in a multicultural society.

That affirms that ICC goes beyond the ''Intercultural competence'' which mainly focuses on being aware of other cultures. In fact, it steps further to be the ability to actually communicate with people of other cultures effectively.

In conclusion, ICC can be inferred to be one's capacity to develop knowledge and understanding of other cultures and adapt to their behaviors and attitudes in a culturally convenient manner when communicating with individuals of these cultures. It is the competency that allows interlocutors of diverse backgrounds to hold not only successful but also appropriate communication especially when being confronted with major cultural differences.

1.1.3. Models of Intercultural Communicative Competence

Many models and frameworks are presented as an endeavor to facilitate the recognition and comprehension of the concept of ICC, and thus its development. the following are a few of the most recognized ones in intercultural research:

1.1.3.1.Byram's Model of ICC

Byram's model is considered the foundation for researchers to develop new assessment tools for intercultural communicative competence. Byram (1997) seeks to build up intercultural communicative competence based on the concept of ''intercultural speaker''. Someone who can interact with others, to accept and respect the different perspectives of the

world. It is seen as a mediator between the target language culture and his native one. In other words, according to him, an intercultural speaker is a person who holds all the underlined components of his model ‘’the five Savoirs”.

Byram’s five-faced model describes the factors involved in a successful intercultural communication as a set of knowledge, attitudes, interpreting and relating skills, discovery and interaction skills, and critical cultural awareness:

1.1.3.1.1. Knowledge (Savoirs)

Byram views knowledge as a consequence of interaction at different levels. It is a result of socialization that leads the individual to be interculturally competent. He thinks that an intercultural speaker possesses two different types of knowledge; a native and a foreign one, and a knowledge of general processes of social and individual interaction.

The first type is knowledge of social groups and their products and practices of his own country that is acquired automatically from daily life through formal and informal socialization or of the interlocutor country through communication for instance, knowing about history, idioms, dialects, assumptions, etc., and also understanding their differences to avoid misconceptions and stereotypes. The second type, knowledge of processes of interaction, which an intercultural speaker should have, is the understanding of the general principles that guide human behavior and social interactions across different cultures. For example, being aware of body language, politeness, style of communication, showing empathy and interest, etc. Byram explains, however, that knowledge alone is not enough and that the development of attitudes and additional abilities to comprehend what can occur in some unique situations that may come up in interaction across cultures is necessary.

1.1.3.1.2. Attitudes (Savoir Etre)

The term attitude refers to feelings, positions, and points of view that impact one's behaviors. According to Byram (1997), this component deals with the ability to have a coexistence attitude towards the variant cultures and backgrounds of others. He thinks that an intercultural speaker can reside in curiosity, and open-mindedness and should see the world from different perspectives to avoid conflict and negative stereotypes about other cultures. For him, the attitude as an effective component, like the others, that fosters exchanging ideas and thoughts in intercultural settings.

The significance of this factor is evident in guaranteeing a successful interaction across cultures through acknowledging how these cultures vary, showing respect and interest, and having willingness to take risks to engage in intercultural communication. Therefore, the present dimension suggests effective ways for people to interact, either in the learning and teaching process or in sharing ideas and thoughts beyond educational settings.

1.1.3.1.3. Skills of Interpreting and Relating (Savoir comprendre)

This factor of Bayram's model is considered a fulfillment of the previous one. This means having enough Knowledge and constructive attitudes are not sufficient; they need to have skills in intercultural situations. Bayram suggests that an intercultural speaker is supposed to have the ability to interpret the underlying meaning of a given message across cultural boundaries. Through relating the new meaning of culture to the preexisting knowledge from its own culture. He also confirms that the intercultural speaker should understand the hidden meaning of a particular culture including metaphors, indirect meaning, idioms, etc. to solve cultural problems in the future.

1.1.3.1.4. Skills of Discovery and Interaction (Savoir Apprendre/Fair)

The present factor is concerned with the practical side of communication in an intercultural setting, since it deals with the intercultural speaker's interaction with others from different backgrounds. Bayram thinks that intercultural speakers should discover how to respond and interact with other interlocutors, especially in unpredicted situations. Moreover, all the prior factors need to be put into practice because this fifth factor is regarded as a guide for the speaker to get a successful interaction while communicating with people from other cultures. Therefore, a good speaker must have all the factors before reaching this stage to ensure effective communication.

1.1.3.1.5. Critical Cultural Awareness (Savoir s'engager)

The last factor of Bayram's model of ICC is critical cultural awareness. It focuses on "the ability to evaluate critically the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, and practices of its own culture and those of other cultures" (Byram, 2009, p. 323). According to him, an effective intercultural speaker ought to have a deep understanding of all the cultural aspects of both cultures, his culture and the target one, to reduce the conflict and be more effective in solving the cultural clash. Thus, the intercultural speaker should take into consideration the ideology and values of others and those of their own to meditate in intercultural exchanges. He also encourages the educational systems to promote intercultural awareness to enable students to develop cognitive abilities and effectively communicate in intercultural settings**.**

1.1.3.2.Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

In an attempt to clarify how individuals' interculturality may evolve, the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) is introduced by M. J. Bennett (1993). As its name denotes, this model is designed in a sequential nature which explains how learners can develop their ICC and change their worldviews when experiencing several

phases in a given order. DMIS suggests that there are six stages which one goes through including denial, defense, minimization, acceptance, adaptability and integration. When the former three stages are characterized by being ethnocentric where the individual sees his own culture as the only existing and valid culture, the latter remaining stages are seen ethnorelative where one comprehends that there are many other variant and equal cultures.

The six stages can be explicated as follows:

1.1.3.2.1. Denial

The first stage of ethnocentrism is characterized by the ignorance of existence of other cultures and cultural differences by individuals who are isolated from other communities and cultures. According to Bennet (1993), this is the phase of 'stupid question syndrome' where individuals have little to no knowledge of cultural diversity.

1.1.3.2.2. Defense

In this stage, people are no longer ignorant of cultural differences; they recognize that their culture is not the only existent one. However, they may take biases to one side over the other either in a form of denigration and superiority when one believes their worldviews are superior, or in reversal when they change their perspectives into seeing their culture as inferior.

1.1.3.2.3. Minimization

In this last and least ethnocentric stage, one might acknowledge how other cultures may distinct from his own. Nevertheless, he/ she may still consider these distinctions as superficial minimizing their importance and possible impact on cross cultural communication.

1.1.3.2.4. Acceptance

Entering the first stage of ethnorelativism, individuals begin to show a sense of acceptance and respect towards the different worldviews and behaviors of others without the necessity of attempting to adopt them.

1.1.3.2.5. Adaptability

At this point, one is able to open to alter his/ her behaviors in hopes for achieving a more flexible interaction with people of other cultures.

1.1.3.2.6. Integration

Representing the last stage of intercultural development, integration means that an individual is on a good point of understanding and appreciation of multiple cultural views. Hence, they are able to integrate this understanding to analyze situations from different angles and behave accordingly in cross-cultural environments.

On the whole, it can be concluded that the combination of these stages offers a dynamic framework to examine and clarify the intercultural development for teachers and researchers in the field of interculturality (Khan et al, 2023). They formulate a continuous chain of progression. As individuals elevate from one stage to the next and from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism, their worldviews gradually become less primitive and shallow but more complex and sophisticated. Additionally. The model explains how the negative attitudes of a less interculturally competent involving stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination reflected in ethnocentric stages convert into positive ones as openness, respect and valuing. In the following figure, a summary to the stages of Bennett's developmental model of intercultural sensitivity is represented.

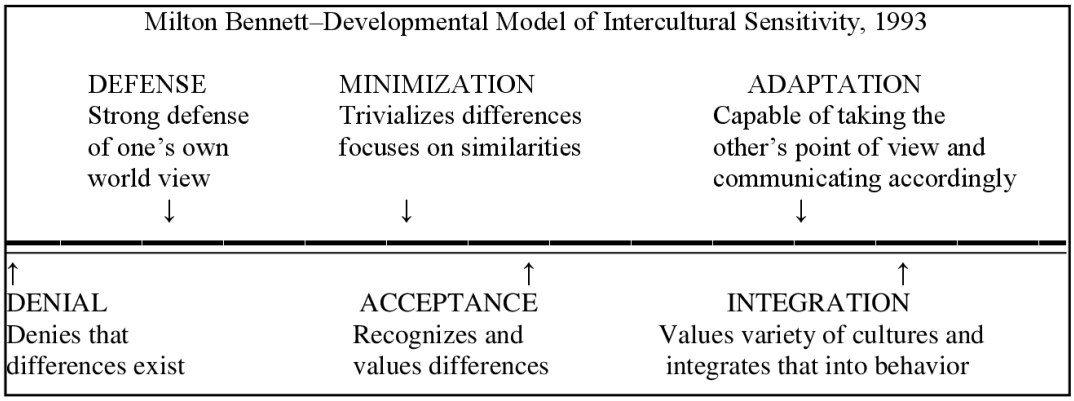

Figure1: Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (1993)

1.1.3.3.Deardorff's Pyramid Model

Deardorff was an active researcher who conducted studies to conceptualize intercultural communicative competence. To create a universal definition of intercultural competence, she used the so-called "Delphi technique" which includes the point of view of intercultural scholars on intercultural competence including definitions, components, evaluations, and strategies (Behrnd& Porzelt, 2006). Deardorff (2006) developed his famous pyramid and process model of ICC. He examines the move of individuals from the personal level to an interactive level based on: attitude, knowledge, skills, internal outcomes, and desired external outcomes.

As stated by the Council of Europe (2014), intercultural proficiency is "never complete but can always be enriched still further from the continuing experience of different kinds of intercultural encounter'' (p.17). In the same context, Deardorff (2006)states that the development of the ICC is a dynamic shift from a personal to an interpersonal level.

