

The use of free access and tandem learning in English/foreign language teaching

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The use of free access and tandem learning in
English/foreign language teaching

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¹ Please find the appendices on the CD at the end of this dissertation.

1. Introduction

Didactic methods are constantly evolving with time but also with the learners' needs. This is why it is important for teachers, and trainee teachers, to progress over time and adapt to these new ways of thinking and doing. Free access and tandem learning have been around for a number of years already, they continue to evolve and educationalists are still creating new approaches to using them. A more recent innovation is videoconferencing, which is a mode of communication rather than a didactic method. It will be dealt with here as a medium of free access and tandem learning. This master's thesis investigates what the benefits of these methods are for teaching English as a foreign language, or foreign language teaching more generally.

In this dissertation, I will thus focus on these two didactic methods, i.e., free access and tandem learning. In addition, I will investigate the use of videoconferencing as a medium for both methods. I will also study the role both methods are playing in the English/foreign language classroom, including with the help of a survey which was conducted among teachers in Belgium.

Before starting this thesis, I would like to highlight the reasons why I have chosen this topic. The main reason takes me back to my secondary education where one of my English teachers used to make us exchange with native speakers about a number of subjects and themes. In fact, we had the opportunity to be in contact with native speakers at least four times a year. The process consisted of us learning about a specific theme during several weeks, then discussing it with our fellow students and finally having a Skype call, an exchange of letters or even videos with a native speaker to discuss the subject with him/her and asking him/her questions about the cultural aspect of the subject. This way of teaching really made me value language skills even more and the possibility of talking to native speakers made things real to me, which was very different from using textbooks for example. What made me want to focus on videoconferencing even more is the fact that I had the opportunity to do an internship in my secondary school with that same teacher who taught me about this method and who allowed me to create a lesson which had as its final task a Skype call. This experience supported me in the finding that both as a student and as a teacher, this way of teaching is highly motivating. After discussing this subject with my supervisor, he suggested that I also talk about free access and tandem learning, as they are closely linked in the way that they differ from the original didactic outline. In fact, they are outside of and complementary to didactic sequence teaching such as

*Present, Practice, Produce*² or Kolb's problem-solving model (1976), as they offer a new way of teaching but are also designed to enhance the learners' linguistic input and output.

Finally, videoconferencing has gained a lot of importance in the context of teaching recently due to the pandemic situation and I thus believe that it is an appropriate moment to learn more about what this mode of communication has to offer for teachers as well as learners. I also find that free access and tandem learning go hand in hand with videoconferencing, as videoconferencing is a mode of communication which can be used in connection with free access and tandem learning and this is why I decided to work on this mode of communication in addition to these two methods.

This master's thesis is organised as follows. The first section will discuss the hypotheses and research questions this work is going to focus on. The second section will be about the theoretical framework of free access, tandem learning and videoconferencing. In the first part of section three, the occurrence of free access and tandem learning in Belgian frameworks and curricula will be assessed. In the second part of section three, we will have the analysis of a survey made with teachers on how they use free access, tandem learning as well as videoconferencing as a mode of communication in their language lessons. Finally, a conclusion will be drawn with suggestions for use.

² Simons, G. (2020-2021). Cours de didactique des langues modernes. Partim I. Présentation de deux canevas didactiques pour l'enseignement des langues modernes [Syllabus]. Liège : Université de Liège. Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres. Service de didactique des langues modernes.

2. Hypotheses and research questions

In order to convey a clear structure to this thesis, I would like to focus on eight research questions and hypotheses about free access, tandem learning and videoconferencing which are going to be answered in the subsequent chapters of this study. A lot of these research questions will also be answered on the basis of a survey which was sent to Belgian teachers.

Before presenting the research questions, I will first explain why they were chosen for this study. An important reason is that they are currently a blind spot in the field of didactics. In fact, throughout my studies, whether during university college or university, I have never encountered the use of free access or tandem learning and I want to take advantage of this thesis to understand the possible difficulties but also the benefits of such methods. In addition to practice, these methods were not really discussed in the theory apart from the topical didactics course with Mr. Simons when we tackled the subject of other modes of organization than didactic sequences in the language classroom. My objective is also to analyse whether they are addressed in language frameworks, such as the CEFR, and, if not, to understand why.

The list below presents the hypotheses arising from research questions central to this thesis:

H1a) Free access works on the learners' autonomy.

H1b) Tandem learning works on the learners' autonomy.

H1c) Videoconferencing works on the learners' autonomy.

H2a) Free access occurs only very rarely in language frameworks.

H2b) Tandem learning occurs only very rarely in language frameworks.

H3a) Free access enhances the learners' linguistic input.

H3b) Tandem learning enhances the learners' linguistic input.

H4) Tandem learning enhances the learners' linguistic output.

H5) Tandem learning is motivating for learners as it provides them with a real-life situation.

H6) Tandem learning provides learners with cultural knowledge.

H7) Teachers think they do not have time to move beyond the didactic sequences.

H8) Exchanging with native speakers can only be practised with learners having a higher level of language skills (from upper-secondary level onwards).

3. Theoretical framework

3.1 Introduction

This section will provide theoretical background about free access, tandem learning and videoconferencing. It is indeed important to start with defining these methods and mode of communication and describing the historical contexts in which they appeared and continue to develop. Free access and tandem learning are in fact different but do share a number of characteristics, as they are seen as alternatives to basic didactic sequences, which means that they can be practised outside the context of a regular lesson. Other such alternatives include, for example, occasional lessons on the foreign culture, presentations given by students, or even the project-based learning (Simons, 2021: 2)³ but free access and tandem learning with videoconferencing as a medium are the methods I especially want to focus on in this thesis, as I think that they can be easily combined. In fact, they could be combined into a single method that would consist of doing tandem learning in a free access context via videoconferencing, but I really want to address these methods separately in this thesis, considering that free access is mainly for receptive tasks. Throughout the following section, I will try to provide an answer to my first research question using the information I gathered in various literature.

3.2 General aspects of free access, tandem learning and videoconferencing

3.2.1 Free access

3.2.1.1 Definition and goals

The first method on which the focus will be placed is free access. But before moving on to its historical context, it is first crucial to define this term which can seem quite vague. According to Sheerin in the book *Self-Access*⁴, “Self-access is a way of describing learning material that is designed and organised in such a way that students can select and work on tasks on their own, and obtain feedback on their performance.” Then, the Wallonia-Brussels Federation defines free access in the Germanic language program for second and third level learning as follows: “L’accès libre est une manière possible d’organiser l’apprentissage. Il s’agit d’aménager un lieu (un coin de la classe, la médiathèque ou la bibliothèque...), de déterminer les moments où les élèves peuvent accéder librement à un choix de textes, des fiches d’activités et d’autocontrôle. L’organisation en groupe-classe est alors abandonnée Ceci permet des moments

³ Simons, G. (2020–2021). Cours de Didactique des langues modernes. Partim II. Module : autres modes d’organisation de la classe de langue étrangère que les séquences didactiques [Syllabus]. Liège : Université de Liège. Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres. Service de didactique des langues modernes.

⁴ Sheerin, S. (1989). *Self-Access*. Resource books for teachers. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

d'apprentissage individualisé et différencié. Le professeur n'intervient qu'à la demande des élèves"⁵. These definitions serve as an aid to provide my own input which focuses on the teaching of a second language. According to me, free access enables learners to work, mainly on the receptive skills such as listening and reading comprehension, each at their own pace thanks to their "free access" to documents in the foreign language. Learners are provided with correction sheets which allow them to correct their work whenever they are ready. They also get a log book to record their results and see their progress. As an example from Beckers *et al.*'s study⁶ on free access, learners can choose freely between listening or reading comprehension activities and then have to complete the task within a time period. One example from this study is a listening exercise about finding accommodation. Learners get a context that explains to them that they have to help a friend to find a place to live by reading through a newspaper and listening to this friend speaking. They have the task of crossing out unsuitable advertisements and circling the advert that the friend chooses to pick out. They are given 40 minutes and have the opportunity to listen to the conversation five times.

Now that we know what is meant by the term "free access", it is essential to know more about its purpose. "The primary aim of such facilities is to enable learning to take place independently of teaching. Students are able to choose and use self-access material on their own and the material gives them the ability to correct or assess their own performance. By using such a self-access facility, students are able to direct their own learning" (Sheerin, 1989: 3). In this quotation, free access seems complementary to standard teaching, as it could bring real benefits for the learners' autonomy. Autonomy could therefore be connected with effective language learning. As Naiman *et al.* put it in their 1978 study, "the most successful language learning strategies are connected with assuming responsibility for one's own learning."

The concept of free access is thus directly linked to the issue of autonomy, which has had an increasing importance following The Council of Europe Modern Languages Project in the 1970s (Holec, 1981 in Koyalan, 2009: 731)⁷. In fact, Holec defined learner autonomy in

⁵ *Programme des langues germaniques*, deuxième et troisième degrés, Communauté française, cahier 5, p.13

⁶ Beckers, J., Simons, G. *et al.* (2005). L'accès-libre : une reconfiguration efficace du métier de l'élève et de l'enseignant ? Observation et analyse des conditions d'efficacité : rapport intermédiaire de la première année de recherche. Université de Liège, Faculté de Psychologie et des Sciences de l'Éducation, Service de Didactique Professionnelle et de Formation des Enseignants.

⁷ Koyalan, A. (2009). The evaluation of a self-access centre: A useful addition to class-based teaching? *System*, 37(4), 731–740.

this project as being “the ability to take charge of one’s own learning” and perceived this as “enabling him (the learner) to act more responsibly in running the affairs of the society in which he lives”⁸. It is therefore important for teachers to teach learners to work independently in order to move with the times and to learn better. As Koyalan specifies in her article about a self-access centre, “when learners have responsibility for their own learning and can make decisions for themselves, [...] this is of vital importance since learning can best occur if the learners are willing to learn. They need to understand that their role in the process of learning is crucial” (Koyalan, 2009: 731). Free access can thus be a useful way to help learners to become aware of the importance of their role. It is therefore important to explain this process before starting a free access project so as to enable learners to understand why they are doing this kind of exercises. This will help them be more effective as learners, as they will have a purpose and will be all the more active while learning.

Next to the concept of autonomy, we also find that motivation which plays an important role in the free access method, as it seems to be linked to autonomy. In this context, Spratt *et al.* have concluded in their study from 2002 comparing the relationship between autonomy and motivation that “teachers should encourage motivation before autonomy. When students believe in their own efforts and allow more time to the activities and materials they want to engage in, they become more motivated and this leads to greater autonomy”⁹ (Spratt *et al.*, 2002 in Koyalan, 2009: 733). As a result, teachers should motivate learners in the language learning process so that they can perhaps, later, acquire autonomy while bearing in mind that not all motivated learners are necessarily autonomous as well.

3.2.1.2 Historical background

In his article about the role of self-access centre in a tertiary language learning process, Bruce Morrison tackles the subject of developing self-access. He addresses the finding that self-access probably took some characteristics from resource-based learning (RBL) and might also be a result of the development of language learning in the 1960s and 1970s¹⁰. As a matter of fact, RBL was the audio-visual method that was in full expansion during those years having, as its main goals the development of auditory-oral skills, an immersion in the foreign language and

⁸ Little, D. (2007). Language Learner Autonomy: Some Fundamental Considerations Revisited. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, 1(1), 14–29.

⁹ Koyalan, A. (2009). The evaluation of a self-access centre: A useful addition to class-based teaching? *System*, 37(4), 731–740.

¹⁰ Morrison, B. (2008). The role of the self-access centre in the tertiary language learning process. *System*, 36(2), 123–140.

the use of visual aids (Simons, 2020: 14)¹¹. RBL consists in giving autonomy to learners and letting them develop their knowledge through a variety of resources in both print and non-print form (books, music, internet, videos, newspapers, etc.) What free access and RBL also have in common is the shift that the teacher has to go through from being in a traditional learning model to a “more autonomy to the learners” model. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the link between both methods:

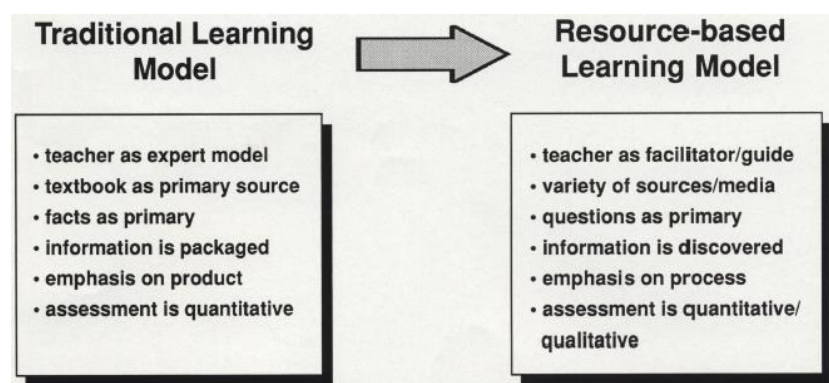


Figure 1. Paradigm shift from traditional learning models to a resource-based learning model¹²

Teacher	
paternal/assertive	→ fraternal/permissive
dispenser of all knowledge	→ resource person/consultant
fostering dependence	→ training for independence
Student	
passive	→ active
no responsibility for learning	→ assume responsibility for learning
seeking approval	→ doing without overt approval
submissive	→ involved in decision-making

Figure 2. Role changes in free access¹³ (Stevick, 1976 in Sheerin, 1989: 4)

We can clearly see in these figures that free access (late 1970s) was inspired by the model of resource-based learning (1950s/1960s). The teacher moves in both methods from being the source of all knowledge and the expert to being a guide, a resource person. This definitely shows the important role of the learner in his/her own learning and the resulting autonomy. The learner switches between being passive to active and thus more and more involved in decision-making and consequently in his/her learning. It is however important to specify that both figures contrast the teacher's and the student's roles in a caricatured way, as

¹¹ Simons, G. (2019–2020). *Cours de Didactique des langues modernes. Partim I. Module : Aperçu historique des méthodes d'enseignement en langues étrangères : de la méthode « grammaire-traduction » à la perspective « actionnelle »*. [Syllabus]. Liège : Université de Liège. Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres. Service de didactique des langues modernes.

¹² Rakes, G. C. (1996). Using the Internet as a Tool in a Resource-Based Learning Environment. *Educational Technology*, 36(5), 52–56.

¹³ Sheerin, S. (1989). *Self-Access*. Resource books for teachers. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

reality is rarely so clear-cut. In fact, a teacher can be paternal without being assertive. It is important to see things as less contrastive than they are shown in Figures 1 and 2.

It is also crucial to point out that teachers who deal with one classroom with several levels have always worked with free access by creating a self-access corner in the classroom for example. What is being aimed at in this thesis is a new paradigm of free access in the context of second language acquisition.¹⁴ The aim is to propose to vary the techniques used.

3.2.2 Tandem learning

3.2.2.1 Definition and goals

We are now moving on to the second method, which is tandem learning. In his article “Learner Autonomy and Tandem Learning: Putting Principles into Practice in Synchronous and Asynchronous Telecommunications Environments”, Klaus Schwienhorst defines tandem learning as a situation in which “two learners of complementary L1-L2 combinations are brought together in a tandem pair” (Schwienhorst, 2003: 431).¹⁵ The purpose of this exchange is that they learn from each other and play both the role of the language expert (of their mother tongue) and the learner (of the foreign language). We can also define it, as mentioned in a French-German study on tandem learning¹⁶, as “an immersion situation in which two learners learn from each other in an authentic situation, by communicating, imitating and building the rules of the language through an inductive process. Both learners rely on their discussion partner’s communicational skill as a model and a support” (Böcker *et al*, 2017: 8).

In his article, Klaus Schwienhorst raises the question of synchronous and asynchronous environments as a result, in the mid-1990s, of the face-to-face tandem that happened initially. Synchronous means that the exchange takes place in real time, whereas asynchronous means that the exchange takes place offline and at various times. However, it is also important to talk about the forms that the tandem can take. It can indeed take the form of a virtual/remote tandem, or a physical tandem, or both forms can be combined to form a blended tandem. There are therefore a lot of possibilities in tandem learning. In the case of Beckers *et al.*’s¹⁷ study on

¹⁴ In fact, I could discuss Freinet’s theory on active pedagogy here but this is beyond the scope of my thesis.

¹⁵ Schwienhorst, K. (2003). Learner Autonomy and Tandem Learning: Putting Principles into Practice in Synchronous and Asynchronous Telecommunications Environments. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 16(5), 427–443.

¹⁶ Böcker, J., Ciekanski, M. et al. (2017). Développer des compétences par l’apprentissage en tandem : Focus sur les acteurs, les ressources et la formation. *Office franco-allemande pour la jeunesse*, 29.

¹⁷ Beckers, J., Simons, G. et al. (2005). L’accès-libre : une reconfiguration efficace du métier de l’élève et de l’enseignant ? Observation et analyse des conditions d’efficacité : rapport intermédiaire de la première année de recherche. Université de Liège, Faculté de Psychologie et des Sciences de l’Education, Service de Didactique Professionnelle et de Formation des Enseignants.

tandem learning, they experimented with blended tandems, as French-speaking learners were first asked to discuss a book they liked with their Dutch-speaking partner by e-mail. This written exchange was later followed by a physical meeting in Flanders and then another physical meeting in Wallonia. During these exchanges, they communicated in both French and Dutch in view of equal learning opportunities for both parties.

As it is the case with free access, learner autonomy is also central to tandem learning. In fact, both learners are “responsible for their own and their partner’s learning, as they need to take control over and responsibility for their learning process. Language learning in tandem is a collaborative learning partnership” (Schwienhorst, 2003: 431)¹⁸. We clearly see here that learners are put at the centre in tandem learning, as they have to be autonomous enough to manage their own learning but also their partner’s, which is not easy if teachers do not train them to become independent. By implication, engaging in tandem learning is a simple way for learners to build up their autonomy in a real-life setting.

Next to learner autonomy, Klaus Schwienhorst¹⁹ also presents two other principles of this kind of exchange, which are reciprocity and bilingualism. Reciprocity is about learners having control over the support they want to give to their partner while still having control over their language. This means that, as native speakers, they have to make their language accessible for the non-native speaker who wants to learn it but, on the other hand, they need to prompt their interlocutor to produce correct output. On the other hand, as language learners, they also have to adapt to and understand input they receive. Reciprocity can thus be compared with adaptation here. Lastly, still according to Klaus Schwienhorst, we have bilingualism, which represents the fact that we have to divide the speaking time so that each learner benefits from the language they are learning to an equal extent.

3.2.2.2 Historical background

Looking at the historical background of tandem learning, we find that the first official tandem exchanges took place in 1994 and were set up by the International Tandem Network, which had been created by the European Commission in Germany in the same year. However, there are a number of potential precursors to these 1994 tandem exchanges. Examples include the

¹⁸ Schwienhorst, K. (2003). Learner Autonomy and Tandem Learning: Putting Principles into Practice in Synchronous and Asynchronous Telecommunications Environments. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 16(5), 427–443.

¹⁹ Schwienhorst, K. (2003). Learner Autonomy and Tandem Learning: Putting Principles into Practice in Synchronous and Asynchronous Telecommunications Environments. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 16(5), 427–443.

exchanges within the “Ateliers linguistiques” in the 1960s. The tandem only took place at the end of the process, once the learners had received linguistic stimuli. The exchanges within these “Ateliers linguistiques” (AL) in the context of exchanges between French and German learners looked more like a dialogue-type discussion instead of what is now a complete authentic discussion. What has also changed over time is the fact that the discussions were only mono-national back then (during AL), whereas learners now have the chance to talk with people from all-around the world. These mono-national exchanges are now used occasionally, e.g., for further exploring grammar issues²⁰. But we can go even further back in time, after World War II, when the Franco-German Youth Office was created to help Germany and France have more contacts so that the war would not happen again. Young people from France and Germany could thus exchange through tandems to learn about each other’s language²¹.

A last development is e-tandem, which resulted from the synchronous (exchanges happening in real-time) and asynchronous (not in real-time) forms and has continually been developing thanks to the internet and online communications platforms such as Skype, Teams, etc. E-tandem is directly linked to the next section, which is about videoconferencing.

3.2.3 Videoconferencing

3.2.3.1 Definition and goals

E-tandem learning leads us to the third subject of this thesis, which is videoconferencing. This medium is defined as allowing people from different locations to interact and to see each other in real time with the help of an Internet connection²². The distance factor is very interesting here, as the main objective of language learning is communication between people who have different mother tongues. Therefore, having the opportunity to talk with native speakers is particularly appealing. Besides, the fact of it being an audio-visual method allows visual interaction in addition to oral interaction and therefore involves non-verbal language, which is also a crucial aspect that learners need to acquire while learning a new language.

Videoconferencing with native speakers has the benefit of creating a real-life situation in which learners are more motivated to learn, but it also benefits learners’ input and output

²⁰ Böcker, J., Ciekanski, M. et al. (2017). Développer des compétences par l’apprentissage en tandem : Focus sur les acteurs, les ressources et la formation. *Office franco-allemande pour la jeunesse*, 29.

²¹ *What is Tandem learning? Tandem Learning Guidelines*. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.isc.kyushu-u.ac.jp/center/tandem/e-about.html> [Accessed March 16, 2021].

²² Loranc-Paszyk, B. (2015). Videoconferencing as a Tool for Developing Speaking Skills. In M. Pawlak & E. Waniek-Klimczak (Eds.), *Issues in Teaching, Learning and Testing Speaking in a Second Language* (pp. 189–203). Springer Berlin Heidelberg.

because of “the immediacy and spontaneity of response, creating time pressure on the participants to process input and provide output in real time”²³ (Lee, 2007 in Loranc-Paszyk, 2015: 191). So, being in a real-life situation has a positive impact on learners’ abilities and motivation, as it helps them to understand input and then create understandable output in a restricted time range, as everything is happening synchronously.

In terms of learners’ autonomy, Monica Macedo-Rouet explains in her article about videoconferencing in the education sector that most studies show that this method helps learners being more independent and more active in their learning process. This can be explained by the fact that, by doing a tandem exchange through videoconferencing for example, they are stimulated to find subjects and documents by themselves in order to be ready for the exchange with the contact person²⁴. Putting learners in contact with real people about real-life issues could thus motivate them more and make them work more by themselves, which will enhance their autonomy.

In this thesis, videoconferencing will be discussed as a medium in free access and tandem learning.

3.2.3.2 Historical background

Now, a brief history of this mode of communication is going to be provided to the readers so that they can better understand the context of its emergence and then see how it has evolved over time. Videoconferencing first appeared in New York during the 1964 World Fair but began to be more widely spread only in the 1980s (Lawson *et al.*, 2004 in Macedo-Rouet, 2009: 68). In fact, companies saw this method as an opportunity to reduce the workers’ travel costs, as they could stay at home while working²⁵.

It is only in the 1990s that videoconferencing migrated to the education sector. It first consisted in broadcasting lessons in higher education, based on a “one-to-many model”, as the teacher was alone on one side and the students on the other. Its uses have diversified, as videoconferencing appeared in primary and secondary education as well. The first

²³ Loranc-Paszyk, B. (2015). Videoconferencing as a Tool for Developing Speaking Skills. In M. Pawlak & E. Waniek-Klimczak (Eds.), *Issues in Teaching, Learning and Testing Speaking in a Second Language* (pp. 189–203). Springer Berlin Heidelberg.

²⁴ Macedo-Rouet, M. (2009). La visioconférence dans l’enseignement. Ses usages et effets sur la distance de transaction. *Distances et savoirs*, 7(1), 65–91.

²⁵ Macedo-Rouet, M. (2009). La visioconférence dans l’enseignement. Ses usages et effets sur la distance de transaction. *Distances et savoirs*, 7(1), 65–91.

collaborations with peers, whether for language courses or other courses, date back from that time²⁶.

Videoconferencing has been present in the education sector for the last few years and is still continually in progress, as new methods of e-communication continue to be created. Learners have, for this reason, an increasing opportunity to speak with people from other countries whether in the classroom or outside, at home. The recent Covid-19 pandemic also boosted the use of videoconferencing methods, as it allows people to work or attend classes from home.

3.2.4 Answering the first research question

The purpose of section 3.2 was to provide an answer to my first research question, which is: Do free access, tandem learning and videoconferencing enhance the learners' autonomy? An answer can now be formulated taking into account the observations that were made in this section.

In 1989, Sheerin clearly mentions in her book about self-access the fact that the learner's autonomy is really central to the free access method, as learners must be self-sufficient enough to work on their own and play an active role in their learning by choosing and using the material they want to use, reporting their progress in their log book and finally assessing themselves.

Tandem learning, too, has as an objective to enhance the learners' autonomy to the extent that they are not only responsible for their own learning but also for their partner's learning, as both sides play the role of learner but also that of expert. This exchange really challenges them to work on their independence.

Along with free access and tandem learning, videoconferencing with native speakers also appears to be a great way to help learners to become more independent and autonomous. Actually, it can be seen as an excellent medium for these two methods, as learners are free to choose the subject they want to tackle with their partner, like in free access, but also need to provide comprehensible output, like in tandem learning.

²⁶ Macedo-Rouet, M. (2009). La visioconférence dans l'enseignement. Ses usages et effets sur la distance de transaction. *Distances et savoirs*, 7(1), 65–91.

On this basis, we can conclude that free access, tandem learning and videoconferencing with native speakers have as their main objective to enhance the learners' autonomy, as they allow learners to become more active in their learning.

3.3 Ways of implementing or using free access, tandem learning and videoconferencing

Free access, tandem learning and videoconferencing as a medium are actually broad methods and mode of communication. They are not limited to a single use, as each of these approaches is made up of various possibilities. This section is going to take a closer look at the wider scope of such methods.

3.3.1 Free access

This first method is either used in the classroom or in a specific room, which is then called a self-access centre. As described by Koyalan²⁷, such centres are often divided into three rooms: a reading room, an audio video lab and a silent room.

The purpose of the reading room is to provide learners with a collection of readings. Alternatively, learners have the ability to work on their listening skills in the audio video lab, which is equipped with films and computers on which they can do exercises. Lastly, the silent room is mainly dedicated to reading and writing skills, as it is a place where students can work individually and in silence at their own pace on practical exercises which are classified by level so that they can choose what they need at any given moment. Free access allows learners to work on different skills at their own speed and on the level required. To sum up, they have the opportunity to practise their reading, listening and writing skills, as well as grammar, vocabulary and learn about a culture by selecting documents in which they are interested. This process offers, along these lines, a comprehensive way of working to learners, as they can improve all dimensions of the language.

Next to the self-access centre, it is also possible for teachers to establish self-access in the classroom. They can create a corner in the room which is going to be dedicated to this purpose. In fact, it can be quite burdensome to find a room which can be entirely devoted to free access so the self-access corner in the classroom is a great alternative. Sheerin suggests in her book²⁸ “setting up semi-permanent activity corners” (Sheerin, 1989: 22) with a corner for each of the skills or “putting together a self-access box (or collection of boxes) or a self-access trolley which could be used all over the school” (Sheerin, 1989: 22). The main advantage of this organisation would be its flexibility, as learners could turn to these resources whenever they feel they need to. Sheerin also recommends using the self-access boxes as level boxes in

²⁷ Koyalan, A. (2009). The evaluation of a self-access centre: A useful addition to class-based teaching? *System*, 37(4), 731–740.

²⁸ Sheerin, S. (1989). *Self-Access*. Resource books for teachers. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

order to optimise their usefulness. This would therefore amount to classifying the various resources by level, for example creating a box for learners in year four of English as a first foreign language and another one for learners in year six of English as a second foreign language.

The British Council film, *Activity Days*, mentioned in Sheerin's book, also suggests another kind of organization for self-access. If it is difficult for schools to dedicate an entire room to this method, the British Council advises them to suspend some courses one day a week in order to make four rooms available for learners to go to and work on the different skills, each of these rooms being devoted to one specific skill. This proposal seems however fairly difficult to establish in a secondary school, as the timetable is already quite dense and we cannot encroach on other courses.

As a conclusion, we can say that free access is a largely adjustable method, as there are many ways of practising and arranging it, depending on whether we possess a great amount of rooms which can be dedicated to this or not.