The process starts from the individual level with attitude, which is considered the principle component in terms of the development of intercultural competence. It is regarded as openness, respect for people from other cultures, curiosity, and acceptance of ambiguity (Deardorff, 2006). In addition, the component attitude involves empathy and understanding

the different cultural backgrounds, facing and engaging with intercultural orientations (Council of Europe,2014). Knowledge and comprehension are the next dimension of the pyramid model. It consists of cultural self-awareness, deep cultural understanding, and sociolinguistic awareness that includes the acknowledgment of the use of language in different social contexts. Further, it fosters intercultural competence by recognizing the diverse cultural groups along with stereotypes, prejudices, and preconceptions. The last component of the personal level is skills. It is being able to listen, observe, interpret, analyze, and have the capacity to relate or connect to other cultures (Deardorff, 2006). Moving from the personal level to the interactive level, where there could be an interpretation of the outcomes of intercultural competence. firstly, internal outcomes contain the change in the informed frame of reference in terms of adaptability, flexibility, and empathy (Deardorff, 2006). To put it another way, this level concerns itself with adapting one's attitudes and behaviors in accordance to those of people who have a different cultural orientation for the sake of communicating successfully (Council of Europe, 2014). Secondly, the external outcomes promote the improvement of intercultural competence in which the individual behaves and communicates appropriately in intercultural situations based on his or her knowledge, skills, and attitude to reach a particular goal**.** The following figure summarizes the key components to the development of Intercultural communicative competence according to Deardorff (2006).

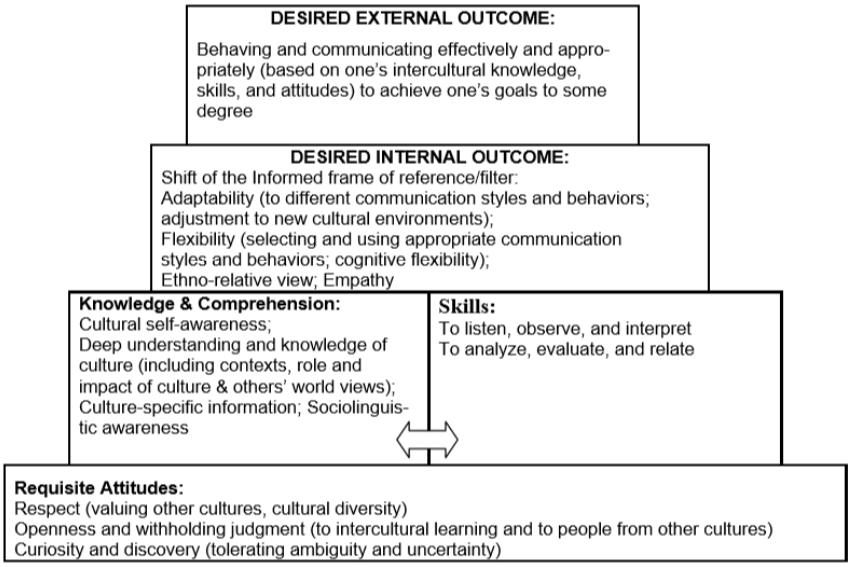

Figure 2: Deardorff's Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence (2006)

1.1.4. Significance of ICC in Foreign Language Learning

In today's globalized world, the importance of intercultural competence for foreign language learning is a strong rationale for exploring its development. In light of its significance, learning a foreign language involves not only acquiring linguistic knowledge or language proficiency but also learning about the cultural aspects of that language. Integrating ICC in EFL classes has been one of the major objectives along with linguistic competence as it improves language learning outcomes in various ways. By cultivating intercultural competence, students can improve their knowledge, attitudes, and skills. Therefore, their ICC enables them to avoid cultural misunderstandings and culture shock arising from cultural differences and enhances their ability to communicate effectively across cultures. Such ability promotes students to see the world from different perspectives and to develop empathy towards individuals from different backgrounds. It is also essential for learners to raise awareness of both their native culture and the target one by relating other cultural perspectives to their own. In this way, this comparison enriches their knowledge and helps them to reflect

on their own beliefs and practices and become critical thinkers who adjust to situational demands. Cortazzi and Jin (1999, p.197) add that:

> It is crucial that foreign language learners should become aware of differing cultural frameworks, both their own and those of others: otherwise they will use their own cultural system to interpret target language messages whose intended meaning may well be predicated on quite different cultural assumption.

In addition, intercultural competence development can promote students' motivation inside the classroom or outside because language learners are engaged deeply with the language they are learning and more energized to know about the culture that surrounds it (Byram & wagner, 2018). This may result in the advancement in the language learning process. Hence, teachers must provide teaching materials and define the objectives of foreign language education in terms of language learning and intercultural communicative competence acquisition, also creating a teaching environment that meets students' needs because the teacher plays a significant role in the process of developing ICC for learners. They should encourage them to be more observant, and be aware of their culture and other cultures (Bayram et. al. 2002).

1.1.5. Development of Intercultural Communicative Competence

Hoping to bring the theoretical ideologies of developing intercultural communicative competence and mastering cross-cultural communication, a bundle of methods and tools are introduced. Several of these are explained in the following lines along with some challenges that educators and trainers can possibly encounter when teaching ICC.

1.1.5.1.Methods for Developing Intercultural Communicative Competence:

There is a plenty of methods that are designated for the specific purpose of developing the intercultural communicative competence. On this matter, many classifications are

provided to group these methods, one of which is Huber and Reynolds' (2014). According to them there are for main types of methods to develop ICC as explained in the following:

1.1.5.1.1. Cognitive Methods

As the name suggests, Cognitive methods are those that rely mainly on one's cognition and mental procedures. They are concerned with collecting information about the various elements of culture including the history, religion, customs, traditions, social and political norms as well as the behavioral norms of a community, etc. Some settings through which individuals may get cultivated about this kind of culture-specific concepts are: lectures, seminars and group discussions.

1.1.5.1.2. Self-insight Methods

Self-insightful methods enable students to learn about themselves; they explore their personalities, thoughts, feelings, strengths and weaknesses, etc. when communicating and reacting to target cultures like adjusting the communication style to be more effective in interaction with other people with different cultural backgrounds. They are efficient for personal growth in terms of changing students' negative attitudes and achieving their full potential whether in formal learning or normal life.

1.1.5.1.3. Behavioral Methods

While the cognitive methods focus on enriching one's awareness of cultural diversity, the behavioral methods come to give this awareness the chance to be realized on real life situations.

This type of methods strives to familiarize learners with more culturally appropriate behaviors to substitute their former inappropriate ones aiming at raising their ICC and preparing them for potential future intercultural encounters.

1.1.5.1.4. Experimental Methods

Experimental methods for ICC development are all about taking action and learning by doing. Here learners get to experiment all the data collected about cultural diversity and the learned behaviors to see their possible effect. This category may include methods of experience, be this experience imaginary (as in role plays) or real engaging in real life communication with members of the host culture, methods of comparison between one's and the others culture, methods of analysis, reflection, and cooperative activities.

1.1.5.2.Tools and Techniques for the Development of Intercultural Communicative Competence

The integration of ICC comes to be a necessity in EFL classrooms. To communicate successfully and appropriately with foreigners who possess different languages and cultures, learners have to develop their ICC. Some scholars present a set of tools that are considered the most used in EFL classes.

1.1.5.2.1. Verbal or Written Description

The present tool is concerned with verbal or written description which is the dynamic explanation of cultural aspects of a given culture, so learners will be aware of people who belong to that culture. This tool helps learners to eliminate judgmental thinking that leads to stereotypes, and prejudice. They develop multiple skills such as interpretation, analysis, and critical thinking in addition to their level of respect and empathy (Navaietene et al. 2013).

1.1.5.2.2. Using Authentic Materials

It is likely impossible to speak about techniques and tools for developing ICC without mentioning the great role of authentic materials in EFL classes. Authentic materials such as TV shows, films, animation, songs, cartoons, literature, etc. could be very efficient to promote students' ICC. By motivating learners to recognize and observe the cultural behaviors,

attitudes, and perspectives of people from the target culture, learners will “become aware of the ways in which their own cultural background influences their own behavior, and develop a tolerance for behavior patterns that are different from their own” (Tomalin & Stempleski 1993, p. 82).

1.1.5.2.3. Online Communication

The application of this tool is commonly used independently by learners. It provides the chance for students to communicate virtually with people who have different cultural backgrounds. This tool is useful for learners of foreign languages in the modern era where telecollaboration is integrated into the world with every society. Online communication promotes across cultures understanding and develops interpretation skills, where common problems like religion, gender, and ethnicity are likely to be removed (Navaietene et al. 2013).

1.1.5.2.4. Total Physical Response

This tool is designed for students to actively engage with cultural experiences in terms of oral commands. (Hughes, 1986; pokrivcakova, 2013). It is regarded as an effective technique for non-verbal communication cues; learners of foreign languages need to know the multiple gestures and their intended meaning during interaction with people of the target culture; for example, gestures such as a handshake, or nodding the head. In fact, the aforementioned gestures may have different interpretations of learners’ own culture. therefore, the acknowledgment of them might avoid misunderstanding in terms of intercultural communication.

1.1.6. Assessment of Intercultural Communicative Competence

In intercultural research, there is a noticeable focus on the assessment of ICC due to its importance regarding the evaluation of the development of this notion. Roy and Starosta

(2001) postulate that “a successful development of intercultural communication is conditioned by a movement’’ (16). This movement is every assessment tool that is devoted to reveal how learners’ intercultural knowledge evolves, informing in return educators and syllabus designers of the possible desired adjustments in the ways by which this knowledge is delivered.

In this respect, Griffith et al (2016) stress that there is a great demand for the creation or improvement of valid and reliable tests that can effectively measure the process through which ICC improves. Likewise, it is required for these tests to vary according to what aspect of ICC they are purposely meant to assess, so that every ICC skill or component has a suitable assessment method (Timpe, 2013). As a matter of fact, this idea originates back to Byram (1997), who proposes that an assessment of one component of ICC should not be the same as one of the others. He explains this claim by referring to the different nature of these components since the one of attitudes lean more to the affective side, while skills are more on the behavioral side. Thus, it cannot be appropriate to use the same assessments tool on all of these components; for instance, a behavioral scale of assessment might be used to assess learners’ intercultural skills, when attitudes are best evaluates through an affective scale.

In this context, there exist numerous views and suggestion on different kinds and scales for ICC assessment. Lussier et al. (2007) think that is should be a continuous operation along the teaching-learning process. Corbett (2013) mentions that it is most effective and practical when being held at particular periods throughout the course including a pre-test, during the course test and finally a post-test. Some common scales for ICC assessment are: Behavioral Assessment Scale for Intercultural Competence (BASIC), the Intercultural Sensitivity Inventory (ICSI), the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) and the Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory (CCAI). All of the above-mentioned scales are instruments

which vary in their design yet share the same aim of examining and determining the levels of ICC reached in a foreign language course.

All in all, one can say that although the process of ICC assessment may appear to be challenging, it surely is a fundamental and a beneficial step to take while attempting to cultivate learners' ICC. Further, to obtain the best results from this procedure, it is significant for its conductor to be able to choose the appropriate tools as well as when to apply it.

1.1.7. Challenges of Teaching Intercultural Communicative Competence

Various approaches to ICC have been developed to apply it in language classrooms. Research on EFL teachers' ICC shows that although teachers play a crucial role in promoting ICC in their students, they also face several challenges and difficulties when establishing a classroom environment that would encourage ICC. Among these issues is teachers' lack of skills in choosing the teaching material. This problem may be due to the next challenges of the teachers' lack of IC knowledge, and difficulty in assessing the students, these multiple challenges might be resulted by the teachers' unwillingness to implement ICC.

1.1.7.1. Choosing Material for Effective Teaching of ICC

During the language teaching process, the teacher needs to design the appropriate materials to deliver a lesson. According to research, EFL teachers who tend to implement intercultural approaches face problems in selecting suitable material, the latter refers to both the type of texts and the topics. They find difficulty in evaluating the appropriate materials and media that meet the student's needs and their ICC teaching. This is seen as a key skill to foster the students' ICC. According to Sercu (2006), teachers have difficulties evaluating material from an ICC approach. After conducting multiple studies for EFL teachers from countries spread over the world, she concludes that teachers tend to assess the material from a

traditional cultural teaching perspective. This means that the teachers focus more on cultural accuracy instead of developing important ICC skills.

1.1.7.2. Teacher's Lack of ICC knowledge

Many researchers notice that teachers have trouble grasping what is meant by ICC, which creates difficulty for teachers to implement it appropriately in their teaching, since most teachers are unfamiliar with the exact meaning of the concept. Gu (2016) confirms that the majority of teachers still define the concept of ICC from cultural facts instead of understanding the right meaning of ICC which incorporates respect and open-mindedness across cultures. This fact leads to a lack of knowledge on how to teach ICC. Sercu (2006) reports that teachers do not know how to teach culture from the intercultural teaching approach. She argues also that they don't possess the effective skills that have been pointed out as needed to teach ICC.

1.1.7.3. Difficulty of Assessing Students

When integrating the ICC approach into the curriculum. one of the greater challenges the teacher may face is the students' assessment. It is very difficult to know and evaluate the level of intercultural competence that each student has achieved because they have diverse backgrounds and learning paces. Therefore, the classroom experience is considered an ongoing process and the teacher cannot control the grade of each student (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006). Furthermore, some researchers propose the idea of open assessment as an opportunity for teachers and students to discuss and be aware of the progress (Scarino,2010).

1.1.7.4. Teachers' Unwillingness to Teach ICC

The present issue focuses on the teacher's attitudes and feelings towards teaching ICC. Research demonstrates that there are some negative attitudes toward ICC and that teachers are unease to address it during the teaching process. In a study conducted by Young and Sachdev

(2011), the application of the ICC approach is complicated because of the risk of approaching culture critically in a free discussion between students, since deep discussion may lead to racist opinions and analyzing cultures in a negative sense; for instance, students may comment and ask why they celebrate certain traditions or not. This risk causes fear in teachers and they avoid teaching the cultural aspects of the critical approach ICC to keep the language classroom safe. In addition to the limited time to focus on ICC, teachers feel that they don't have enough time to deal with IC, since the curriculum of different countries focuses more on linguistic skills such as grammar rather than cultural skills (Larzen-ostermark, 2008).

1.2. Section Two: Tandem Language Learning

1.2.1. Defining of Tandem Learning

In its common sense, the term " Tandem" is used to describe the collaborative nature of a certain operation that inquires more than one participant who work in conjunction with others aiming to achieve, most of times, mutual objectives (Vassallo & Telles, 2006). When perceiving it from a pedagogical angle, tandem leaning refers to a foreign language learning approach where speakers with different linguistic competencies pair up in an attempt to learn and teach each other their respective language (Brammerts, 1996). Put otherwise, native speakers of variant languages collaborate in order to acquire or practice their target language.

By highlighting the role of the learners participating in language learning in tandem as both learners and teachers simultaneously, two main principles; reciprocity and learner autonomy, are proven to be essential in the process (Brammerts, 1996; Cruz, 2023). According to Cruz (2013), learning in tandem is only effective when both participants exhibit a sense of responsibility not only towards their own learning but also that of their partner, which promotes their reliance on reciprocal interaction that resets on what one has to offer in

order to receive from the other. This reciprocity, thus, permits both learners to have equal chances of profit through mutual exchange of language and culture (Vassallo & Telles, 2006). Quite central it is to mention that reciprocity paves the way for participants in tandem to develop their autonomy. That is, when learners interact as a language expert as well as a learner at the same time, their capacity of becoming more independent and responsible for their own learning tends to develop throughout the learning journey (Little & Brammerts, 1996).

Although it originates back to merely face-to-face interactions, the advent of internet and the emergence of CALL offer other models of TL, including e-tandem and teletandem, which largens the range of techniques that participants can choose to implement in the process, including e-mail chats, audio resources, videoconferencing, online platforms, etc. Hence, these models are now more common to use since they facilitate finding competent partners in the target language as well as overcoming the geographical distance issues.

In short, the tandem approach of language learning is one method through which both participants are given an opportunity to gain a personalized learning experience, develop their linguistic proficiency (Shaver, 2012) and their intercultural competence (Lewis & Qian, 2021; Xu, 2019) through authentic communication with natives of their target language.

1.2.2. Underlying Theories

As any other approach to foreign language education, Tandem learning is based on a number of theoretical frameworks that all share the interactive learning principle. The following lines present an elaboration of these theories.

1.2.2.1.Sociocultural Theory

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978) is a theoretical framework that conceptualizes learning as a social practice. In this framework, Vygotsky highlights that social interactions

with other individuals are the core element required for one to grow their understanding of the external world and construct knowledge about the other cultures. In this respect, he argues that humans' cultural development takes place in two levels; the first is the social inter-mental level where it appears as a result of communication between the person and elements of the outer environment, and the second is the psychological intra-mental level that occurs within the person himself (Vygotsky, 1981).

To clarify how knowledge develops within the inter-mental level, Vygotsky argues that humans are born with elementary mental functions that comprise attention, sensation, perception, and memory, which can be used and developed to higher mental functions as a child gets exposed and interacts with the environment around them. This interaction occurs through what he terms as ''the mediating functions of culturally constructed artifacts including tools, symbols, and more elaborate sign Systems, such as language'' (Priego, 2007, p.11). By this stage, Vygotsky (1978) explains how fundamental is the cooperation with adults to the development of the child's mental functions represented in what he calls as "*the zone of proximal development* (ZPD)" which can be defined as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). To put it differently, ZPD represents all what is slightly beyond the child's (novice) capacity and what he/she is able to achieve with the help of their care giver whom Vygotsky calls the more knowledgeable other (MKO); an expert who can provide the necessary scaffolding which enables the novice to grow his skills and move from his current level of achievement to accomplish their goals. As this latter becomes more competent and begins to hold a sense of autonomy over their leaning, the scaffolding is gradually removed.

To conclude, the sociocultural theory is one framework that relates the humans' psychological and cultural development to the surrounding social and cultural context. When applied in the field of foreign language learning, it elaborates how EFL learners can elevate their proficiency levels thanks to interaction and communication with an expert of their target language who can act as the MKO, be it a teacher or a proficient peer, who is able to display different forms of scaffolding such as providing feedback, correcting linguistic mistakes or, simply, acting as an authentic source of knowledge about the language along with its culture.

1.2.2.2.Experiential Learning Theory

John Dewey is a prominent name in educational theory and philosophy. He is familiar for his countless thoughts about academic and social reform. At the beginning of the twentieth century, he changed the focus of the teaching process from teacher-centered, where the instructor is acting as the sole authority in the classroom and the main transmitter of knowledge, to student-centered approach that empowers students to take ownership of their learning. According to Achkovska-Leshkovska and Miovska-Spaseva's article (2016)"the child's instincts, experience, interests and individuality are not an end in itself: they need to be controlled and guided toward realization of predetermined goals''(pp.57-58). This implies that the learners should be actively engaged in the learning process. In his theory, he tackles the notion of learning by doing, i.e., students should grasp input through problem-solving situations, in which they have significant experiences that are meaningful to their progress as learners. Therefore, Education for Dewey's experiential learning theory is not only about theoretical knowledge but also about developing practical experience to guarantee an authentic comprehension of the subject matter. He also emphasized that the environment is vital to the educational process. He believes that students should draw knowledge from their surroundings in addition to traditional sources like books and teachers.

The tandem learning method accurately reflects Dewey's educational ideas. Students have an active role during the tandem learning process. Both pairs are responsible for being language specialists when they provide corrective feedback and assess their partner, or when they learn the target language and discover its cultural perspectives. They deal with real-life situations and discuss authentic topics. Hence, compared to Dewey's theory, the partners discover learning through their environment, as they directly learn from each other and not from books. In addition, the tandem learning reflects Dewey's focus on practical problem solving by engaging learners in authentic interactions with native speakers of different languages. Therefore, the learners may face the problem of miscommunication as they do not share the same background, and they would solve this obstacle and adjust themselves according to the required situation

1.2.2.3.Communicative Approach to Language Teaching

The communicative approach to language teaching, often referred to as the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach, is believed to be one of the most influential methods used in the field of language teaching that puts all of its emphasis on learners' communicative competence (Kaisheng, 2007). To state it otherwise, Vygotsky (1978) postulates that language in its nature functions in two planes; a psychological and a social plane, which means that language is primarily used as a means of thinking as well as of communicating with other people. For that, CLT shifts the focus of second and foreign language learning from form oriented to meaning oriented by including what is known as *functional language use* and interactive activities which can simulate realistic situations including class discussion and role plays. In other words, it encourages the engagement in conversations that are meaningful and accurate to real-life contexts rather than just memorizing the language rules. Further, the approach advocates the development of fluency

and comprehension which can be achieved through authentic and direct meaningful exchange (Sato, 2016).