3.3.2 Tandem learning

Tandem learning is divided into three different uses. Simons tackles in his work²⁹ virtual tandem, face-to-face tandem and a combination of both, whereas Wakisaka³⁰ summarizes the applications of tandem learning as follows:

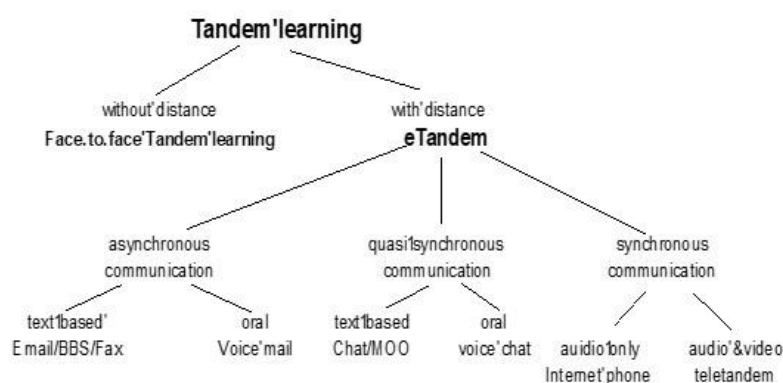


Figure 3. Types of tandem learning (Wakisaka, 2018: 44).

²⁹ Simons, G. (2020–2021). *Cours de Didactique des langues modernes. Partim II. Module : autres modes d'organisation de la classe de langue étrangère que les séquences didactiques* [Syllabus]. Liège : Université de Liège. Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres. Service de didactique des langues modernes.

³⁰ Wakisaka, M. (2018). Face-to-face tandem and etandem: Differences that influence the maintenance of tandem learning activities. *Revista Do GEL*, 15(3), 42–57.

Virtual tandem thus consists of people communicating in an asynchronous, quasi-synchronous or synchronous situation whether by exchanging e-mails, letters, text messages, pictures, voice mail messages or voice or video calls. Face-to-face tandem, on the other hand, allows people to meet in person in one or even both of the speech communities. This type of communication can only occur in synchronous situations.

While face-to-face and synchronous virtual tandem show similarities since synchronous e-tandem has the potential to offer benefits equivalent to face-to-face tandem, there are indeed differences between both methods of communication. Wakisaka tackles these discrepancies in his study comparing both approaches. After analysing the data, it turned out that partners in face-to-face tandem were pleased with their exchanges but e-tandem partners sometimes had trouble finding an appointment which suited both participants, for example due to time differences. Finding a place to use the Internet was also a problem for some people. Another difference between both methods is linked to misunderstandings. As it happens, face-to-face tandem partners allow to draw pictures to make oneself understood but that is not the case for e-tandem partners. The latter have, in turn, access to online dictionaries or to the chat section if they cannot be understood. Finally, there is the fact that face-to-face tandem partners support each other more actively than in e-tandem ones, as they get to know each other more and pay more attention to their partner in real life (Wakisaka, 2018: 54).

Asynchronous virtual tandem learning differs from synchronous face-to-face and virtual tandem learning by the fact that it focuses more on the reading and writing skills whereas synchronous exchanges focus on the listening and speaking skills. In their article, Lewis and Stickler³¹ also address the fact that motivation should be higher for long-term written exchanges, as learners have to check for comprehension, negotiate the meaning, agree on the learning goals and correct mistakes. We can see that this approach requires more work from learners and that they need, as a consequence, a higher motivation so that exchanges can last over time.

As a conclusion, we can say that tandem learning is very complex, as illustrated in Wakisaka's organization chart. This method does not merely refer to communicating with a partner in order to learn a language, since there are various ways of establishing tandems.

³¹ Lewis, T., & Stickler, U. (2007). Les stratégies collaboratives d'apprentissage lors d'un échange en tandem via Internet. *Lidil*, 36, 163–188.

3.3.3 Videoconferencing

Next to free access and tandem learning, videoconferencing as a medium also has more than one use in the education sector. Macedo-Rouet presents seven uses of videoconferencing in her study³²: course broadcasting, discussions with experts, foreign language learning, collaborative problem-solving, cross-cultural exchanges, integration of learners with specific needs and professional development.

Firstly, course broadcasting has been used as a tool for several years but has been increasingly used this past year due to the pandemic. In fact, a lot of teachers had no choice but to start giving their lessons online in order for learners to be able to attend classes without moving from home. With this, came inequalities at two main levels, as cited in *Teaching under lockdown: The experiences of London English teachers*³³. The first inequality was that “some students have the help of their parents or siblings but others don’t” and the second one was that “if I send videos, I cannot guarantee that they (learners) have wi-fi or data with which to watch them” (Evans, C. *et al.*, 2020: 246). These two issues are really problematic for teaching in good and equal circumstances for everyone. Broadcasting lessons has therefore been an important use of videoconferencing in recent times but it is not self-sufficient, as learning a language needs practice and discussion, which cannot be provided at the same scale in remote teaching or face-to-face education. It is still a great method to allow the largest possible number of students to attend classes without any travel costs.

Secondly, the use of videoconferencing which is going to be emphasized in this thesis is its use as a tool for foreign language learning. Macedo-Rouet describes this use as putting learners from different countries in touch, carrying out language projects with learners from the same country and organizing conferences and debates with native speakers. This medium is really enriching for language learning, as it allows students to be confronted with an authentic oral language and it also enables them to express what they want to say in a real-life situation, which is the main goal of such a course. The aspect of learning about another culture is also a benefit of this medium, as students will learn about cultural aspects while discussing with their correspondents. So, tandem learning via videoconferencing is really beneficial, as it allows

³² Macedo-Rouet, M. (2009). La visioconférence dans l’enseignement. Ses usages et effets sur la distance de transaction. *Distances et savoirs*, 7(1), 65–91.

³³ Evans, C., O’Connor, C. *et al.* (2020). Teaching under Lockdown: The experiences of London English teachers. *Changing English*, 27(3), 244–254.

learners to be put in contact with native speakers and to learn about their culture without the disadvantage of traveling costs.

Videoconferencing can also be used, not only for learners but also for teachers, as an aid. It can, indeed, allow teachers to conduct meetings for project organization, arrange meetings with experts and exchanges with peers in order to reflect on and improve their practice.

We can conclude that videoconferencing as a medium, as well as the other two methods, has a wide range of uses whether outside or in language teaching. As such, free access, tandem learning and videoconferencing are not limited to one single use but may offer a wide range of possibilities at different stages of the learning process. They could even, as described in the introduction to this thesis, be combined into one single method which would consist in doing free access in tandem learning via videoconferencing for example.

3.4 Link with learning theories

Before exploring the occurrence of free access and tandem learning in official documents, it is important to learn about the relationship between these methods, on the one hand, and the learning theories concerning second language acquisition, on the other hand. In fact, learning theories are going to help us understand how knowledge is acquired and how to promote it as much as possible, taking learners' needs and differences into account.

This section will deal with the understanding of free access, tandem learning and videoconferencing as a medium in Dewey's theory (section 3.4.1), Gardner's multiple intelligences approach (section 3.4.2), Vygotsky's socio-cognitivism (section 3.4.3), Krashen's theory of second language learning (section 3.4.4) and Swain's comprehensible output hypothesis (section 3.4.5) in order to assess their possible effectiveness on learners.

3.4.1 Dewey's theory

John Dewey's theory dates back to the beginning of the twentieth century when he started to criticize the American school system. He wanted to shift the basic way of teaching, which consisted in the teacher possessing all the knowledge and passing it on to the learners, into a more child-centred approach involving multiple concepts which are tackled in Achkovska-Leshkovska and Miovska-Spaseva's article³⁴: "education is a necessity of life", "the child's experience develops in transaction with the community he lives in" and "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" (Achkovska-Leshkovska & Miovska-Spaseva, 2016: 57-58). The idea behind this theory of active learning was that learners should become more active in their learning process. Dewey also insisted on the idea that learners had to learn from their environment and not only from books or from the teacher (as it was done before discovering the importance of the environment), since learning from their own experiences would have more benefits in the learning process. In his theory, he also addresses the notion of learning by doing, i.e. acquiring knowledge through problem-solving situations. He believes that learners have to start from a problem situation, as the problem will stimulate the knowledge which is derived from experience. It is therefore the learner's experience, and not what he or she is learning at school, that will support the acquisition of new knowledge. He also promotes process-oriented instead of content-oriented instruction because he values the

³⁴ Achkovska-Leshkovska, E., & Miovska-Spaseva, S. (2016). John Dewey's educational theory and educational implications of Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences theory. *International Journal of Cognitive Research in Science, Engineering and Education*, 4(2), 57–66.

project-based method, which makes learners learn individually or in groups during a certain amount of time and makes them develop skills that they will be more likely to get in real-life situations rather than in a school setting. Therefore, it also bears more potential to be meaningful for learners.

This theory is directly related to both methods and the mode of communication which are tackled in this thesis.

Firstly, Dewey's ideas are well represented in the free access method as its main objective is to make learners become more active in their learning process by allowing them to organize their learning as it suits them best and to take the time they need. This, in turn, is linked to Dewey's child-centred approach, as learners become more independent in free access. Learners are the centre of knowledge in Dewey's theory, which is obviously the case in a free access context. Next to this, Sheerin introduces the concept of problem-solving linked to free access in her book³⁵. She presents various activities focusing on the different skills and dealing with problem-solving. She also proposes to build on problems from learners' everyday lives: "Students can be given realistic problems such as they might face in real life and then their task is to cooperate in trying to find a good solution by means of discussion and negotiation" (Sheerin, 1989: 151). Among the activities she describes in her book we can find exercises of problem-solving with an information gap³⁶ and problem-solving with no information gap, which both imply that learners have to share information in order to be able to solve a problem co-operatively.

Secondly, tandem learning can also be associated with Dewey's theory. Here again, learners are at the centre of their learning process while learning in pairs, as they both play the role of the language expert when they need to correct and assess their peer's language and that of the learner when they are practising the foreign language with the help of their peer. As a consequence, learners are very active in the learning process, all the more since they are faced with real-life situations while freely discussing with a correspondent as they might in real life. To compare this with what Dewey discusses in his theory, learners discover learning through their environment, as they directly learn from another person and not from books, which would be the case in a basic learning process. Learners are also faced with problem-solving in a tandem

³⁵ Sheerin, S. (1989). *Self-Access*. Resource books for teachers. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

³⁶ "That is to say that in each task one person or group has information which the other person or group does not have" (Sheerin, 1989: 132).

setting, as they need to be able to cooperate with their partner towards their common aim, i.e. to learn a language. An example of a problem-solving situation in tandem learning consists in learners having to use alternatives for making themselves understood if they cannot speak their mind in the foreign language in the way they would like to. On the other hand, it is also crucial that the native speaker can adapt his or her language so that it can be understood by the interlocutor. This could be done by simplifying the language, adjusting the speech rate or asking the partner if things are understood correctly. These strategies can be seen as a way of solving the problem of miscommunication for example.

Finally, engaging in free access or tandem learning via videoconferencing with native speakers is also in line with Dewey's theory since the learner is at the centre of the learning process, as he/she is actively learning through his/her partner. Practising tandem learning via videoconferencing enables learners to learn both from their own environment and from their partner's environment, as they are free to communicate about personal experiences. Learners are going to remember things better, as they will be able to connect them with a real moment in life, which is their discussion with their partner. The aspect of problem-solving is also present in this medium, as they need to make themselves understood by someone who does not have the same mother tongue as them.

3.4.2 Gardner's multiple intelligences

Gardner's multiple intelligences theory emerged eight decades later than Dewey's theory, and is often seen as a continuation of the latter. In his theory, Howard Gardner changes the original view that each person possesses only one type of intelligence into the idea that each individual has many kinds of intelligence patterns. Achkovska-Leshkovska and Miovska-Spaseva³⁷ discuss the tenets of this theory elaborated by Armstrong in 1994 (who focused on the multiple intelligences in the classroom setting) in their article as being: "1. Each person possesses all intelligences, but they function together in ways unique to each person; 2. Most people can develop each intelligence to an adequate level of competency; 3. Intelligences usually work together in complex ways and 4. There are many ways to be intelligent within each category" (Achkovska-Leshkovska & Miovska-Spaseva, 2016: 58). The multiple intelligences are: linguistic (words), logical-mathematical (numbers or logic), spatial (pictures), musical (music), bodily-kinaesthetic (a physical experience), intrapersonal (self-reflexion) and interpersonal (a

³⁷ Achkovska-Leshkovska, E., & Miovska-Spaseva, S. (2016). John Dewey's educational theory and educational implications of Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences theory. *International Journal of Cognitive Research in Science, Engineering and Education*, 4(2), 57–66.

social experience). Twelve years after his first publication, Gardner added, naturalist intelligence to the list, which “allows us to relate to the environment and other species”³⁸ and consists in having the ability to classify elements of the environment and enjoying categorizing things. Gardner is therefore a proponent of a pluralistic instead of a monolithic approach; he believes that learning can easily be approached in multiple ways so that it suits each of the learners and that every intelligence can be tackled through the different approaches. Achkovska-Leshkovska and Miovska-Spaseva also examine Phillips’³⁹ view about pluralization, i.e. the ability for learners to apprehend new knowledge in a way which suits them and with which they feel at ease. Doing things this way would allow teachers to reach all learners without leaving any behind. As in Dewey’s theory, Gardner also identifies real-life situations as helping the learning process since they give more meaning to the knowledge. Gardner claims that the learners’ “most effective entry points for learning” depend on their personal cognitive profiles, as they are constructed from the learners’ earliest age. He also discusses the importance of an integrated curriculum, as learners need multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary skills to be able to make connections between what they learn in the various disciplines and what they experience in their real lives. Gardner also recognises the usefulness of technology in the learning process because it enables learners to work with different resources on their various intelligences. Lastly, both Dewey and Gardner discuss the problem of the teacher being dominant in the classroom; it would be better to move towards a more child-centred approach in which the teacher’s role would be to work on the learners’ needs and to perceive them as being individuals.

Multiple intelligences can indeed easily be associated with free access. In her book⁴⁰, Sheerin tackles the question of “why bother to set up self-access” and what she highlights in this section reinforces the importance of this theory. She insists on the fact that learners are individuals and are, as a consequence, all different. She describes five main differences between learners which should, in her opinion, be taken into account when practising self-access in the classroom. First, learners have cognitive differences. This means that they will not devote the same amount of time to the same task, so that the duration of the learning process differs for everyone. Secondly, learners have different study habits. Each learner has a preferred strategy

³⁸ *Naturalistic intelligence, the ability to understand the environment.* (n.d.). Iberdrola. Retrieved from <https://www.iberdrola.com/talent/naturalistic-intelligence>. [Accessed July 17, 2021].

³⁹ Hope Phillips, Middle grades resource teacher at Columbus State University. She wrote “Multiple intelligences: Theory and application” in 2010.