Tandem learning approach, as it is based on direct interaction with native speakers of the target language, can be seen as a practical activity that is based on CLT approach since they both share the same principles of prioritizing authentic reciprocity, not neglecting meaning and focusing on developing the learners' communicative competence and cultural exchange.

1.2.3. Forms of tandem learning

Tandem learning is an approach that helps participants learn and apply a foreign language authentically and fosters cultural awareness and communication competence. This innovative approach covers various forms of language learning and exchange, including face-to-face tandem and e-tandem, each providing benefits and opportunities for language learners.

1.2.3.1. Face-to-face tandem learning

Face-to-face tandem learning is the first form of the umbrella term "tandem learning". As mentioned earlier, tandem learning is a learning mode in which two persons with different mother tongues interact to benefit and learn from each other (Brammerts, 2005). In this type, the communication is synchronous, meaning the learners work together in a physical meeting and the conversation takes place in person "to help each other improve their language skills and learn about each other's culture" (Calvert, 1999, p.56). That is to say that face-to-face or direct learning is an effective approach that promotes language learning and exposure to the target culture. In addition, Swienhorst (2003)showed that face-to-face tandem came about first, and the exchange between the partners occurs truly in real-time.

1.2.3.2. E-tandem learning

With the advancement of technology and the spread of globalization, the form of tandem learning has changed from face-to-face to e-tandem. The partners who possess different backgrounds work together virtually, communicating and using technological devices such as telephone, e-mail, video conferencing, instant messaging, or other media. Each participant in the e-tandem form is considered a native speaker concerning the other partner. They help each other and create a beneficial partnership in terms of learning a new language and its cultural aspects (Escribano Ortega & González Casares, 2014; Pomino & Gil-Salom, 2016; Tian & Wang, 2010). The communication concerning this type can be categorized as follows asynchronous, where the exchange does not occur in real-time; like the use of face-to-face type; such as text messages, emails, etc. (Brammerts & Calverts, 2005); quasi synchronous which involves near real time interaction, through text-based chat, voice chat, or synchronous where communication happens in real time including, video conferencing, live online lectures, etc. (Wakisaka, 2018). El-Hariri (2017) demonstrates that "e-tandem communication via the Internet may be realized in different ways. While written interaction through emails or text-chats was prevailing in the last of 1990s, audio-visual tele-collaboration through video-conferencing, establishes itself more and more these days" (p.24).

The participants in e-tandem build a sense of autonomy and confidence in the target language. In this context, Avgousti (2018) found that the learners prefer asynchronous interaction chats because they are more flexible and convenient, in which the participants feel comfortable responding instantly or solving problems, resulting in higher-quality language output. Moreover, Ciftci and Savas (2017)argued that through asynchronous means, the learners during the interaction are required to use simple and short statements compared to the synchronous tools, which demand more linguistically complex formal statements.

Additionally, since 2006 the term teletandem has gained attention compared to e-tandem as a term for online language exchange that takes place over the internet using a telephone and webcam (Tells &Vassallo, 2006). It is a computer-assisted type of learning at a distance in which individuals from different mother tongues learn from each other's language using video conferencing devices virtually. Teletandem is an effective method that promotes a language learner's autonomy and shares knowledge collaboratively through engaging in different tools simultaneously, like Zoom, Skype, and Google Meet (Cavalari & Aranha, 2019; Telles & Vassallo, 2006). Many researchers consider teletandem and e-tandem to be used interchangeably, but a subtle difference exists. E-tandem is concerned only with reading and writing abilities. while teletandem can provide virtual tools to apply speaking and listening in addition to writing and reading skills.

1.2.4. Tandem Principles

The tandem learning approach is built upon several core principles that facilitate effective language learning. These include autonomy, reciprocity, authenticity, and interculturality, all of which work together to create a supportive learning environment.

1.2.4.1.Autonomy

The term autonomy in the field of foreign language possesses a heavy importance. It has been said that autonomy in language learning and autonomy in language use are interconnected (Little, 2004). According to Holec (1981) learners' autonomy is "the ability to take charge of one's own learning'' (Holec, 1981, p.3) . It means that the learners can freely determine what they learn and decide when they want to learn autonomously concerning contents, materials, learning setting, strategies, and styles, etc. One approach to encouraging the present principle is by implementing tandem learning. In which the learners assume responsibility for their learning and for others when they teach each other the language and its cultural aspects, which builds a sense of collaborative work. They are regarded as beginners

and experts at the same time. Moreover, through interaction, tandem participants develop a sense of autonomy, and they become more confident and active in the target language by taking on the role of learners and competent speakers (Little & Brammerts, 1996). With the same assumption, Mc Bride (2009) argued that the learners in virtual communication like e-tandem improve interactional skills through connection with others, which offers more chances to develop the autonomy mindset.

Furthermore, autonomous awareness refers to the learner's ability to make decisions and choices to achieve the learning goals; however, it is not about working in isolation without assistance (Little 1991; Karjalainen, 2011). Hence, learner autonomy should be developed progressively, for instance, with the guidance and support of a teacher (Holec, 1981).

1.2.4.2. Reciprocity

A different tandem principle is reciprocity, which involves the equal contribution of both participants during the learning process. They should benefit mutually from the cooperation of the language exchange and balancing time and effort between both languages. According to Barmmerts, (1996)"Learners should be prepared and able to do as much for their partner as they themselves expect from their partner'' (p.11) . In a similar context, Reymond and Tardieu, (2001)pointed out that tandem language learning requires both partners to actively participate and support each other to the same extent and with a mutual trust and cooperation "to devote the same length of time to each language and to invest the same quantity of energy and involvement in their partner's success'' (Reymond & Tardieu, 2001, p. 21). Moreover, the reciprocity principle of tandem learning promotes the partners' self-esteem and establishes an equal footing between them. Telles and Vassallo (2006) view that "The reciprocity principle allows enough space for its partners to feel free of financial

commitments with the other. It increases their self-esteem and puts both participants on equal terms'' (p. 3).

1.2.4.3. Authenticity

In all of its forms, tandem learning is known to have two main principles; autonomy and reciprocity, with the former representing responsibility and control over one's own learning and the latter indicating the exchanging dynamic of the approach (Brammerts, 1996). However, newer research works seem to assort authenticity as an additional characteristic of learning in-tandem. In order to give the concept a clearer sense, Rule (2006) suggests four main elements that characterize authentic learning as any learning activity that involves real-world problems, mental functioning, engagement in social communication and, finally, the empowering sense of learner autonomy. therefore, learning in tandem, non-formal tandem in particular, is said to be an authentic approach to foreign language learning since it encompasses the combination of these authentic elements. To elucidate, engaging in a non-formal communication with a speaker of another language where real- life scenarios are discussed allows the participant to use their cognitive skills to solve real-life issues concerning their acquisition as well as their performance of the target language with the help of their expert partner rather than relying solely on adapting already planned language content that might step out of the learner needs.

1.2.4.4.Interculturality

There exists a common conviction that language and culture are closely intertwined as one reflects the other (Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo, 1999). Therefore, a communication held by speakers of two different codes is, surely, an intercultural one where interlocuters are allowed to acquire knowledge about each other's cultural norms and raise their awareness of the potential areas of difference and similarity they might share. In this context, language learning

in tandem, which foremost, sets on the collaboration of individuals with various mother tongues and ethnic backgrounds, appears to be an intercultural approach.

As tandem partners exchange, they are offered direct access to experience the target cultural elements reflected in the individual's performance, including the non-verbal cues such as facial expressions and gestures, specifically in face-to-face tandem or when communicating via audio-visual aids such as video conferencing. Additionally, learners can directly ask each other about any ambiguous or culture-specific concepts, whether related to linguistic performance like idioms and culturally bound expressions, or to everyday life practices, including lifestyles, customs, and traditions. Consequently, a broader image of this culture is progressively built hand in hand with the participants' linguistic proficiency.

1.2.5. Tandem Learning in EFL Context

In the EFL context, tandem learning is a valuable collaborative approach that offers numerous benefits for its potential to enhance language learning outcomes, while also presenting challenges that require careful consideration and effective management.

1.2.5.1. Benefits of Implementing Tandem Learning

As is well-known, tandem learning implies that two people with different mother tongues learn each other's native languages. Hence, the purpose behind the present process is to improve language competence through the exchange between individuals. In other words, tandem learning is based on social interactional perspectives because there is a close relationship between language learning and social interaction (See e.g. kaanta, 2010; Firth & Wanger, 2007). In the EFL classroom contexts, tandem is regarded as an effective method for teaching and authentically learning foreign languages. Simons (2006)emphasized that tandem learning has several advantages and benefits for the participants, particularly for EFL learners.

The first benefit to be addressed is motivation. Ushioda (2000) argues that tandem learning encourages motivation for learners "interest and enjoyment of personal interaction with a native speaker, access to informal everyday language, focus on own needs and interests, the mutual partnership factor and lastly speed convenience of e-mail communication'' (Ushioda, 2000, p.125). In fact, the interaction with others and discussing topics about their interests authentically would increase a sense of motivation in learners to learn the language and be truly active and concerned in the process. Wakisaka (2018)studied the effectiveness of tandem learning by collecting reviews from students who have participated in the process, and the majority showed that their motivation is increased thanks to the communication through a tandem. Lea, as a participant, explains that her motivation increased after she found a common interest with Aki in classical music. Yuko also said that her motivation went up after she started the e-tandem practice. Thus, these perspectives could show that integrating tandem exchanges inside the classroom or outside, talking about real-life experiences, could enhance EFL learners' motivation to learn a language.

Secondly, the interaction with persons who possess different backgrounds through tandem learning would enable the learners to get a great benefit in terms of linguistic competence and performance. Simon (2021)shows that the application of tandem learning allows the learners to encounter the language authentically in addition to facilitating the process without making efforts and traveling, especially while applying the e-tandem. Moreover, it contributes to increasing the amount of learners' input as well as the amount of output when practicing the language and exchanging in tandem. In other words, communicating with native speakers is considered an effective way to enhance the linguistic proficiency for EFL learners, which seems to be the basis for the learning and acquisition of a language and the first step of creating an output and significant production.