⁴⁰ Sheerin, S. (1989). *Self-Access*. Resource books for teachers. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

and way of doing when it comes to learning and studying. Thirdly, learners also have personality differences, as they all come from different backgrounds, cultures or religions and do not have the same personality, as some can be more extrovert and others more introvert. Then, motivation also plays a role that differs from one learner to another and varies with the degree of motivation to learn a language. Lastly, learning goals are different, as they depend on the individual. Learners do not all want to learn a language for the same reason. Their motivations range from work to the simple pleasure of learning. In sum, we can conclude that learners are all different and also differ as to their mix of intelligences, as described in Gardner's theory. The learners' cognitive and personality differences and their varying personal study habits are the differences mentioned by Sheerin that come closest to Gardner's multiple intelligences. Against this background, free access seems to be a great way of confronting learners to the different types of intelligences at their own pace and helping them to find and use the process they want to use without compelling them, as they first need to find out about things that work for them. In the context of this method, intrapersonal intelligence as well as naturalistic intelligence can for example be more intensively exercised, since learning is individualized (intrapersonal intelligence) and learners can choose from topics in which they are interested, in this case written or audio texts about nature for example (naturalistic intelligence). Consequently, setting up free access as a complement to the traditional course will allow learners to work on their different intelligences, since the targeted intelligences will vary. Teachers will also learn about their learners' needs and ways of processing new knowledge skills.

Tandem learning (possibly via videoconferencing) offers the possibility to work on the various intelligences in the same way as free access. Firstly, spatial intelligence could be practised since learners are provided with visual input because they see the person they are talking to thanks to the camera, during a Skype call for example. Secondly, taking part in discussions, listening to their contact person and to their accent is perfectly suitable for musical intelligence. Thirdly, learners who have verbal intelligence feel very much at ease when they have the possibility to talk and express their ideas, which can be done easily in the exchanges with their partner. Then, learners with interpersonal intelligence need to share ideas and opinions and work with other people, which is the case in tandem learning and videoconferencing. Learners who have intrapersonal intelligence need time beforehand to work alone on what they want to discuss with their correspondent and to learn by themselves before sharing information with another person. Learners with logical-mathematical intelligence can

exchange their thoughts and ask their partner's help for solving problems they are very interested in. Learners having kinaesthetic intelligence are also involved, as they can be active during the call, showing their partner around and talking about real-life subjects. Lastly, regarding naturalistic intelligence, learners have the opportunity to talk about subjects that interest them and which are linked to daily life and nature life. Tandem learning, whether via videoconferencing or not, is therefore a great opportunity, like free access, to complement the traditional lessons by facing learners with the multiple intelligences in various ways. Adding the use of free access and tandem learning to the standard course will therefore allow to vary the targeted intelligence in order to include all learners and meet their specific needs.

3.4.3 Vygotsky's socio-cognitivism

As a third theory, we have Vygotsky's cognitive development theory, which dates back from the late 1900s. His work focused on social interactions as a way to improve one's language skills. Just like Dewey's learning by doing, Vygotsky also recognises the role that our social environment plays in our learning. He "sees social and cultural goals as being integrated into social pedagogy" and also "suggests there should be greater control by a mentor who creates activity that will lead the child towards mastery" (Glassman, 2001: 3)⁴¹. Another key point of his theory is culture considered as an aid for our thinking. He argues that children need interactions to link cultural and social history with knowledge and that, through social interactions, they are able to achieve higher performances, as Lightbown and Spada discuss in their book *How languages are learned*. These social interactions can be seen as scaffoldings to learners. Scaffolding is "the language that an interlocutor uses to support the communicative success of another speaker" (Lightbown & Spada, 2013: 223). This can imply working with a teacher, or a learner who is more advanced in the learning process, in order to help learners achieving their goals. Hence, the role of the tutor is crucial in the learner's acquisition of knowledge, as he/she needs to recognise the learner's interests, knowledge and point of view in order to be effective, as mentioned in Pardjono's research about active learning⁴². This is what Vygotsky calls intersubjectivity. Learners need to share something, whether an idea or an opinion for example, with their tutor. He also discusses the fact that learners' development is divided into three aspects: the actual development level of a child, the potential development and the intermediate zone of proximal development, the last one being the most famous notion

⁴¹ Glassman, M. (2001). Dewey and Vygotsky: Society, Experience, and Inquiry in Educational Practice. *Educational Researcher*, 30(4), 3–14.

⁴² Pardjono, P. (2016). Active Learning: The Dewey, Piaget, Vygotsky, and Constructivist Theory Perspectives. *Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan*, 9(3), 163-178.

created by Vygotsky. He defines the zone of proximal development as “the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978 in Pardjono, 2016: 168). This means that there is a gap between what a learner can do independently and what he/she can do with external help from their tutor or peers. He describes here the importance of learning through others as a crucial step of the learning process. Learning through others would help learners to improve their skills to make them more able to then work individually and in an effective way.

Tandem learning, whether via videoconferencing or not, can be linked to Vygotsky’s theory. One of its objectives happens to be communication with other people. In tandem learning, students are confronted with learners with a different mother tongue, which puts them in a situation of exolingual communication⁴³ and creates an interaction that is different because both partners do not share the same culture. As a result, learners learn from their peer but also from encountering a different cultural perspective, which is going to both expand their thinking horizons and improve their language. To compare this to what Vygotsky discusses in his work, learners are not able to learn about another culture by themselves; it is only through social interactions that they are going to learn about it. Next to this, videoconferencing as a medium is also linked to Vygotsky’s theory. Social interactions help learners to learn about one another’s culture and are important in second language acquisition, as mentioned in *How languages are learned*. The native speaker, with whom the learner is confronted can be considered as a tutor if we follow Vygotsky’s theory. This tutor is going to help him/her to add new linguistic and cultural knowledge to what he/she already attained through scaffolding. Another important aspect of Vygotsky’s theory that can be found in tandem learning is intersubjectivity. His work discusses the importance of sharing interests with a tutor as a learner. This is strongly present in this method, as both partners share the desire to learn a language and take turns in playing the tutor.

3.4.4 Krashen’s theory of second language acquisition

Krashen’s theory of second language acquisition is another important element. Krashen developed this theory in 1982 but it was in fact “first described in the early 1970s, at a time when there was growing dissatisfaction with language teaching methods based on

⁴³ Böcker, J., Ciekanski, M. *et al.* (2017). Développer des compétences par l’apprentissage en tandem : Focus sur les acteurs, les ressources et la formation. *Office franco-allemande pour la jeunesse*, 29.

behaviourism” (Lightbown & Spada, 2013: 106)⁴⁴. He thus created a model which is based on five hypotheses: the acquisition learning hypothesis, the monitor hypothesis, the natural order hypothesis, the comprehensible input hypothesis and finally the affective filter hypothesis. The acquisition learning hypothesis puts “acquisition” and “learning” in opposition. Krashen developed this hypothesis to show that the acquisition of a language occurs unconsciously by being confronted to this language like when a first language is acquired. According to him, learning is different since it is a conscious process and he therefore believes that language is preferably acquired rather than learnt. The monitor hypothesis states that the type of language that is used in natural conversation is what has been acquired by the person, and what has been learnt acts as a monitor to correct what this person is saying. Krashen believes that what is learnt only serves as a monitor to help people correct themselves when they are talking but is not central to the communication, as this monitor takes time (because speakers need to think about the form rather than on the meaning, which tends to slow down conversations). In fact, for the monitor (what corrects people’s language while speaking) to be able to work properly, three conditions are required: the learner needs to have sufficient time within his or her reach to use the monitor, he or she needs to focus on the form rather than on the content and lastly, the learner must know the rule. Thirdly, the natural order hypothesis explains that the first rules that are learnt are not necessarily the first to be acquired. An example of this, which is given by The British Council, is that “learners acquire the grammatical morpheme *-ing* (for present participles) before the morpheme third person *-s*”⁴⁵ although the third person rule comes before the other one in the learning process. Fourthly, the input hypothesis is described in *The Study of Second Language Acquisition* in terms of four main ideas which are: “learners progress along the natural order by understanding input that contains structure a little bit beyond their current level of competence” ($i+1$), “although comprehensible input is necessary for acquisition to take place, it is not sufficient, as learners also need to be affectively disposed to ‘let in’ the input they comprehend”, “input becomes comprehensible as a result of simplification and with the help of contextual and extralinguistic clues”, “speaking is the result of acquisition, not its cause; learner production does not contribute directly to acquisition” (Ellis, 1994: 273)⁴⁶. The $i + 1$ formula is described in *How languages are learned* as the “ i ” representing “the level of language already acquired”, and “ 1 ” as “a metaphor for language that is just a step beyond that

⁴⁴ Lightbown, P. M. & Spada, N. (2013). *How Languages Are Learned*. Fourth edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁴⁵ *Natural order*. (n.d.). TeachingEnglish | British Council | BBC. Retrieved from <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/natural-order>. [Accessed May 7, 2021].

⁴⁶ Ellis, R. (1994). *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

level”. This means that learners need to be confronted with input which is little above their own level in order to progress in the language learning. We also get a representation of Krashen’s input hypothesis model in Han’s article⁴⁷, represented in Figure 4.

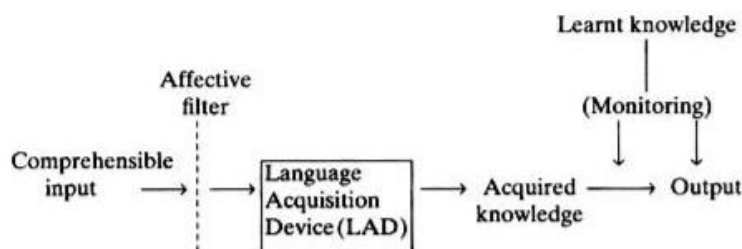


Figure 4. The input hypothesis model of L2 learning and production (Krashen, 1982: 16 in Han & Jo, 2010: 4).

This figure shows that the starting point is the comprehensible input provided to learners. Fifthly, it is important to think about the affective filter. This means that learners have to learn in a positive and stress-free environment, otherwise this affective filter could create a barrier to further learning. If learners are confronted with comprehensible input and feel at ease, the affective filter will be lowered by teachers and the new knowledge will have the ability to enter the language acquisition device (Chomsky), which means that the knowledge is acquired. Then, the learnt knowledge also plays a role in the creation of output, as everything that has been taught to learners is going to be used by them and corrected by their monitor in order to see if the output that they are going to create is correct. All of this is finally going to create the final output as long as the three conditions linked to the monitor which are mentioned earlier are met.

When it comes to assessing how free access fits in Krashen’s theory, it can be stated that the requirement of comprehensible input, for example, can be met by organizing the material according to distinct levels. In concrete terms, it would be easier for teachers but also for learners to go through resources if they were sorted by level in order to find which level suits them best. Teachers could thus arrange documents so that they match the $i+1$ formula. Doing things this way could make learners acquire language in a more effective way, Krashen says, as the confrontation with a level which is just above the learners’ level will make them progress more in the language learning. The affective filter hypothesis can also be met with the use of free access, as learners have the opportunity to work at their one pace, and this means

⁴⁷ Han, I. & Jo, I. (2010). The effect of interactive task-based learning on learners’ affective barriers in ELT. *The New Korean Journal of English Language & Literature*, 52(3), 259–284.

that they are going to feel more at ease and less stressed, which in turn will create a better working atmosphere for them, as the affective filter will be lowered. The teacher and the other students will not keep a constant eye on the students' learning process and the learners themselves will avoid the pressure of certifying assessment, which is rare in free access.

3.4.5 Swain's comprehensible output hypothesis

Lastly, inspired by Krashen's input hypothesis, Merrill Swain proposed the comprehensible output hypothesis as a response to Krashen in 1985. Her hypothesis can also be linked to Michael Long's idea of negotiation for meaning⁴⁸, which takes place when speakers must negotiate the meaning when communication becomes difficult. This negotiation for meaning can, for example, consist in asking for clarification or paraphrasing in order for the interlocutor to be able to see if things are understood properly. According to Swain, learners need a communicative failure since it will induce them to produce more coherent and precise output. She therefore believes that language acquisition will only occur when learners are pushed to produce output⁴⁹. Swain highlights three advantages that learners get when being pushed: "the first advantage is that learners get the opportunity to notice the gap between their current knowledge and the target language form", "the second advantage is that learners get the opportunity to test their assumption about the target language form and the real target form of the native speakers" and lastly, "the third advantage is that the second language learners get the opportunity to talk about the language through the interactions" (Yufrizal, 2001: 66-67)⁵⁰. Next to these advantages, Rod Ellis also describes another aspect in his book⁵¹: feedback. As stated by him, indirect feedback is more important than direct feedback in the comprehensible output hypothesis. Talking with a person who does not have the same mother tongue leads to indirect feedback "in the form of clarification requests, confirmation requests, etc." This concept is therefore also linked to negotiation for meaning, which has been mentioned above.

In this sense, tandem learning can be said to fit in Swain's hypothesis, since learners are pushed to produce output as part of a conversation with another learner. In this context, learners are more likely to be confronted with a communicative failure they will have to counter by producing comprehensible and more precise output. They will thus have to negotiate for meaning as part of the process to then be able to be understood and produce a language which

⁴⁸ Ellis, R. (1994). *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁴⁹ Ellis, R. (1994). *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁵⁰ Yufrizal, H. (2001). Negotiation of Meaning and Language Acquisition by Indonesia EFL Learners. *TEFLIN Journal - A Publication on the Teaching and Learning of English*, 12(1), 60-87.

⁵¹ Ellis, R. (1994). *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

can be understood properly by their interlocutor. Confronting learners with tandem learning will also enable them to get indirect feedback, which is less scary than direct feedback for them, and which is going to help them to produce correct output in a shorter period of time. In fact, by getting immediate feedback, learners are said to be less likely to remember mistakes⁵².

⁵² Ellis, R. (1994). *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

3.5 Free access and tandem learning in language teaching

The purpose of this section is to inform the readers about the benefits but also the drawbacks of free access and tandem learning in language teaching. The purpose is to understand what would be interesting to keep from these methods and what should be improved.

3.5.1 Free access

3.5.1.1 Free access: Benefits

As discussed in the previous section, one of the main benefits of free access is the autonomy it brings to learners. However, Simons⁵³ mentions two other advantages: allowing learners to work at their own pace and increasing the amount of linguistic input without increasing the length of the course. The Japanese Ministry of Education also presented other benefits of self-access in 2005 when they rewarded the Kana University for their self-access centre⁵⁴ referring to the positive effects of motivation and individualization.