The last benefit of tandem learning to be dealt with is the culture. It is regarded as an essential part of tandem learning in addition to language. Telles and Vassalo (2006) said that tandem is "a free mutual exchange of knowledge about language and culture**''** **(**pp.6-7). Indeed, when culture is the topic, intercultural communicative competence is a key consideration. Being interculturally competent by developing intercultural skills is important nowadays because it provides the learners with information about international collaboration and employability. Furthermore, learning the culture next to the language may prevent learners from falling into a misunderstanding between the partners. This implies that the communication with native speakers will supply the learners with knowledge about the new culture, including art, music, behaviors, dialect, etc. Therefore, this method offers opportunities for EFL learners to have real cultural interaction with both partners, and they will gain from each other's cultural aspects and knowledge.

1.2.5.2.Drawbacks of Implementing Tandem Learning

While tandem learning can be a powerful method for language acquisition and cultural exchange, it is not protected from challenges. In Simon's opinion (2006), there are several drawbacks that can be faced when applying the tandem learning method for EFL learners.

First and foremost, planning to ensure the progress of the tandem process is a great obstacle that could be seen as time-consuming. In fact, looking for schools and participants to exchange with is very difficult and takes time. Simon argues that teachers and learners also have a difficult responsibility to find a partner school and learners with a similar linguistic level to reach an equal exchange, because a successful tandem process requires the achievement of a reciprocal nature. In addition, it is hard for teachers to evaluate learners' development in a foreign language. The point that prevents the learners from knowing their

current level. That is why Simons suggested creating tandem logbooks in order to record the interaction during the process.

Furthermore, another challenge to be tackled is balancing between the foreign language and the language of the school in tandem learning. Since both learners should benefit similarly from this method. For this reason, Schwienhorst (2003)emphasized that "both partners should use the two languages in equal amounts to ensure that they profit equally from the exchange'' (Schwienhorst, 2003, p.431). Simons suggest the fifty-fifty rule, which implies speaking fifty percent of the time in the mother tongue and fifty others in the foreign language to guarantee the balance of both languages for EFL learners.

Finally, the provision of the necessary requirements concerning the e-tandem, such as internet, computers, and video calls, and the balance of time differences between partners when establishing tandem learning are really serious obstacles. There is a need to offer computers and create a suitable learning environment by making use of the multimedia rooms to ensure the progress of learning. Moreover, both partners need to meet at the same time. Therefore, it is crucial to make sure that the hours of learning match from one country to another. This act is very difficult and may influence the development of the process

1.2.6. Relating Tandem Learning to Intercultural Communicative Competence

The most commonly stated definition of intercultural communicative competence is that of Byram (1997) who believes that it is a mixture of three components; knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to hold effective and appropriate conversations when the interlocuters belong to different ethnical backgrounds. As its name denotes, the first component of ICC is all about being familiar with the fact that other cultures with variant norms do exist. In addition to that, the component of skills tackles mainly the practical aspect of ICC; it comprises all the necessary skills that allow a person to act upon the acquired cultural

knowledge without falling into misunderstandings and conflict. Some of these are skills of interpretation, skills of communication and collaboration, problem-solving, critical thinking and adaptability. As for attitudes which represent the psychological side of ICC, they include all the positive emotions that allow an individual to be interculturally competent and able to engage in successful interaction. These attitudes may involve openness and curiosity to learn, flexibility, acceptance and tolerance. With its intercultural, authentic and communicative nature, the tandem approach to foreign language learning shows to serve as a great field to acquire as well as practice the previously explained components. Relating the concept of ICC to language learning in-tandem can, therefore, be of significant validity (Koh et al, 2020). Since tandem learning is based on a mutual exchange, participants can orient their conversation topics to be more culture-related ones in hopes for them to have more exposure to each other's culture and larger insights on how these cultures differ. Moreover, the direct connection between tandem partners, in case of face-to-face tandem or when interacting through video conferencing, gifts them the opportunity to observe the non-verbal cues which is an effective way to foster their critical thinking skills. Especially when there are unlike interpretations to these non-verbal cues within the learners' cultures, they can easily ask for clarification aiming to avoid any kind of misunderstanding or conflict in case they face similar situations in the future. This, in turn encourages the learners to improve their communication and openness skills, and trains them to be more accepting and respectful towards other communities' beliefs and practices.

To conclude, the tandem language learning method can be seen as an intercultural activity that provides second/ foreign language learners chances to raise their awareness of the target culture since this latter is an inseparable part of language. In the same vein, tandem learning can be viewed as an experimental sphere to potential real-world context that allows

its users to receive feedback on their performance in the target language so that they can carry effective and conflict free intercultural communication in the future.

1.2.7. Notion of Perception

To firstly explicate what a perception is, Perrealt and MacCarthy (2005) suggest that the term can simply be described as the process that individuals go through when attempting to gather and interpret the different kinds of information from the surrounding environment. To identify the components of this process, Jobber (2004) proposes that a perception occurs throughout three distinct steps; selecting, organizing and interpreting sensory stimulation into a meaningful picture of the world. That is to say, it refers to a cognitive representation to the world, which is formed whenever a given stimuli inters the human mind to be, then, processed and transformed to more understandable notions. For Dwinata (2017), a perception is a subjective concept. Since it relies on how one look at things, people, circumstances, and events in a unique way from how another does, it cannot be taken as an ultimate fact as it bears equal chances of being either a correct or false interpretation.

Under the scope of the present research, it is highly important to understand educators' perceptions towards the development of learners' ICC through the use of tandem learning in order to unveil the efficacy of this approach. Alongside, knowing teachers' opinions concerning the matter can reveal whether implementing tandem in Algerian institutions can potentially substitute the tutors, or at least partly assist them, in teaching EFL learners the target culture.

Conclusion

To conclude, the present chapter serves as the theoretical framework of the research topic. At its core, it is about teachers' perceptions on how tandem learning develops students' intercultural communicative competence. In today's globalized world, learners are exposed to

various foreign cultures and are in ongoing interaction with other societies. The fact that led learners to know how to treat foreigners, accept their beliefs, avoid misunderstandings, and adapt to a new environment in addition to language learning. In fact, it is crucial for learners to be interculturally competent for successful communication. Tandem process is one of the more contemporary approaches that might promote that and stays up-to-date with advancements and technology. It is the most suitable way for learners, where they explore various tastes of other cultures and discuss different topics. Therefore, it is definitely worth it if language teachers integrate intercultural context into lesson plans through the implementation of the tandem process. Overall, it can be inferred that intercultural competence is a multi-layered concept that contributes to the stability of learners through interaction with foreigners, and tandem learning serves as a valuable tool to develop this competence through mutual language exchange and cultural immersion.

Chapter Two: Teachers' Perceptions about the Development of EFL Learners' ICC through Tandem Learning

Introduction

Unlike the previous chapter which explored the theoretical background to the notions of intercultural communicative competence and tandem learning, the present chapter is dedicated to the practical segment of this study. By collecting the data required to answer the research questions, this chapter pursues to expose teachers' views about the tandem approach and its usefulness for the development of learners' intercultural communicative competence.

This part of research comprises the main elements of the fieldwork. Initially, it begins with a demonstration of the sample of the study from which the data is gathered. Following that, a description and analysis of the items of teachers' questionnaire is provided before moving to the description of its key findings. Based on these findings, the chapter offers some recommendations for learners, teachers, as well as further research after setting out the limitations of the ongoing study.

2.1.Sample of the Study

Due to their valuable experience of teaching a foreign language as well as their knowledge of the different teaching approaches that might help learners cultivate as well as practice their ICC, teachers are expected to provide enlightening information that serves the study's aims. Hence, fourteen EFL teachers from Mila University Centre (MUC) were randomly selected to share their points of view regarding the tandem approach to language learning and its effectiveness as a developmental tool for EFL learners' ICC.

2.2.Description of Teachers' Questionnaire

The present questionnaire aims at exploring EFL teachers' perceptions regarding the use of tandem learning as a developmental instrument for learners' intercultural communicative competence. The respondents are informed about the confidentiality of the data they provide as well as its significance for the realization of this study. To affirm that they have a clearer grasp of what Tandem Learning is, a concise description of the notion is provided within the introductory segment of the questionnaire. Delving deeper into it, the questionnaire comprises four sections with a total of twenty items most of which are closed-ended questions with few open-ended ones.

The first section, entitled ''Background Information'', consists of a dichotomous (yes or no) question and an open-ended one. It seeks to identify the respondents' qualification degree and how many years of teaching they have experienced. As for the second section, entitled '' EFL Learner' Intercultural Communicative Competence'', it attempts to uncover how teachers perceive teaching the target culture, its importance, the potential setbacks that can rise from culture clash, how to incorporate culture into their teaching, on which frequency and the necessary skills and knowledge for learners to be interculturally competent. All through a one dichotomous question, one open-ended item, four multiple-choice ones and one frequency scale question.

The third section is entitled ''Tandem Language Learning in EFL Context''. It aims at determining the effectiveness of tandem learning in language education and the challenges that might follow up its implementation. It consists of six questions as a whole. Two of them are open-ended items, three are dichotomous (yes or no) questions and the sixth is a multiple-choice one. The final section is the main section of the questionnaire and the foundation of the present dissertation as well. It is entitled ''EFL Teachers' Perceptions about Tandem

Learning as a Tool of EFL Learners' ICC. The focus of this section is oriented to uncover teachers' thoughts on whether the tandem approach to foreign language learning is in any way useful for enhancing EFL learners' ICC. It is composed of five questions; one of which is a multiple-choice question; two others are dichotomous ones questioning the relationship between tandem and ICC, and where does a teacher stand in a tandem situation, while the rest are open-ended items that request personal opinions regarding the topic as well as further suggestions and additional commentary.

2.3.Analysis and Interpretation of Teachers' Questionnaire

Analyzing the questionnaire is, indeed a crucial step to meet the aim of this study and understand how teachers view the tandem learning approach and its usefulness to the development of learners' ICC. Hence, the following lines provide a thorough interpretation for all participants' answers.

Section One: Background Information

Q1. What is your professional degree?

Table 1: Teachers' Professional Degree

Statement	Frequency	Percentage
Magister	0	0%
Doctorate	14	100%
Total	14	100%

The first question seeks to determine what professional degree do teachers hold. As shown in Table 1 above, all participating teachers, representing100% of the sample, reported holding a PhD.

Q2. How many years of teaching experience do you have?

Table 2: Teachers' Teaching Experience

Statement	Frequency	Percentage
20	1	7.1%
16	1	7.1%
13	4	28.6%
12	2	14.3%
8	3	21.4%
5	2	14.3%
4	1	7.1%
Total	14	100%

This question's aim is finding out the respondents' teaching experience. As indicated in table 2, four of them (28.6%) are reported to have thirteen years of teaching experience. Three informants (21.4%) stated having eight years of experience. Two teachers (14.3%) reported to have twelve years, while other two (14.3%) have five years of teaching. One participant (7.1%) mentioned to have twenty years of experience, meanwhile another (7.1%) has sixteen years, and another (7.1%) has four years. To cut it short, the results of this

question reveal that participant have very distinct experiences of teaching in terms of length, the thing that might influence their perspectives regarding the topic of the current study.

Section Two: EFL Learners' Intercultural Communicative Competence

Q3. Do you believe that teaching the target language's culture is essential for learners?

Table 3: Teachers' Beliefs on the Importance of Culture Teaching

Statement	Frequency	Percentage
a. Yes	14	100%
b. No	0	0%
Total	14	100%

This question targets to determine how teachers perceive the significance of teaching the target culture. As revealed in Table 3 above, fourteen out of fourteen teachers (100%) stated that it is quite essential to teach the target culture for learner to develop a full competency in the target language.

Q4. If yes, please justify

In this question, a clarification on how informants view the necessity of the target culture teaching is demanded. Since all the teachers (100%) have agreed on its importance, fourteen justifications were provided to explain why it is compulsory for the target culture to be taught. These clarifications can be summarized as the following:

- Language and culture are inextricably linked to each other and it is through language that one learns about the cultural norms and practices of other

communities. Thus, learning the language will not be appropriate or complete without learning about the culture itself.

- Learning the target culture is highly important for language learners in order to develop their intercultural awareness as well as communication skills.
- Understanding the target culture helps making learning more engaging and enjoyable and helps learners avoid all kinds of misunderstandings and communicate in a more comfortable manner.
- It helps them identify with events discussed and treat topics from variant perspectives.
- It enables learners to understand linguistic expressions specific to certain cultures such as idioms and proverbs.

Q5. What are some factors that can lead to misunderstanding when learners are exposed to a new culture?

Table 4: Factors Leading to Cultural Misunderstanding

Statement	Frequency	Percentage
a. Language barrier	2	14.3%
b. Discrimination or feeling of ethnic or national superiority	1	7.1%
c. Different communication styles	2	14.3%

a+b	1	7.1%
a+c	3	21.4%
a+b+c	5	35.7%
Total	14	100%

This item is included to uncover the most encountered obstacles that teachers notice as factors leading to misunderstandings when experiencing other cultures in a language classroom. It is shown that each of the options of language barrier and different communication styles were chosen by two teachers (14.3%) at a time. Only one respondent (7.1%) opted for discrimination and feelings of ethnic or national superiority as a factor to misunderstandings when experiencing alien cultures. One participant (7.1%) selected both options of a and b (language barrier + discrimination or feeling of ethnic or national superiority), other three (21.4%) chose a and c (language barrier + different communication styles), and five of them (35.7%) opted for all the suggested factors denoting that all of them can contribute to triggering a great deal of discomfort.

Furthermore, four teachers had additional thoughts on the matter. They revealed that misunderstanding can occur due to a plenty of other reasons including:

- Unfamiliar cultural expressions or references.
- Differences in the conceptualization of values, norms, and cultural dimensions.
- Unawareness about what is deemed polite and what is not in the target culture.
- Lack of knowledge about the target culture's traditions and values.

Q6. What activities do you use to incorporate intercultural competence elements into your teaching?

Table 5: Activities of Intercultural Communicative Competence

Statement	Frequency	Percentage
a. Presentations	5	35.7%
b. Role plays	0	0%
c. Classroom social media groups	0	0%
d. Video conferences	0	0%
e. Collaborative projects with international peers	0	0%
a+b	1	7.1%
a+b+d	1	7.1%
a+c	2	14.3%
a+c+e	1	7.1%
a+d+e	2	14.3%
c+e	1	7.1%
Total	13	92.7%

The purpose behind this item is to explore what activities teachers use the most to insert intercultural elements in the teaching process. As Table 6 shows, presentations were individually opted for by five (35.7%) out of fourteen teachers. Whereas the other options were collectively selected. To elaborate, options a+b (presentations + role plays), a+b+d (presentations + role plays + video conferences), a+c+e (presentations + classroom social media groups + collaborative projects with international peers), and c+e (classroom social media groups + collaborative projects with international peers)were all chosen by one (7.1%) teacher at a time. Each of the options a+c (presentations + classroom social media groups) and a+d+e (presentations + video conferences + collaborative projects with international peers) was selected by tow (14.3%) participants.

While the vast majority of respondents were satisfied merely by the proposed activities; four others have offered different ways they prefer using to inform about the target culture. Their propositions revolved mainly around reading novels and short stories in the target language, using teacher talk, or simply teaching cultural aspects directly. It is worth mentioning that a note was added by one teacher indicating that they were using option d+e in their classrooms when they were teaching abroad. This signifies that there is a minor emphasis on these activities in the department of foreign languages at MUC compared to presentations.

Q7. How frequently do you address cultural differences between your students' own culture and the one of the target language?

Table 6: Frequency of Teachers' Teaching of Cultural Differences

Statement	Frequency	Percentage
a. Often	7	50%

b. Sometimes	4	28.6%
c. Rarely	2	14.3%
d. Never	1	7.1%
Total	14	100%

By asking this question, we aimed to find out how often teachers stress cultural differences in their classrooms. Half of them (50%) opted for the option ‘’often’’. Four respondents with a percentage of (28.6%) selected ‘’sometimes’’. Two teachers (14.3%) chose ‘’rarely’’, while only one (7.1%) opted for ‘’sometimes’’. Overall, it is indicated that the vast majority of teachers are aware of the importance of cultural differences and contribute to address them.

Q8. What skills do you think are essential for students to be interculturally competent?

Table 7: Essential Skills for Intercultural Communicative Competence

Statement	Frequency	Percentage
a. Communication skills	1	7.1%
b. Critical thinking	0	0%
c. Empathy	0	0%
d. Flexibility	0	0%
e. Adaptability	0	0%

f. All of them	7	50%
a+b+c+d	1	7.1%
a+b+d	2	14.3%
a+c+e	1	7.1%
a+d+e	1	7.1%
b+e	1	7.1%
Total	14	100%

This item was designed to seek the respondents' opinions about the necessary skills that enable one to be considered interculturally competent. As indicated in Table 8, communication skills were selected by one teacher (7.1%). Two informants (14.3%) chose the option a+b+d (communication skills + critical thinking + flexibility). Each of the options a+b+c+d (communication skills + critical thinking + empathy + flexibility), a+c+e (communication skills + empathy + adaptability), a+d+e (communication skills + flexibility + adaptability), b+e (critical thinking + adaptability) was chosen by only one participant (7.1%) at a time. Seven teachers (50%) out of fourteen opted for all the provided options stressing the importance of all of them for shaping learners' intercultural communicative competence.

Q9. What are the key knowledge areas that learners need to develop their ICC?

Table 8: Essential Knowledge for the Development of Intercultural Communicative Competence

Statement	**Frequency**	**Percentage**

a. Awareness of one's own cultural biases	1	7.1%
b. Awareness of cultural diversity	3	21.4%
c. Knowledge of the global perspectives	0	0%
d. Understanding of the differences in communication styles and non-verbal cues	0	0%
e. All of the above	6	42.9%
a+b	1	7.1%
a+b+d	1	7.1%
a+c	1	7.1%
b+d	1	7.1%
Total	14	100%

The last question of this section asks the respondents about the most vital knowledge areas language learners need to acquire in order for them to improve their intercultural communicative competence. Table 9 reveals that only one teacher (7.1%) chose *the* awareness of one's own cultural biases. Three informants (21.4%) opted for awareness of cultural

diversity. Each of the options a+b (awareness of one's own cultural biases + awareness of cultural diversity) , a+b+d (awareness of one's own cultural biases + awareness of cultural diversity + understanding of the differences in communication styles and non-verbal cues), a+c (awareness of one's own cultural biases + knowledge of the global perspectives), b+d (awareness of cultural diversity + understanding of the differences in communication styles and non-verbal cues)was opted for by one participant with a percentage of (7.1%) at a time. Nevertheless, six respondents forming (42.9%) reported selecting all of the suggested options as crucial to learn about for the sake of becoming interculturally competent individuals.

Section three: Tandem Learning in EFL context

Q10. Are you familiar with the concept of tandem learning?

Table 9: Teachers' Awareness of Tandem Learning

Statement	Frequency	Percentage %
Yes	12	85.7%
No	2	14.3%
Total	14	100%

The current introductory question explores the teachers' acknowledgment of tandem language learning. A total of twelve teachers (85.7%) declared that they are familiar with the approach. However, two teachers (14.3%) showed their ignorance of the concept. The result suggests that the majority of teachers are aware of the concept of tandem learning and are working on it.

Q11. Do you think that tandem learning is effective for language learners?

Table 10: Teachers' Thoughts about the Effectiveness of Tandem Process in the Language Learning

Statement	Frequency	Percentage%
Yes	13	92.9%
No	1	7.1%
Total	14	100%

This item attempted to uncover the efficiency of tandem learning for language learners. The data clearly display that thirteen of the participants (92.9 %) support the idea that tandem learning is an appropriate approach for EFL learners. While only two teachers (7.1%) showed disagreement with that idea. Overall, the results show that the vast majority of teachers believe in the effectiveness of tandem learning.

Q12. Justify your answer, please

In the next question, teachers were asked to justify the utility of the tandem process in language learning. Notably, all the participants shared their personal opinions and provided justification. Hence, the majority emphasized the effectiveness of tandem learning, citing several key reasons, including:

- Tandem learning helps learners to interact authentically with native speakers.
- Tandem learning enhances linguistic level, cultural exchange, and develops intercultural competence.
- Tandem learning helps to improve speaking skills and fosters students' autonomy.

A significant number highlighted that EFL learners benefit greatly from tandem learning. All the participants cited different reasons to justify their views. For example, one participant noted that the interaction with native speakers via tandem learning develops students' confidence and independence, while another emphasized its importance to motivate the students and make them open to the world. Additionally, some respondents stressed that it is effective in improving students' linguistic and cultural level. Among those who selected the *no* option, two teachers offered an explanation; one teacher excused himself to justify due to the lack of knowledge of the topic, saying that'' I really have no idea because even this concept as such is alien to me''. The other participants argued that the tandem process lacks a structured format. Therefore, it is pleasing that the awareness of tandem's value is prominent in the language learning process.