The first benefit which is going to be discussed in this section is respecting the learning rhythm of each learner. As described in Sheerin's book about self-access, learners are individuals with specific needs. They differ in terms of cognitive abilities, study habits, personality, motivation but also learning goals and teachers need to be aware of that. It would therefore seem favourable for learners to allow them to work at their own pace to respect their learning differences as distinct individuals. Some learners are going to need more time to work on a specific task and others will not. Free access enables them to understand by themselves how and when they learn most efficiently. Letting learners work at their own pace is also important because it makes them familiar with self-regulation techniques, as mentioned in Tullis and Benjamin's study about the effectiveness of self-paced learning⁵⁵. Beckers, Simons *et al*'s study⁵⁶ also focuses on the fact that free access is beneficial for the weakest learners since "it gives them more confidence (especially for the listening comprehension) as they have a lower stress level than in group-work activities" but it is also positive for stronger learners as "they are not held back from the group" (Simons, 2005: 24-25). It is equally important to point

⁵³ Simons, G. (2020–2021). *Cours de Didactique des langues modernes. Partim II. Module : autres modes d'organisation de la classe de langue étrangère que les séquences didactiques* [Syllabus]. Liège : Université de Liège. Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres. Service de didactique des langues modernes.

⁵⁴ Hadley, G., & Brown, H. (2007). *Improved Language Learning through Self-Access*. 27-36.

⁵⁵ Tullis, J. G., & Benjamin, A. S. (2011). On the effectiveness of self-paced learning. *Journal of Memory and Language*, 64(2), 109–118.

⁵⁶ Beckers, J., Simons, G. *et al.* (2005). L'accès-libre : une reconfiguration efficace du métier de l'élève et de l'enseignant ? Observation et analyse des conditions d'efficacité : rapport intermédiaire de la première année de recherche. Université de Liège, Faculté de Psychologie et des Sciences de l'Education, Service de Didactique Professionnelle et de Formation des Enseignants.

out that the learning process does not limit itself to the self-access time as Sheerin describes the ideal learning environment as being “a combination of: expert help and direction by the teacher where appropriate, group-directed learning and self-access facilities which students can use to work on their individual problems” (Sheerin, 1989: 197). So, we can conclude that free access is valuable for the learners, as it allows them to work at their own pace but it still goes hand-in-hand with a more “traditional” way of teaching, where they are able to share opinions and learn from others with help from the teacher. As mentioned by Sheerin, free access would therefore not be efficient by itself, since it is the combination of these three learning processes (i.e., self-access facilities, expert help by the teacher and group-directed learning) that allows learners to acquire new knowledge.

The second benefit highlighted by Simons is a large exposure to input. Free access is actually, as expressed by Sheerin⁵⁷, a great way of exposing learners to comprehensible input through receptive skills through, for instance, reading or listening tasks. Receptive skills are particularly suitable for self-access, as they allow teachers to provide feedback to learners through the correction of “tapescripts, reading texts and answers to comprehension questions” (Sheerin, 1989: 54). It is nevertheless still possible to work on the productive skills in free access although it is less frequent. Sheerin also advises to confront learners with resources which are a little above their own level, as expressed by Krashen’s input hypothesis (i+1) so that “students may consciously or unconsciously acquire new language at the same time as they are focusing on another task connected with the text” (Sheerin, 1989: 54). As mentioned in the previous section about learning theories, Krashen believes that knowledge is acquired unconsciously rather than learnt consciously and free access would be, in this sense, a great way of acquiring a language. On the basis of Krashen’s theory, we can assume that the more learners will be confronted with comprehensible input through self-access resources, the deeper this input will be integrated unconsciously and will thus be acquired rather than learnt by them.

Then, motivation is also seen as a positive effect of free access. It is therefore important to define two types of motivation that had been highlighted by Gardner and which are tackled in *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*⁵⁸. Gardner makes a clear distinction between instrumental and integrative motivation. Instrumental motivation refers to “learning to accomplish a task, such as passing a course, getting better pay, etc.” (Ehrman, 1996: 139) and

⁵⁷ Sheerin, S. (1989). *Self-Access*. Resource books for teachers. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁵⁸ Ellis, R. (1994). *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

integrative motivation refers to “a favourable attitude toward the target language community, possibly a wish to integrate and adapt to a new target culture through use of the language” (Gardner, 1985: 54). It seems thus that an integrative motivation will be more beneficial for learners, as they have a real purpose for learning the language and this motivation is therefore not limited to achieving a specific task⁵⁹. Another author, Rolland Viau, also agrees with this, as he believes that the value of an activity depends on the use that learners see in it but also on the goals they set for themselves whether social or educational. According to him: “l’apprentissage doit l’emporter sur la seule recherche de performance”⁶⁰. By saying this, he shows his agreement with Gardner, as he claims that the learning process is a better motivator than performance, which, in turn, is only a short-term source of motivation. By confronting learners with resources that they can choose by themselves, they will consequently feel more motivated, as they are free to select documents (and their degree of difficulty) which make sense for them and which they feel have a real value in real-life situations. Something that also leads to increasing learners’ motivation is, as mentioned in Simons’ study⁶¹, the large variety of topics which are offered in the various resources. Learners are thus allowed to choose from topics that really interest them and this might lead to an integrative motivation. Letting learners be autonomous with the decisions they make in free access seems to have a beneficial impact on their motivation, as they are free to make their own choices.

Lastly, individualization, which is also known as differentiation, is seen as another benefit of free access. According to the “Décret Missions” (art 5, §12), differentiated pedagogy is “une démarche d’enseignement qui consiste à varier les méthodes pour tenir compte de l’hétérogénéité des classes ainsi que de la diversité des modes et des besoins d’apprentissage.” In other words, it has as its main goal to allow **every** learner to acquire knowledge by adapting the learning methods so that they suit every learner as an individual with different needs and ways of learning. Differentiation means “different work, not more work” (Cooper, 1998; VanTassel-Baska & Stambaugh, 2005 in Latz, 2008: 28). Another point is that, differentiation allows teachers to tackle the learners’ different intelligences and learning strategies and is thus, in this sense, directly linked to the multiple intelligences that were tackled in the previous

⁵⁹ It is still important to note that recent studies are more contrastive and mention that “both types of motivation have been found to be related to success in second language learning” (Lightbown & Spada, 2013: 87).

⁶⁰ Houssaye, J. (1995). Review: La motivation en contexte scolaire by Rolland Viau. *Revue Française de Pédagogie*, 113, 154–155.

⁶¹ Beckers, J., Simons, G. *et al.* (2005). L’accès-libre : une reconfiguration efficace du métier de l’élève et de l’enseignant ? Observation et analyse des conditions d’efficacité : rapport intermédiaire de la première année de recherche. Université de Liège, Faculté de Psychologie et des Sciences de l’Education, Service de Didactique Professionnelle et de Formation des Enseignants.

section (Howard Gardner). Free access, allowing learners to choose from various skills, resources and levels of difficulty, enables teachers to differentiate their learners both in terms of material and strategies. The English as a Second Language Council (Specialist Council of the Alberta Teachers' Association)⁶², devoted a publication to the differentiation of learning strategies. They make a distinction between three types of strategies which can be differentiated: metacognitive, cognitive and social affective strategies. Metacognitive strategies would involve working on self-evaluation and paying attention to key words or phrases for example. Cognitive strategies would be about contextualization, inferencing and summarizing. Finally, social affective strategies would tackle cooperation and questioning for clarification. These strategies could be implemented through free access in such a way that learners have the possibility to become aware of these strategies in order to use them in other contexts. Differentiation is therefore not limited to working on various resources and skills as in the case of free access but also on multiple strategies which need to be learnt as part of the language course and independently from activities which are practised through free access.

3.5.1.2 Free access: Drawbacks

Next to the positive aspects of free access, problems can also be encountered while implementing such a method. Beckers and Simons' study⁶³ has highlighted some drawbacks of the use of free access. They tackle the problem of the practical organization of free access but also the fact that this method that can be taken lightly by learners.

The first problem that is mentioned in this study is the practical organization of the free access course, which is seen as time-consuming for teachers. Beckers and Simons summarize the teachers' most recurrent constraints as being: the development of resources and tasks, maintaining order in the classification of resources (if they are stored in boxes for example) but also monitoring and storing the equipment. All of these tasks are added to what teachers already have to prepare for their lessons. In this way, we could say that it seems problematic for novice teachers to experiment self-access with their students unless they have the opportunity to join an existing group of teachers which already has all the material required, including documents and tasks.

⁶² *Understanding ESL Learners Series*. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.eslcata.com/understanding-esl-learners-series?mid=941>. [Accessed April 8, 2021].

⁶³ Beckers, J., Simons, G. *et al.* (2005). *L'accès-libre : une reconfiguration efficace du métier de l'élève et de l'enseignant ? Observation et analyse des conditions d'efficacité : rapport intermédiaire de la première année de recherche*. Université de Liège, Faculté de Psychologie et des Sciences de l'Education, Service de Didactique Professionnelle et de Formation des Enseignants.

The fact that free access is located outside the regular didactic sequence also makes its organization more difficult. In fact, there would be more advantages for learners if what they do in free access were to be exploited as an integral part of their learning process and not only as a “break” in the didactic sequence. Beckers and Simons have investigated this issue and have concluded in their study on free access⁶⁴ that “une articulation étroite entre les heures en accès-libre et les autres moments d’apprentissage augmente l’efficacité et le sens de ces moments « extraordinaires »” (Beckers *et al.*, 2006: 63). This quotation insists on the importance of linking what is done in free access with the usual learning process in order to increase the efficiency of this method. Beckers and Simons also provide solutions for integration such as: teaching the strategies that will be used during free access, introducing the topics before free access and then discussing them in group, getting learners used to setting goals for themselves and to using a dictionary, doing remediation on what has been done during free access activities and finally guiding self-assessment. As a conclusion, they explain that “the better the hours of free access are integrated into the curriculum, the more effective they will be” (Beckers *et al.*, 2006: 63). Consequently, this difficulty seems avoidable if Beckers and Simons’ solutions are taken into account.

Another difficulty of free access is the degree of learners’ involvement. Not all learners will be equally involved in the task, since learners are individuals who have personal needs and interests for learning. Understandably, teachers will note that some learners are less involved in some tasks and that they are not able to have control on the learners’ degree of engagement. Beckers and Simons’ study⁶⁵ highlighted the fact that free access is especially suitable for weaker learners who have a hard time keeping up with more traditional courses, for example, and for learners with a higher level who want to excel. Free access allows them to work at their own pace, to be more involved in their tasks and to devote this time to overtaking exercises if they want to. This study concludes that free access is a good opportunity for learners to work at their own pace but teachers cannot control who wants to take this chance or not. It is also clear that the greater the commitment, the greater the progress in learning (Beckers *et al.*, 2006:

⁶⁴ Beckers, J., Simons, G. *et al.* (2006). L’accès-libre : une reconfiguration efficace du métier de l’élève et de l’enseignant ? Observation et analyse des conditions d’efficacité : rapport final de la deuxième année de recherche. Université de Liège, Faculté de Psychologie et des Sciences de l’Education, Service de Didactique Professionnelle et de Formation des Enseignants.

⁶⁵ Beckers, J., Simons, G. *et al.* (2006). L’accès-libre : une reconfiguration efficace du métier de l’élève et de l’enseignant ? Observation et analyse des conditions d’efficacité : rapport final de la deuxième année de recherche. Université de Liège, Faculté de Psychologie et des Sciences de l’Education, Service de Didactique Professionnelle et de Formation des Enseignants.

64). This difficulty therefore seems to be unavoidable, as the degree of commitment depends on the learner and not on the teacher.

3.5.2 Tandem learning

3.5.2.1 Tandem learning: Benefits

In his study on tandem learning, Simons describes several advantages in terms of motivation, language, culture and lastly autonomy. This latter aspect having already been discussed in section 3.2 of this thesis, this part is going to focus on the motivational, linguistic and cultural aspects of tandem learning and the benefits arising from them.

The first benefit of tandem learning to be tackled is motivation. In her study about motivation in tandem learning via e-mail, Ushioda⁶⁶ discusses multiple facets of motivation which seem to be present in tandem learning: “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 and convenience of e-mail communication” (Ushioda, 2000: 125). Indeed, communicating with another person in an authentic context about their own personal interests would motivate learners to learn the language, as they really feel concerned and active in the learning process. Intrinsic motivation also plays a role in the efficiency of tandem learning, as “the intrinsically motivated learner will learn to paint by painting, to work with computers by working with computers, and to learn languages by using them” (Ushioda, 2000: 126). This type of motivation would allow learners to learn the language by actually practising it through communicating with native speakers. Wakisaka⁶⁷ also studied the effectiveness of this method by collecting testimonies from students who have practised tandem learning. Charlie assures that Yuko⁶⁸ was helpful and that “her motivation went up after she started eTandem” (Wakisaka, 2018: 49). Then, Lea explains that “her motivation increased after she found a common interest with Aki, classical music” (Wakisaka, 2018: 49). Another student, Nana, also explains: “the reason why my motivation decreased is because it became harder to take time for Skype session at night and I had other appointments except for classes during winter holiday” (Wakisaka, 2000: 50). This quotation could mean that motivation seems to be linked with communication through a tandem and if this exchange is not possible any longer, motivation could decrease significantly. Organizing tandem exchanges in the classroom

⁶⁶ Ushioda, E. (2000). *Tandem language learning via e-mail: From motivation to autonomy*. *ReCALL*, 12(2), 121–128.

⁶⁷ Wakisaka, M. (2018). Face-to-face tandem and etandem: Differences that influence the maintenance of tandem learning activities. *Revista Do GEL*, 15(3), 42–57.

⁶⁸ Charlie and Yuko, Lea and Aki are tandem partners.

could therefore prevent this exchange from being difficult to establish and enhance learners' motivation. The realism of the exchange, as learners are in contact with native speakers, inside as well as outside the classroom, talking about real-life experiences, makes the motivation even greater.