Q13. Do you encourage your students to interact with speakers of other languages via tandem learning?

Table 11: Teachers' Attempt to Encourage Students' Interaction with Foreigners via Tandem Learning

Statement	Frequency	Percentage %
Yes	11	78.6 %
No	3	21.4%
Total	14	100%

This question was designed to gather insights about whether the teachers facilitate communication with speakers of other languages using the tandem approach. The collected

data revealed that eleven respondents (78.6%) encourage learners to engage with foreigners through tandem learning. In contrast, three teachers (21.4%) deny the idea.

Q14. If yes, what techniques do you advise them to use?

This follow-up question was answered by eight teachers who previously affirmed the promotion of students' interaction with foreigners through tandem learning. It explored preferred techniques for better learning. The results show diverse techniques: one teacher suggested that the cultural discussion using virtual tools like images, video, etc., is an effective technique. Some participants showed that video conferencing, social media, and using specific applications are the best ways to interact with native speakers. Another respondent proposed that using online classes with other universities from different countries as a collaborative learning may help students to learn the cultural aspects in addition to their language. Overall, according to the answers, the teachers share a common point, which is that they are trying to foster students' interaction with foreigners in different ways.

Q15. What challenges do you believe might arise when implementing tandem learning in the classroom?

Table 12: Potential Challenges when Applying Tandem Learning in the Classroom

Statement	Frequency	Percentage%
a. Language and cultural barriers	2	14.3%
b. Partnership dynamic	1	7.1%
c. Time management	1	7.1%

d. Motivation and engagement	0	0%
e. Technical issues like poor internet, audio, or video delay	1	7.1%
a+b	1	7.1%
a+c	1	7.1%
a+b+c	1	7.1%
c+e	1	7.1%
a+c+e	2	14.3%
a+b+d+e	1	7.1%
b+c+e	1	7.1%
Total	13	92.9%

This question highlights the potential drawbacks that might hinder the tandem process inside the classroom. Based on the presented data, two (14.3%) teachers mentioned that language and cultural barriers are the most serious challenges. One (7.1%) respondent showed that the partnership dynamic might obstruct the process. One (7.1%) teacher attributed the reason to time management. Another teacher (7.1%) considered the technical issues as an obstacle that blocks the application of tandem learning. While each of the options a+b (language and cultural barriers + partnership dynamic), a+c (language and cultural barriers + time management), a+b+c (language and cultural barriers + partnership dynamic + time

management) , c+e (time management + technical issues like poor internet, audio, or video delay), a+b+d+e (language and cultural barriers + partnership dynamic + motivation and engagement + technical issues like poor internet, audio, or video delay), b+c+e (partnership dynamic + time management + technical issues like poor internet, audio, or video delay) was selected one time (7.1%) by teachers, and two others (14.3%) chose the possibilities of a+c+e (language and cultural barriers +time management + technical issues like poor internet, audio, or video delay) and another teacher did not answer the present question. This indicates that the present approach faces multiple issues in all aspects.

Section four EFL Teachers' Perceptions about Tandem Learning as a Tool of EFL Learners' ICC

Q16. Do you think tandem learning can contribute to the promotion of EFL learners' ICC?

Table 13: The Contribution of Tandem Learning to the Promotion of ICC

Statement	Frequency	Percentage%
Yes	14	100%
No	0	0%
Total	14	100%

This item is devised to examine the potential benefits and effectiveness of tandem learning in enhancing EFL learners' ICC. As depicted in the graph, all the respondents (100%) agree with the idea that the application of the tandem learning process contributes to fostering the language learners' ICC. This suggests the significant benefit of the approach on developing the students' intercultural skills.

Q17. Which aspects of ICC do you think tandem learning can most effectively develop?

Table 14: The Effect of Tandem Learning on Aspects of ICC

Statement	Frequency	Percentage %
a. Cultural awareness	2	14.3%
b. Communication skills	0	0%
c. Empathy	0	0%
d. Others	0	0%
a+b	6	42.9%
a+c	1	7.1%
a+b+c	4	28.6%
Total	13	92.9%

This question is intended to identify the specific areas where tandem learning can have the most impact on developing ICC. According to the data in the table, two (14.3%) teachers suggest that cultural awareness is regarded as an essential aspect of ICC that can be developed through tandem learning. Six teachers (42.9%) believe that the provided options a+b (cultural awareness + communication skills) are features that foster the tandem process, including cultural awareness, communication skills. At the same time, one (7.1%) teacher selected the option a+c (cultural awareness + empathy). she\he thinks that communication skills and empathy may be improved through the current approach. However, four (28.6%) respondents picked the option a+b+c (cultural awareness + communication skills + empathy). They consider that the application of tandem learning promotes the cultural awareness,

communication skills, and empathy of learners. In addition to one participant did not provide an answer to the current question. Overall, these answers point to the great influence of the tandem application in various ICC's aspects.

Q18. In your opinion, what strategies can enhance the effectiveness of tandem learning for the development of ICC?

The current question seeks the teachers' views on strategies to enhance tandem's effectiveness for developing intercultural communicative competence. The vast majority of respondents suggested various strategies to implement the tandem learning, as mentioned in the following points:

- Prior teaching of cultural aspects and communication cues.
- Tele-collaboration with other students, continuous interaction, and cultural discussions.
- Setting online discussions regularly and engaging in fun activities.
- Integrating authentic materials.
- Setting clear goals and assessing the learning progress.

All these are strategies suggested by teachers in order to implement an effective tandem learning process. They focused on prior teaching of cultural aspects and communication cues for both cultures (native and target) , which is regarded as the basis for a successful interaction. They also recommended encouraging telecollaboration with foreigners to motivate the learners by utilizing different authentic materials such as social media platforms, language exchange apps, and online forums. Moreover, they proposed establishing clear objectives to ensure a structured and evaluate progress.

Q19. Do you believe that teachers can play a role in drawing their learners' attention to the beneficial impact of tandem learning in the development of their ICC?

Table 15: Teachers' Beliefs on their Role in Shaping Students' Perceptions about Tandem Learning for ICC Development

Statement	Frequency	Percentage%
Yes	14	100%
No	0	0%
Total	14	100%

The present question is created to seek the role of teachers in promoting tandem learning and its potential benefits for improving ICC among students. Table 19 shows that fourteen respondents (100 %) confirm the great status of the teacher in directing learners' attention to the positive impact of tandem learning on EFL intercultural competence. This reveals that no objection to the role of teachers in developing the students' intercultural skills.

Q20. If you have any other insights or comments regarding the implementation of tandem learning to develop learners' ICC, please share.

The last question is intended for further perspectives and comments on the application of tandem learning in order to promote students' ICC. Four of the respondents out of fourteen gave their views regarding the topic. Their answers can be classified into two categories. The first category admits their unawareness of the concept of tandem learning despite its importance. They also suggest that teachers and students should read more in order to learn how to implement it. Meanwhile, the second one shows the importance of the approach and its vital role in fostering the languages and intercultural aspects. Among their opinions is the

necessity of integrating such an approach into the educational system for better learning outcomes. Their suggestions can be concluded in the following points:

- The effectiveness of tandem learning in developing ICC can vary, depending on many factors, including the fact of how the program is structured, and the commitment and dedication of the participants.
- Learners prefer innovative methods of teaching, and they admire social media; thus, attracting their attention to such an approach may push them forward to do better in their English, for example.

2.4. Discussion of the Findings

The present study mainly addressed educators' perceptions regarding the implementation of tandem learning and its influence on EFL learners' intercultural communicative competence. In this vein, the interpretation of the data gathered from the teachers' questionnaire showed a number of key findings.

First and foremost, the analysis of the first sections of the questionnaire revealed that it, indeed, is of a paramount significance to educate foreign language learners about the target culture in order to train them for intercultural communication. According to teachers, culture and language cannot be separated since the latter is the vehicle that helps carrying and preserving culture and it is through language that the different cultural norms, practices and heritage of other societies is best understood. Therefore, it is quite far for language learners to achieve an overall advanced proficiency in the target language and properly use it if the culture is not given much attention. The respondents' answers also resulted in a considerable number of factors that teachers view as the main reasons that lead learners to fall into misunderstanding when dealing with the target culture. Some of these factors were different communication skills and the ignorance of target cultural meanings which reemphasize the

necessity for the development of not only cultural awareness but also the different attitudes and skills that prepare learners to be able to handle intercultural communication.

Furthermore, the data obtained allowed for a comprehension of what cultural elements teachers stress the most and how they do so. It is concluded that most of them frequently attempt to address the potential differences between learners' culture and the target one form verbal and non-verbal communication, knowledge of the global perspectives, to communication styles often times through different activities including presentations, role plays, and other aiming to cultivate their learners' ICC.

The third section of the questionnaire provides insights into teachers' views on the benefits of the tandem process for EFL learners. According to the questionnaire findings, teachers believe that it is a well-known approach. They regularly employ it in different ways, using video conferencing, social media, collaborative projects with international peers, etc. According to them, it is a very useful approach in terms of improving the students' proficiency level in the target language including listening and speaking skills, motivation, autonomy, and confidence. In addition, teachers think that the tandem process offers a real interaction with speakers of a different mother tongue in which the students develop their communication skills and enhance cultural exchange. In other words, via tandem learning, the EFL learners would develop their linguistic proficiency in addition to cultural competency. So, what can be inferred from the results is that the tandem process can be regarded as a beneficial approach for language learners, as it could provide a supportive environment wherein the students practice authentic conversations and improve language skills. It is fair to say that the teachers view tandem learning as an appropriate approach for learners. That is why the EFL learners should apply it and adapt it as an essential approach, like the other approaches to learning.