Secondly, exchanging with native speakers through tandem learning also has a linguistic value. As Simons describes in his study⁶⁹, it allows learners to be confronted with an authentic language without facing travel costs. It also enables them to increase the amount of input with which learners are faced as well as the amount of output they are going to produce while discussing in tandem. The native speaker who is going to play the role of the language expert while he/she is not the learner is going to help the foreign language learner. The correction of errors is going to be provided by another learner (and not by the teacher as is usually the case) in a situation of reciprocity. This will allow a better reception of this feedback, as it can only be seen as positive by both learners. Reciprocity is important, as it should bring mutual improvement to learners who are helping each other to achieve their own goals⁷⁰. To compare the exposition of input that learners get from tandem learning with Krashen's input hypothesis, we could say that by being often confronted with comprehensible and authentic input, learners will acquire rather than learn the language and will probably find it easier to create comprehensible output afterwards. This would mean that, as it has already been analysed with Krashen's *input hypothesis model of L2 learning and production* in Figure 4, input is the basis for the learning and acquisition of a language, as no output can be created without the learner having been confronted with input in the first place. Communicating with native speakers seems, in this sense, to be a great way of improving the amount of input with which learners are confronted as mentioned in these learners' feedbacks from Simons' study in 2006⁷¹: "Ik heb veel woorden geleerd, ik heb me veel nieuwe vrienden gemaakt en nu kan ik met hen internetten." (Thomas) and "Ik sprak vlugger, ik begreep vlugger, het was steeds gemakkelijker voor mij." (Gilles).

⁶⁹ Simons, G. (2020–2021). Cours de Didactique des langues modernes. Partim II. Module : autres modes d'organisation de la classe de langue étrangère que les séquences didactiques [Syllabus]. Liège : Université de Liège. Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres. Service de didactique des langues modernes.

⁷⁰ Wakisaka, M. (2018). Face-to-face tandem and etandem: Differences that influence the maintenance of tandem learning activities. *Revista Do GEL*, 15(3), 42–57.

⁷¹ Simons, G. et al. (2006). *L'apprentissage en tandem : apprendre une langue étrangère de et avec l'autre*. [CD-Rom]. Administration Générale de l'Enseignement et de la Recherche scientifique, Service général des Affaires pédagogiques et du Pilotage du réseau d'enseignement organisé par la Communauté française.

The last positive aspect of tandem learning which is going to be tackled in this thesis is about culture. Tandem is described by Telles and Vassallo as “a free and mutual exchange of knowledge about language and **culture**” (Telles & Vassallo, 2006: 6-7). Culture seems therefore to be an important part of what is learnt through tandem learning next to language. As a matter of fact, developing intercultural skills is becoming more important these past years, as they give students information about international employability⁷². These skills could be trained with the help of tandem learning, as “a conversation between a native speaker of English (NSE) and an English as a foreign language learner (EFL) often not only helps the language learner to improve his/her linguistic proficiency, but also enhances intercultural awareness” (Kramsch, 1998 in Acar Kobayashi, 2011: 3). Learning about the culture behind the language they are learning could also allow learners to avoid misunderstandings which can be linked to a lack of cultural knowledge. Dekhinet explained in 2008 that “the misuse of language or the failure to notice the cultural nuances contained in the language could lead to misunderstandings between a native speaker of English and an English as a foreign language learner”. This quotation shows that learning a language also implies learning the culture behind it in order to be able to understand the language in its full meaning, including art, music, dialect words or regional accents for example. Communicating with native speakers will thus provide learners with knowledge about a new culture which is then going to be used to communicate with other native speakers afterwards, as both the native and foreign culture are going to be reflected when speaking. Communication therefore relies on both language and culture, and language reflects and constitutes culture. This is called “culture of communication” and is illustrated as follows⁷³:

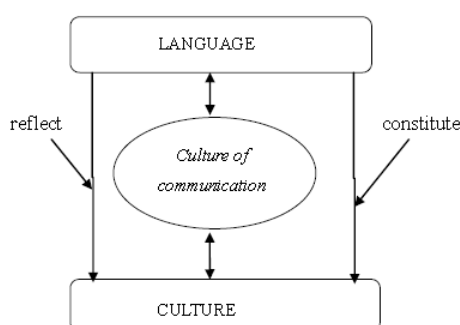


Figure 5. A simplified framework of communication and learning (Jin *et al.*, 1998 in Acar Kobayashi, 2011: 3).

⁷² Böcker, J., Ciekanski, M. *et al.* (2017). Développer des compétences par l'apprentissage en tandem : Focus sur les acteurs, les ressources et la formation. *Office franco-allemande pour la jeunesse*, 29.

⁷³ Acar, A., & Kobayashi, H. (2011). Whys and how's of language exchange meetings. *Computer-Assisted Language Learning Electronic Journal*, 12(2), 1–10.

As a conclusion, tandem learning enables learners to learn about their partner's culture in addition to learning the language, as culture is a part of the language. The possible effectiveness of this method can for example be seen in the following quotations from students in the context of Simons' study on tandem learning from 2006⁷⁴: "Met Nederlandse leerlingen, heb ik de Nederlandse culture geleerd bijvoorbeeld "er is een kaartenspel in België en Nederland maar met verschillende spelregels" (Baptiste), but also "Nederland is naast België, maar het leven daar is heel verschillend" (Daniel). We can see that even if the exchange is done between countries which are close to each other, it might still be effective, as each country has its own culture. It would even be interesting to take advantage of Belgium's geographical position (close to The Netherlands, Germany, and even Great Britain, etc) to increase the exchanges between these countries in language learning. This method provides for a real cultural exchange between both learners and they will benefit from the other person's cultural knowledge.

3.5.2.2 Tandem learning: Drawbacks

In his study about tandem learning, Simons⁷⁵ discusses several drawbacks that can be encountered when using such a method. He mentions, among others, the cumbersome nature of its organization and the difficulty to find a balance between the foreign language and the language of schooling in the exchanges. These are the two problems on which this section is going to focus.

Firstly, organizing tandem learning might be seen as time-consuming, in the same manner as free access. In fact, finding a school to communicate with is not as easy as it seems. As described by Simons, teachers should ideally to start looking for a partner school the year prior to the one in which they want to begin the exchanges, as it is a long process. In addition to this, it is also important to find learners with the same linguistic level in order to have effective and equal exchanges that will benefit both learners. This organisational mode is a long-term process that requires a lot of time and investment from teachers but also from learners since tandems might need to be modified if partners do not match with each other for example.

⁷⁴ Simons, G. *et al.* (2006). *L'apprentissage en tandem : apprendre une langue étrangère de et avec l'autre*. [CD-Rom]. Administration Générale de l'Enseignement et de la Recherche scientifique, Service général des Affaires pédagogiques et du Pilotage du réseau d'enseignement organisé par la Communauté française.

⁷⁵ Simons, G. (2020–2021). Cours de Didactique des langues modernes. Partim II. Module : autres modes d'organisation de la classe de langue étrangère que les séquences didactiques [Syllabus]. Liège : Université de Liège. Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres. Service de didactique des langues modernes.

It also seems difficult for teachers to follow their learners' development in the foreign language and this is the reason why Simons proposes to create tandem logbooks in which learners are asked to record everything that is done during the exchanges in tandem. This way of recording what is learnt during tandem learning will help teachers to be aware of their learners' development. Another difficulty will arise when evaluating the learners, as it appears awkward to evaluate learners only based on logbooks. One way to do this would be to practise what is done in tandem learning in the normal language course (with the entire group) in order to be able to evaluate the learners' skills.

Secondly, finding a balance between the foreign language and the language of schooling is very crucial in tandem learning but could appear quite difficult to reach. It is indeed important that both learners benefit equally from this learning. For this reason, Schwienhorst advises that "both partners should use the two languages in equal amounts to ensure that they profit equally from the exchange" (Schwienhorst, 2003: 431)⁷⁶. Simons⁷⁷ shared this view when putting forward the fifty-fifty rule, which consists of speaking fifty percent of the time in the mother tongue and the fifty other percent in the foreign language to ensure the balance between both languages. However, he makes an exception for physical tandems, where learners are asked to only speak the language of the person hosting. This being said, there should be no difference in speaking time in the final result, as both partners are supposed to host the other person.

Finally, one should also take into account the necessary equipment (computers for emails or video calls) and the time difference (from one country to another or between lesson timetables) when establishing tandem learning. Teachers seldom have access to multiple computers in their classrooms, there is therefore a need to make use of a multimedia room to be shared with other teachers and this makes things much more difficult. Then, time difference is another difficulty, as both groups need to meet at the same time. Teachers have to make sure that the hours are compatible from one country to another but they also have to ensure that both groups have their language course at the same time and this is not that easy to do in practice. The fact that virtual tandem is limited to oral and listening skills can also be seen as a limit of this method, since learners still need to work on the other skills. Teachers will have to guarantee

⁷⁶ Schwienhorst, K. (2003). Learner Autonomy and Tandem Learning: Putting Principles Into Practice in Synchronous and Asynchronous Telecommunications Environments. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 16(5), 427–443.

⁷⁷ Simons, G. et al. (2006). *L'apprentissage en tandem : apprendre une langue étrangère de et avec l'autre*. [CD-Rom]. Administration Générale de l'Enseignement et de la Recherche scientifique, Service général des Affaires pédagogiques et du Pilotage du réseau d'enseignement organisé par la Communauté française.

a certain balance between all the different skills and could do this by combining tandem learning with free access but also by arranging links with the “ordinary” course.

4. Occurrences of terms in official documents and online survey of teachers about free access, tandem learning and videoconferencing

4.1 Official documents

4.1.1 Introduction

This section is devoted to the importance given to free access and tandem learning in the official documents of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation. In order to have a rather large overview of the relevance of such methods, several official frameworks and curricula are going to be analysed in order to identify the occurrence of these terms in each of these documents. The frameworks and curricula to be investigated are, firstly the *Common European Framework of Reference for Language* (CEFR) considering that it has influenced national policies on language teaching, secondly the curricula of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, and finally the documents of the *Federation of Catholic secondary education* (FESeC).

The analysis of these documents consists of studying the frequency of occurrence of both terms “free access” and “tandem learning”. The occurrences of these terms are going to be compared in old and new official documents to analyse their possible evolution over time. It will also enable me to see whether such methods are advised to language teachers or whether they are rather unrecognised. The results are then going to be presented in table format in order to provide the readers with a clear overview.

4.1.2 Common European Framework of Reference for Language

The CEFR is a framework that has influenced educational policies in Europe, so if we find a trace of the terms at issue in the CEFR, we might also find them in our curricula in French-speaking Belgium because these are influenced by the CEFR. The first version was published in 2001 (196 pages) and has as its main objective to “provide a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe”⁷⁸. In 2018, a Companion volume was released, followed by a newer version in April 2020, which has 278 pages. The two versions that are going to be used to measure the occurrence of terms linked to free access and tandem learning are the 2001 and 2020 editions.

⁷⁸ *Purposes of the CEFR*. (n.d.). Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Retrieved from <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/purposes>. [Accessed July 9, 2021].

The terms “free access” and “tandem (learning)” are mentioned neither in the CEFR nor in the Companion volume. This could mean that they are still concepts which are not very well-known and this could also explain why they are so little used by language teachers.

To get an idea of the relative importance of the occurrence of these two terms, I also studied the occurrence of the word “communication” because it is a pedagogical approach which is close to free access and tandem learning. As a comparison, the term “communication” appears 150 times in the Companion volume and 144 times in the CEFR from 2001.

			“Tandem learning”	“Free access”
Council of Europe	<i>New:</i>	<i>Common European Framework of Reference for Language</i> (Companion volume 2020) (278 pages)	0	0
	<i>Old:</i>	<i>Cadre européen commun de référence pour les langues : apprendre, enseigner, évaluer (2001)</i> (196 pages)	0	0

Table 1. Occurrences of “free access” and “tandem learning” in the CEFR.

4.1.3 Wallonia-Brussels Federation network

Six curricula of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation are going to be analysed in this sub-section. These documents aim to give instructions to teachers from the Wallonia-Brussels Federation (WBF) on how to teach and assess their students. As the focus of my research is on methodological tracks, I have decided to focus only on the curricula detailed hereafter and to omit the competence frameworks, which are inter-network and which only address the content that needs to be taught, not the methods.

Tandem learning is, as was also the case in the CEFR, not mentioned in any of the curricula related to the WBF. Regarding free access, there is an improvement, since it is mentioned twice in “Programmes d’études langues modernes 2^e et 3^e degré des humanités générales et technologiques”, two more times in “Programmes d’études langues modernes 2^e et 3^e degré des humanités professionnelles et techniques” and thirteen times in “Enseignement

secondaire ordinaire de plein exercice Humanités générales et technologiques Enseignement général et technique de transition 2ème et 3ème degrés”. The latter even lays out the appropriate procedure to follow if teachers want to work in a free access mode. This document presents a definition of the method, describes its implementation in the classroom/school and suggests the material which is required. With regard to the implementation of this method, the authors advise teachers to collaborate with each other to be able to initiate the project but also with teachers from other schools to develop the necessary material (p.13). Regarding the material that is needed, the authors created a list, which is divided into five types of material: the equipment (i.e., computers, microphones, etc.), documents (i.e., written texts, videos, audio documents, self-correction sheets, etc.), activities (oral activities in pairs, instructions for written exercises, grammar exercises with answers, etc.), software (containing exercises for the reading, listening and oral skills) and lastly reference books such as grammar books and dictionaries (pp.14-15). The authors of this curriculum also suggest the implementation of a log book so that learners can be able to write down the date, the title of the text, the specific activity and assess what they feel they have learnt from this activity (p.15). The sudden occurrence of this method in these curricula could be explained by the fact that inspectors play a role in the preparation of curricula and free access was set up by an inspector in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, Manfred Dahmen, who probably wanted this method to be addressed in these curricula.

By way of comparison, the term “communication” occurs 89 times in “Socles de compétences” from 2018, 125 times in “Compétences terminales et savoir requis humanités générales et technologiques – Langues modernes”, 174 times in “Programmes d’études langues modernes 2e et 3e degré des humanités générales et technologiques”, 152 times in “Programmes d’études langues modernes 2e et 3e degré des humanités professionnelles et techniques”, 130 times in “Enseignement secondaire ordinaire de plein exercice Humanités générales et technologiques Enseignement général et technique de transition 2ème et 3ème degrés”, and 32 times in “Socles de compétences langues modernes”.

			“Tandem learning”	“Free access”
WBF	<i>New:</i>	Programmes d’études langues modernes 2 ^e et 3 ^e degré des humanités générales et technologiques (2019) (452p)	0	2
		Programmes d’études langues modernes 2 ^e et 3 ^e degré des humanités professionnelles et techniques (2019) (382p)	0	2
		Socles de compétences (2018) (128p)	0	0
		Compétences terminales et savoirs requis humanités générales et technologiques – Langues modernes (2017) (233p)	0	0
	<i>Old:</i>	Socles de compétences langues modernes (2013) (5p)	0	0
		Enseignement secondaire ordinaire de plein exercice Humanités générales et technologiques Enseignement général et technique de transition 2 ^{ème} et 3 ^{ème} degrés (2000) (247 pages)	0	13

Table 2. Occurrences of “free access” and “tandem learning” in the curricula of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation network.

4.1.4 Federation of Catholic secondary education

This sub-section focuses on the curricula of the Federation of Catholic secondary education. Neither free access nor tandem learning are mentioned in these documents. As a result, it seems

that free access and tandem learning are unrecognised, similarly to the framework of the CEFR and the curricula of WBF, except for a few mentions of free access in the curricula of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation network.

By contrast, the term “communication” is, as is the case in the other framework and curricula, very frequent in the curricula of the Federation of Catholic secondary education. This word occurs 116 times in “Programme langues modernes formation générale commune 2e et 3e degrés professionnel et technique de qualification”, 125 times in “Programme langues modernes I, II, III 2e et 3e degrés”, 97 times in “Programme langues modernes 1er degré commun”, 143 times in “Programme langues modernes Langues I, II, III 2e et 3e degré de transition”, and finally, 150 times in “Langues modernes (1) 1er, 2e et 3e degrés - Outils d’accompagnement du nouveau programme”.

			“Tandem learning”	“Free access”
Catholic teaching/ FESeC	<i>New:</i>	<i>Programme langues modernes 1^{er} degré commun (2018) (114p)</i>	0	0
		<i>Programme langues modernes I, II, III 2^e et 3^e degrés (2018) (166p)</i>	0	0
		<i>Programme langues modernes formation générale commune 2^e et 3^e degrés professionnel et technique de qualification (2017) (129p)</i>	0	0

	<i>Old:</i>	<i>Langues modernes (1) 1^{er}, 2^e et 3^e degrés Outils d'accompagnement du nouveau programme (2001) (140p)</i>	0	0
		<i>Programme langues modernes Langues I, II, III 2^e et 3^e degré de transition (2000) (70p)</i>	0	0

Table 3. Occurrences of “free access” and “tandem learning” in the curricula of the Federation of Catholic secondary education.

4.1.5 Conclusion

As a conclusion, it seems that free access and tandem learning are still very unrecognised in the framework of the Council of Europe and in the curricula of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation and the Federation of Catholic secondary education.

It is difficult to evaluate the reasons why these methods are not more present in the framework of the CEFR and in the curricula but it could explain why teachers do not often use them, as the curricula do not provide them with a lot of instructions on how to establish these methods, and the CEFR does not mention these methods either. Supposedly, the cumbersomeness of implementing these methods could explain why they seldom occur in the curricula. The next section about the online survey which was answered by language teachers might be an aid to find out the elements that have an impact on whether or not these methods are used in the language classroom.

As regards my second hypothesis (i.e., *Free access and tandem learning occur only very rarely in language frameworks*) about the occurrence of free access and tandem learning in the language frameworks, evidence does indeed show that, on the one hand, free access occurs only very rarely in all the curricula that were studied and, on the other hand, tandem learning never appears as such in any of the curricula. Progress could therefore be made to familiarise teachers with these methods and to make them appear more frequently in these documents.

4.2 Online survey

4.2.1 Introduction

This section is about the preparation of an online survey that was created in order to confront various teachers' thoughts on free access, tandem learning and videoconferencing and evaluate the role they play in second language acquisition. In fact, the online survey appeared to me to be the most efficient way to collect a large amount of data over a limited period of time. In his book about questionnaires in second language acquisition⁷⁹, Zoltán Dörnyei discusses the fact that "The main attraction of questionnaires is their unprecedented efficiency in terms of (a) researcher time, (b) researcher effort, and (c) financial resources" (Dörnyei, 2003: 9). Using an online survey allowed me to easily spread it around the internet (Facebook groups or emails) in order to collect as many responses as possible but also to avoid some disadvantages of the paper version mentioned in Dörnyei's book. This questionnaire will also serve to verify most of my research hypotheses by confronting the respondents' answers with the theoretical part of this thesis.

4.2.2 Methods

The purpose of my online questionnaire is to collect declarative data that will help me get an overview of the way teachers perceive free access and tandem learning (via or without the aid of videoconferencing) in second language acquisition. It will also enable me to see how these methods work and are used in practice.

This online survey was supervised by Mr. Simons and was also prepared under his guidance and with his advice on how to conceive it. He advised us, together with the five other students who are writing their thesis in the field of didactics, to combine our different questionnaires into a single document on *Google forms* which was intended to be sent to the participants. Using an online questionnaire was easier than a paper version given the circumstances of the pandemic, as it allowed teachers to answer it from home, without having to go anywhere. The purpose of combining the various questionnaires was to obtain a greater number of responses from the respondents, by sparing them the burden of answering six individual ones and giving them the feeling they had less questions to answer, which allowed us to collect more answers. Working with five other students also enabled us to learn from each

⁷⁹ Dörnyei, Z. (2003). *Questionnaires in second language research: Construction, administration, and processing*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

other, as we were helping each other with the preparation of our surveys. Sharing ideas was very rewarding.

We first started by creating the questions we had in common, that is to say the questions about the respondents' profile. These questions consisted of getting to know the respondents (the school in which they teach, their years of experience, the languages they teach, etc.) in order to be able, when analysing the data, to see if links could be established between the answers and specific profiles. For example, the answers could show that teachers who have between eleven and twenty years of experience know about free access and tandem learning. This first part was then sent to Mr. Simons and was corrected taking his remarks into account. When this section was ready, we continued with the preparation of our personal questionnaires. This individual part of the survey was created by each of us individually and revised several times by Mr. Simons, who helped us improve our questionnaires by means of separate feedbacks. In this way, we had the opportunity to optimize our surveys with the help of his comments. As far as I am concerned, there were four versions before the fifth and final version of my questionnaire.

Next, we proceeded writing an introduction to our questionnaires. The purpose of this introduction was to explain the main theme of each of the surveys, describe our target audience and also the duration of all six parts of the questionnaire. Then, each of us wrote an individual introduction in order to introduce themselves and explain the objective of our questionnaire and its significance for the writing of our thesis. We also took advantage of the introduction to specify that the questionnaire was divided into six parts but that the respondents could skip the parts they did not want to answer. It was equally important to mention that the survey was anonymous, as the respondents' answers would only be used as part of our theses and would not be made public. This was indeed important in order to protect the respondents' privacy as is mentioned in Dörnyei's book: "Principle 2: The respondent's right to privacy should always be respected [...]. That is, respondents are perfectly within their rights to refuse to answer questions without offering any explanation [...]. No information can be published about identifiable persons or organizations without their permission" (Dörnyei, 2003: 91-92).

Then, Mr. Simons advised us to work with *Google forms*, as it allowed us to work simultaneously on a single document which constantly saved our progress. It was also useful, as it allowed us to create multiple sections for each of the six questionnaires with an unlimited number of questions. This platform also creates automatic Excel graphs which can be helpful

for the presentation and analysis of the results. Lastly, *Google forms* is user-friendly and, in order to save respondents' time, does not require any creation of an account. The only problematic aspect we encountered with this platform is that it does not allow respondents to save their answers and return to them later. They had to answer everything in one go. To compensate for this problem as much as possible, we have kept the length of our questionnaire to a minimum.

The following step was to send our questionnaire to Mr. Simons and his assistants (Florence Van Hoof, Julie Vanhoof and Alain Segatto, who are teachers in secondary schools and therefore match our target audience, as well as Audrey Renson who taught us about the creation of an online survey through a comprehensive PowerPoint presentation) for the pre-test phase. We also sent it to ten teachers who teach in secondary education in order to have the broadest possible panel, as well as a representative sample of teachers by selecting six teachers working in private education ("enseignement libre" in French), two from the Wallonia-Brussels Federation and two more who work in provincial schools ("ville et province" in French). We also made sure that two of these ten teachers teach in lower-secondary education.

Finally, after having reworked our questionnaires taking the teachers' remarks from the pre-test phase into account, we sent the final version of the survey to further respondents. Here again, we were able to count on our university teachers' help to spread our survey to the greatest number of teachers, as they transmitted our questionnaire to many of their contacts who are internship supervisors. These teachers are therefore normally more aware of subjects in the didactic field than other teachers. We also shared the survey on Facebook and sent it to as many people as possible, including to our internship supervisors, who are not in the University's contact list.

4.2.3 Pre-test phase

In order to have an effective pre-test phase, we first asked Mr. Simons' assistants (J. Vanhoof, F. Van Hoof and A. Segatto) to give us a personal feedback on each of our questionnaires. As regards my questionnaire, they suggested that I add more possible answers in my multiple-choice questions. When, for example, I forgot the "never" option in my questions about the frequency of use of the methods.

In a second step, ten teachers coming from different types of schools were asked, as mentioned in the previous sub-section, to answer our questionnaire. This group was composed of: four teachers working in the private education (upper-secondary), two teachers working in

the Wallonia-Brussels Federation (upper-secondary), two teachers working in city and provincial schools (upper-secondary) and lastly, two teachers working in private education, in the lower-secondary level. Their role was to go through our survey to see whether everything worked smoothly (the references to the different sections for example). They also corrected some language or formulation mistakes. Given that our university teachers had already checked our questionnaire, we only had to make minimal changes such as correcting careless mistakes for example. They also helped us with the evaluation of the duration of the questionnaire which finally turned out to be between twenty-five and forty minutes, depending on the number of questions they decided to answer.

4.2.4 The questionnaire

Regarding my questionnaire, it was divided into three main sections. The first section was about free access, the second about tandem learning and the third one about videoconferencing. The entire questionnaire consisted of 22 questions and the 23rd one was devoted to possible remarks from the respondents. The first two parts began with an open question asking the respondents to write their own definition of free access and tandem learning. Then, there were more specific questions on the use they make of such methods and on the frequency of use. These questions were in the form of a Likert scale.

4.2.4.1 The questions

This sub-item will address the questions which were part of my questionnaire about free access, tandem learning and videoconferencing and their significance for the writing of my thesis. The questions that will be tackled in this part are only those that are part of my own questionnaire, excluding the questions about the respondents' profile, which, for their part, will be dealt with in section 4.2.4.2 about the respondents. For the purpose of making everything homogeneous, I will translate the questions that were in French into English.⁸⁰

The first part of my questionnaire was about free access. Its main objective was to see if the respondents knew about this method and, if so, how, when and why they used it in the language classroom. The following questions were created to help me achieve this objective:

1. Do you know the term “free access”?
 - Yes
 - No

⁸⁰ See Appendix A for the full questionnaire in its original version.

2. If yes, what do you think this term means?

After these first two questions that were designed to assess if the respondents were familiar with the term “free access”, I provided the respondents with the definition of free access which I think is the most reliable and which is inspired by the one used by the Wallonia-Brussels Federation in the Germanic language program for second and third level learning (cf. pp.5/6): “A way of organising the classroom and activities that allows students to work at their own pace, mainly in listening and reading comprehension, by giving them ‘free access’ to different documents in the foreign language.” The respondents could thus, in this way, first express the representations they had about free access without having a fixed definition in mind that could influence their answer. The purpose of providing my definition was to make the respondents able to use this definition as a guide to answer the questions that followed.

3. I use free access in my classroom:

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

4. If yes, I use free access to:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
- increase the amount of language input with which learners are confronted.				
- enable learners to work on the reading and listening comprehensions at their own pace.				
- develop learners' autonomy.				
- enable me to work with a few learners who are struggling				

while the others work independently.

- Others: (please specify)

5. If not, why don't you use free access?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
- Free access takes too much time.				
- Free access is difficult to set up.				
- It is difficult to manage free access activities in the classroom.				
- To work with free access, learners need to be able to manage their work on their own and it is difficult for the teacher to check that a learner is completing the task.				
- As free access activities are not assessed by certification, learners do not engage in them in the same way as in the regular course.				
- Lack of time due to the amount of subject matter to be taught.				
- Others (please specify)				

- If you answered “agree” or “strongly agree” to “It is difficult to manage free access activities in the classroom”, why is it difficult according to you?

Questions three, four and five are intended to evaluate if the respondents use this method in their classroom but also to see how they use such method. The use of a Likert scale allowed me to provide several possible answers in order to be able to measure the most and least recurring elements.

6. Select the proposition that suits you best:

	Never	1 hour a year	Less than 10 hours a year	4 hours per term	4 hours per month
- How frequently do you use free access in the classroom?					

Finally, question six will enable me to estimate the average frequency of use of this method.

The second part of my questionnaire was about tandem learning. As with free access, the objective of this section was to assess how familiar the respondents were with this term, if they use it, in what forms, but also how often. I also included questions covering non-use of this method in order to understand the reasons for this. Here are the questions they were asked:

7. Do you know the term “tandem learning”?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

8. If yes, what do you think this term means?

These first two questions of the second section aimed at, as it was the case with free access, assessing if respondents were well-acquainted with this method and its meaning. So that all respondents could answer the following questions with the same concept in mind, I defined tandem learning, taking Klaus Schwienhorst’s and Beckers, Simons *et al.*’s definitions into account (cf. p.9), as follows: “Tandem learning is the bringing together of two students who do not share the same mother tongue and who wish to learn each other's language. The basic idea is that each learner 'teaches' their own language to their partner. There are three forms of

tandems: The virtual tandem, the physical tandem (physical meeting of the partners) and blended tandem (both virtual and physical).”

9. I use tandem learning in my classroom:

- Yes
- No

10. If yes, I use tandem learning to:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
- enable learners to communicate at a distance with native speakers of their own age (virtual tandem).				
- enable learners to meet native speakers of their own age (physical tandem).				
- improve learners' accents.				
- enrich learners' vocabulary.				
- enrich learners' knowledge of the culture of the foreign country.				
- uninhibit learners of the foreign language because part of the learning is done at home with someone of their own age and the focus is therefore not				

on grammatical
correction but on the
content of the
messages exchanged.

- Others (please specify).

11. If not, why don't you use tandem learning?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
- Tandem learning takes too much time.				
- Tandem learning is difficult to set up.				
- It is difficult to find native speakers to communicate with.				
- Tandem learning is difficult to manage because some exchanges take place outside the classroom.				
- Tandem learning may overlap on learners' other courses in the case of physical tandem (physical meetings) or blended tandem (physical and distance meetings).				

- Others (please specify)
- If you answered "agree" or "strongly agree" to "Tandem learning is difficult to set up", why is it difficult according to you?