The analysis of the last section of the questionnaire, which is the core of the current dissertation, is an answer to the second and third research questions that tend to reveal the teachers' perceptions towards the development of EFL students' intercultural communicative competence through the tandem learning process. Teachers demonstrate that tandem learning plays a crucial role in the development of ICC. It may develop multiple aspects effectively, such as cultural awareness, communication skills, and empathy, etc. They show that through telecollaboration and the mutual cultural exchange, students gain a deeper understanding of the cultural differences, ultimately becoming more interculturally competent EFL learners. Moreover, the analysis of the final question regarding further comments and opinions revealed that some teachers noted learners' preference for innovative methods, such as social media integration, to enhance engagement and learning outcomes. The tandem approach effectively addresses these aspects. However, a minority of respondents highlighted a lack of awareness about this process among teachers, emphasizing the need for more information and training. Hence, to implement this approach effectively, the majority of them suggested integrating it as a structured activity within the educational framework, the thing that reflects that the approach is not really implemented in MUC.

2.5.Recommendations

In light of the findings of the current study, a set of recommendations is presented to address EFL learners, EFL teachers, and future researchers.

2.5.1. Recommendations for Learners

All the learners from different levels are advised to apply this approach of tandem learning to improve their intercultural competence. They should find a partner from a different cultural background and engage in regular communication, exploring various topics, and discussing communication differences. Also, they are recommended to take advantage of

the spread of globalization and use social media and the multiple electronic tools to apply the present process and interact with foreigners from a distance.

2.5.2. Recommendations for Teachers

Teachers are advised to follow the tandem learning approach in the regular sessions regarding its crucial role in fostering the students' intercultural competency. They are recommended to draw attention to the beneficial impact of tandem learning on the development of their ICC, and create opportunities to engage with diverse perspectives, promoting effective communication and cultural understanding.

2.5.3. Recommendations for Future Researchers

It is recommended for future researchers to conduct other research on students' perceptions as well in order to provide insights into their willingness to apply the tandem process for the development of their ICC. Furthermore, it would be advisable for future researchers to employ an experimental design to explore the effectiveness of tandem learning for learners' intercultural situations so as to get more authentic and valid results.

2.6.Limitations of the Study

Several difficulties were encountered in the course of carrying out the current study, the most prominent one was the limited availability of references of the present topic regarding the relationship between the two variables, namely tandem learning and intercultural communicative competence. Another challenge arose during the collection of teachers' answers. Indeed, collecting responses from participants was difficult due to the online questionnaire form. Most teachers did not reply to emails or answer the Google form questionnaire. This ultimately led us to administer paper versions of the questionnaire in person at the university making the procedure much more time-consuming.

Conclusion

This chapter is focused on the practical part of the present study. It reveals the findings of this research conducted on the teachers' perceptions about the development of EFL learners' intercultural communicative competence through tandem learning. It was administered to English teachers at AbdElhafid Boussouf Mila University Center. The study provides logical insights into the aforementioned research questions. Most of the respondents show agreement with the effectiveness of the tandem approach to improve the students' intercultural competence. Hence, the findings confirm that teachers of English encourage the implementation of the tandem process to develop the intercultural competence of learners. So, based on teachers' perceptions, it is worth highlighting that tandem learning is one crucial way to foster students' intercultural competence.

General Conclusion

Within the increasing rise of globalization throughout the world, intercultural communicative competence has become one of the most required skills for communication. One cannot doubt its significance for allowing the individual to positively perceive the others' beliefs and perspectives as well as appropriately interact with them. Consequently, the focus of foreign language teaching approaches is nowadays oriented to develop this competence within language learners. Tandem learning is one of the most beneficial approaches when it comes to culture teaching. As being based on authentic communication between learners, it provides them with an enriching source of cultural information.

An attempt was made to gain broader insights on teachers' perceptions about the effectiveness of the tandem approach in developing EFL learners' ICC aiming to understand the scope of their overall acceptance of its implementation as a developmental instrument of

the competence. In order to achieve the previously mentioned research aims, a questionnaire was handed to EFL teachers at MUC.

The research findings reveal that teachers actually welcome the use of tandem learning as a communicative language teaching and learning approach which might help cultivating learners' ICC. According to them, a direct interaction with an expert of the target language is a great way to enhance not only the linguistic competence but also raise students' cultural awareness. More importantly, they suggest that the tandem process provides a safe zone for learners to discuss and question the differences between their cultures allowing them to be more open-minded and respectful of these differences. As a result, learners can easily ameliorate their critical thinking, communication skills, and adapt their behaviors according to the target culture preparing them to navigate future intercultural communication. Consequently, teachers are recommended to take advantage of this approach in order to assist them in the mission of culture education.

As a final note, it is worth mentioning that this study carries out significant implications for EFL classrooms as it can enlighten teachers as well as learners to orient their attention towards the tandem approach in order to eases the pedagogical process and assist them in culture teaching and learning. Nevertheless, this is of a limited scope and that its findings are open for discussion and criticism. Further research is therefore suggested to be conducted in order to discuss the positive side of tandem learning and its effect on learners' ICC.

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Appendices

Appendix: The Teachers' Questionnaire

Dear teacher,

Thank you for agreeing to take part in the present study which pursues to uncover your valuable perceptions about the development of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' intercultural communicative competence through the application of tandem learning. All the responses you provide would be a great help for the accomplishment of this research and all the data will be kept confidential.

Before answering the questionnaire, please keep in mind that tandem learning is an approach to language learning that involves reciprocal language exchange. In this method, two learners from different ethnic background and each is fluent in a given language, collaborate in an authentic communication to teach each other their respective language.

Please put a tick (✓) in the boxes of the answers that suit you most, and provide extra details whenever needed.

Section One: Background Information

1. What is your professional degree?

a. Magister☐ b. PhD (Doctorate)☐

2. How many years of teaching experience do you have?

……...

Section Two: EFL learners' Intercultural Communicative Competence

3. Do you believe that teaching the target language's culture is essential for learners?

a. Yes☐ b. No☐

4.if yes, please justify ……

……

……

5. What are some factors that can lead to misunderstanding when learners are exposed to a

new culture?

a. Language barrier☐

b. Discrimination and feelings of ethnic or national superiority☐

c. different communication styles☐

d.Others……

…….

…….

6. what activities do you use to incorporate intercultural competence elements into your

teaching?

a. Presentations ☐. b. Role plays ☐ c. Classroom social media groups/ blogs ☐

d. Video conferences ☐ e. Collaborative projects with international peers ☐

f.Others……

……..

…….

7. How frequently do you address cultural differences between your students' own culture and the one of the target language?

a. Never ☐ b. Rarely ☐ c. Sometimes ☐ d. Often☐

8. What skills do you think are essential for students to be interculturally competent?

a. Communication skills ☐b. Critical thinking ☐ c. Empathy☐

d. Flexibility☐ e. Adaptability ☐ f. all of them☐

9. What are the key knowledge areas that learners need to develop their ICC?

a. Awareness of one's own cultural biases ☐

b. Awareness of cultural diversity ☐

c. Knowledge of the global perspectives ☐

d. Understanding of the differences in communication styles and non-verbal cues ☐

e. all of the above ☐

Section Three: Tandem Learning in EFL context

10. Are you familiar with the concept of "tandem learning"**?**

a. Yes☐ b. No ☐

11. Do you think that tandem learning is effective for language learners?

a. Yes☐ b. No ☐

12. please justify ……

……

……

13. Do you encourage your students to interact with speakers of other languages via tandem learning?

a. Yes☐ b. No☐

14. If yes, what techniques do you advise them to use?.....

……

…….

15. What challenges do you believe might arise when implementing tandem learning in the classroom?

a. Language and cultural barriers☐

b. Partnership dynamic☐

c. Time management☐

d. Motivation and engagement☐

e. Technical issues like poor internet, audio or video delay☐

Section Four: EFL Teachers' Perceptions about Tandem Learning as a Developmental Tool of EFL Learners' ICC

16. Do you think that Tandem learning can contribute to the promotion of EFL learners' ICC.

Strongly agree ☐

Agree ☐

Undecided☐

Disagree☐

Strongly disagree ☐

17. Which aspects of ICC do you think tandem learning can most effectively develop?

a. Cultural awareness ☐ b. Communication skills ☐ c. Empathy☐

d. Others ……...

……...

……..

18. In your opinion, what strategies can enhance the effectiveness of tandem learning for the Development of ICC?

……

……

……

19. Do you believe that teachers can play a role in drawing their learners' attention to the beneficial impact of tandem learning in the development of their ICC?

……

……

……

……

20. If you have any other insights or comments regarding the implementation of tandem learning to develop learners' ICC, please share

……

……

……

……

Your Contribution is very much appreciated.

الملخص

تتطور أساليب التدريس باستمرار مع مرور الوقت، ومع احتياجات المتعلمين أيضًا. لذلك، من المهم للمعلمين والمعلمين المتدربين أن يتطوروا مع مرور الوقت وأن يتكيفوا مع هذه الأساليب الجديدة في التفكير والتنفيذ. لقد شاع التعلم الثنائي او الترادفي منذ سنوات عديدة، ونجح في تحسين مستوى الطلاب وتنمية جوانبهم الثقافية. تبحث هذه الأطروحة في تصورات المعلمين لدور هذا النهج في تطوير التواصل بين الثقافات لدى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. وبناءً على ذلك، تم طرح ثلاثة أسئلة بحثية:1) إلى أي مدى يعزز التعلم الترادفي وعي متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية بالاختلافات الثقافية؟ 2) هل يرحب المعلمون بالتعلم الترادفي كنهج؟ 3) ما هي تصورات المعلمين فيما يتعلق بتنفيذ التعلم الترادفي لتطوير كفاءة التواصل بين الثقافات لدى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية؟ ولتحقيق أهداف الدراسة والإجابة على أسئلة البحث، تم اعتماد منهج وصفي. وتم توزيع استبيان على أربعة عشر معلمًا للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في جامعة ميلة. وتظهر نتائج البحث الرئيسية أن غالبية المعلمين يمتلكون مواقف إيجابية تجاه تحسين كفاءة التواصل بين الثقافات لدى طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية من خلال تطبيق نهج التعلم الترادفي. ويشير ذلك إلى موقفهم الداعم لتطبيق هذا النهج من أجل التنمية بين الثقافات. يقدم البحث في النهاية ثروة من التوصيات لعلم أصول التدريس والبحوث المستقبلية لتسليط الضوء على فعالية التعلم الترادفي في تعزيز كفاءة التواصل بين الثقافات لدى الطلاب.

الكلمات المفتاحية: كفاءة التواصل بين الثقافات، تصورات، التعلم الترادفي