Questions nine, ten and eleven, just as questions three, four and five of the part about free access, are created to see whether the respondents use tandem learning with their learners. These questions will also enable me, with the help of the Likert scale, to assess the reasons why these teachers use or do not use this method.

12. Select the propositions that suit you best:

	Never	1 hour a year	Less than 10 hours a year	4 hours per term	4 hours per month	1 hour a week
- How frequently do you use tandem learning in the classroom?						
- How frequently do you think learners use tandem learning outside the classroom?						

This last question of this second section will help me study how recurrently this method is used inside but also outside the classroom. Using the results of this question will also enable me to see whether there is a change in the frequency of use of this method inside or outside the classroom.

The third and final part of my questionnaire was about videoconferencing platforms. Incidentally, I wanted to find out if this last year with the pandemic had an influence on the way language teachers used videoconferencing platforms. I also wanted to use the subject of videoconferencing platforms to study whether it could be or is already used as a medium for free access and/or tandem learning.

As an introduction to this third part, I began with providing the respondents with the definition of videoconferencing platforms that best suited the purpose of my dissertation: “Computer environment for real-time interactivity, favouring the articulation of audiovisual and

telecommunications, and supporting synchronous remote interactions”⁸¹. Teachers could then answer the following questions having the same definition in mind. Below are the questions that respondents were asked about videoconferencing platforms:

13. Were you using videoconferencing platforms as part of the language course before the Covid-19 pandemic?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

14. If yes, what use(s) did you make of these videoconferencing platforms? I used them to ...

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
- provide distance learning.				
- enable learners to communicate with native speakers.				
- enable learners to communicate with other learners who are not native speakers.				
- Others (specify).				

These first two questions will help me assess if teachers used such videoconferencing platforms before the pandemic and how they exploited them. These questions will thus serve for comparing the use of videoconferencing platforms before and with Covid-19.

15. Do you use videoconferencing platforms in the language course since the Covid-19 crisis?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

16. If yes, what do you use these videoconferencing platforms for? I use them to ...

⁸¹ Definition inspired by Jean-Marc Robinet (psychologist, ergonomist, expert in educational technologies) and by Smith (mentioned in *Videoconferencing as a tool for developing speaking skills*, 2015), cf. p.10.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
- provide distance learning.				
- enable learners to communicate with native speakers.				
- enable learners to communicate with other learners who are not native speakers.				

- Others (specify).

17. If not, why didn't you use videoconferencing platforms in your language courses before the Covid-19 crisis?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
- I do not have the necessary equipment.				
- I have the necessary equipment but I don't feel competent to use this technology.				
- I do not know how to train learners' writing skills with these platforms.				
- The attention of the learners is not the same as in a face-to-face lesson.				
- My usual course gives very good results				

without using these
platforms.

- Others (specify).

These previous questions were created to be able to assess if teachers have adapted their practice since the pandemic and in what ways. With question seventeen, I intended to understand why they choose not to use these platforms.

18. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
- Using videoconferencing platforms is a waste of time.				
- The use of videoconferencing platforms is difficult to set up.				
- Using videoconferencing platforms to communicate with native speakers is too time-consuming.				
- The use of videoconferencing platforms allows learners to learn about native speakers' culture.				
- The use of videoconferencing				

platforms makes it easier for learners to express themselves in the foreign language.

- If you answered “agree” or “strongly agree” to “The use of videoconferencing platforms is difficult to set up.”, why is it difficult according to you?

The purpose of this question was to have a global overview of what teachers think of videoconferencing platforms.

19. Select the propositions that suits you best: BEFORE the Covid-19 crisis:

	Never	Once a year	Twice a year	Once per term	Once a month
- How often did you use videoconferencing platforms to teach your courses?					
- How often did you use videoconferencing platforms for learners to communicate with native speakers or other learners in class?					
- How often did learners have the opportunity to communicate via videoconferencing platforms with native speakers or other					

learners outside the classroom setting?					
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20. Select the propositions that suits you best: SINCE the Covid-19 crisis:

	Never	A few times a year	Once a week	Between twice or three times a week	Once every two days	Every day
- How often do you use videoconferencing platforms to teach your courses?						
- How often do you use videoconferencing platforms for learners to communicate with native speakers?						

These two questions were asked to evaluate the frequency of use of videoconferencing platforms before and since Covid in order to identify if teachers only use them to teach their lessons or if they use them for other purposes.

21. In order of frequency, which of these problems do you encounter most often?

	Very frequent	Frequent	Fairly frequent	Infrequent	Never
- Learners who do not connect at all.					

- Learners who do not answer when they are asked a question.					
- Learners who claim to have connection problems.					
- Learners who claim not to have a built-in camera or to have camera problems.					
- Learners who claim that their microphone is not working.					

This question was, for its part, designed to evaluate the problems that might be linked to the use of videoconferencing platforms and their recurrence.

22. What will you keep from these videoconferencing platforms in your future practice after the Covid-19 crisis?

This last question was prepared in order to study if teachers think the use of such platforms have an added value for language learning and if so, what is the added value (such as the ability to communicate with native speakers, working with absent students, etc.).

4.2.4.2 The respondents

Given that this dissertation is about the use of free access and tandem learning in language teaching, the audience I wanted to reach were language teachers who are teaching in Belgium, regardless of the network they are teaching in. The questionnaire was posted on 15th February and personally, I decided to close it on 1st May 2021. During this period of time, 56 teachers responded to this questionnaire. As regards my part of the questionnaire, I had 56 responses out of the 59 for the whole survey.

To get an idea of the public who answered the questionnaire, I am going to analyse the part concerning the respondents' profile. Taking into account the graph below (Figure 6) concerning the years of experience as a teacher, the possible answers ranged from five years or

less to 40 years. What can be observed is the fact that most respondents are in the “between eleven and 20 years” group. The other respondents vary between the four other groups “between six and ten years”, “between 21 and 30 years” and “between 31 and 40 years”. Lastly, one person having 40 hours of experience as a trainee answered the questionnaire as well.



Figure 6. Respondent’s profile – Question 1 “How long have you been teaching languages?”

In order to get more information on the respondents’ profiles, it was also important for us to evaluate the school network(s) in which they teach. Figure 7 shows that the school networks that are the most mentioned by the respondents are the official Wallonia-Brussels Federation network with 30,4% (seventeen people) and the free subsidised network (denominational) with 62,5% (35 people). Then, 8,9% (five people) of the teachers work in the subsidised public-school network and 1,8% (one person) in the free subsidised network (not denominational). None of the teachers work in the free non-subsidised network. This sample therefore reflects the reality fairly well.

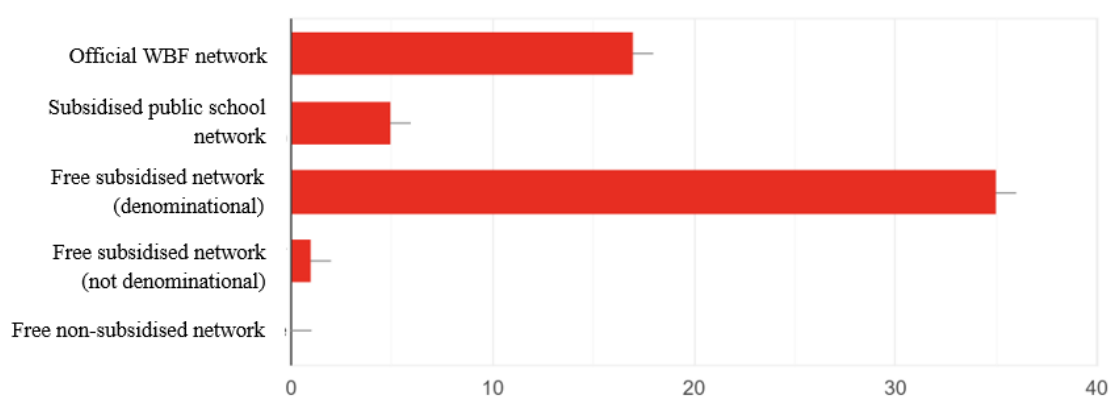


Figure 7. Respondent’s profile – Question 2 “In which school network(s) do you teach?”

Figure 8 aims to get an even better picture of the respondents by asking them at what levels they teach. 75% (42 people) answered that they teach at upper-secondary level, 26,8%

(fifteen people) teach at lower-secondary level, 5,4% teach “en promotion sociale”⁸², 3,6% (two people) teach both in primary school and in higher education and lastly, 1,8% (one person) teaches in a company.

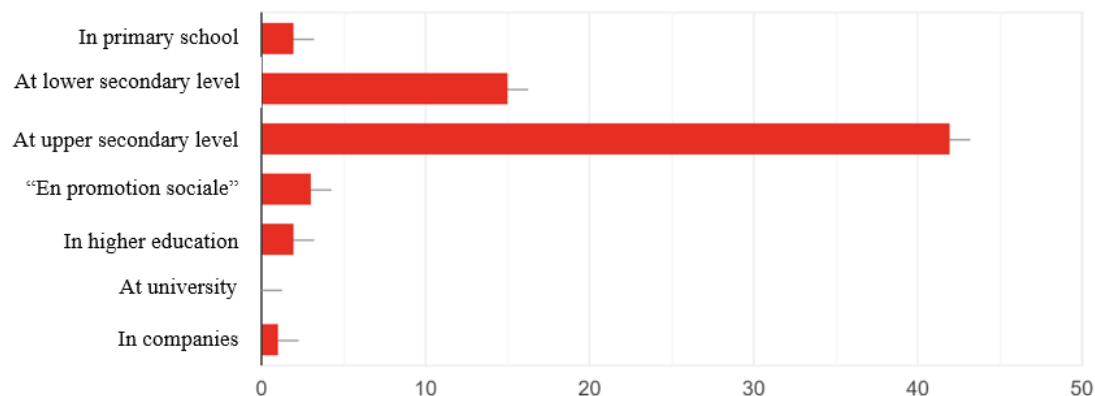


Figure 8. Respondent’s profile – Question 3 “At what level(s)/degree(s) do you teach?”

This next figure, Figure 9, represents the types of education in which the respondents teach. We can observe a large majority of answers for category “général”⁸³ with 80,4% (45 people). The types of education which come next are “technique de qualification” with 26,8% (fifteen people), “technique de transition” with 16,1% (nine people), “professionnel” with 12,5% (seven people) and “promotion sociale” with 5,4% (three people). The rest equals 1,8%, which means one person.

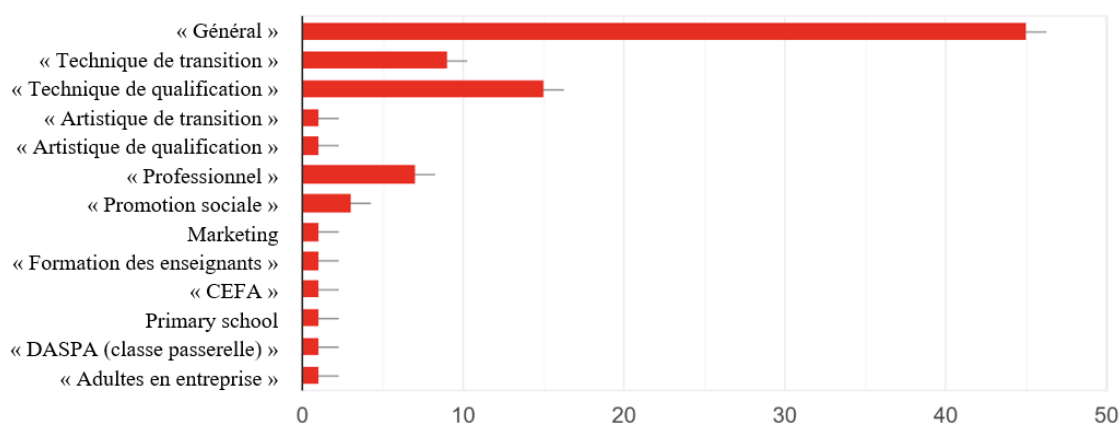


Figure 9. Respondent’s profile – Question 4 “In which type(s) of education do you teach?”

The last part of the respondent’s profile that is of interest for my part of the questionnaire is illustrated with the following graph. Figure 10 represents the languages that respondents

⁸² « Promotion sociale » is equivalent to social advancement in English but in order for this term to be understood in its exact meaning, I have decided to leave it in French.

⁸³ For the sake of accuracy, I made the decision not to translate these terms in English as there is sometimes no equivalent term in the English-speaking world.

teach. Respondents mainly teach English with 76,8% (43 people) and Dutch with 66,1% (37 people). Then, 12,5% (seven people) teach Spanish, 8,9% (five people) teach German and 1,8% (one person) teaches Italian and French as a foreign language.

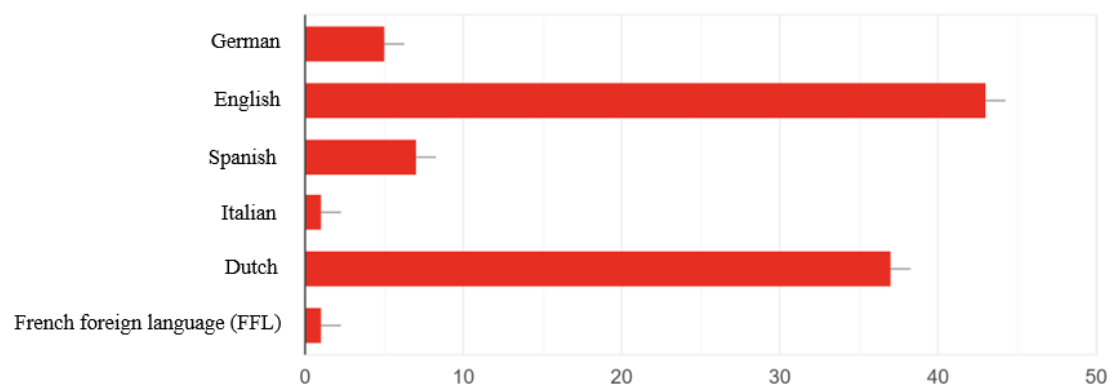


Figure 10. Respondent's profile – Question 5 “What language(s) do you teach?”

4.2.5 The results

All respondents, that is 56 people, answered my questionnaire about free access, tandem learning and videoconferencing. However, the number of respondents sometimes varies from one question to another. In this section, the results are going to be analysed and interpreted in order to confront them with my hypotheses that were introduced in the second section of my thesis.

4.2.5.1 Part one: Free access

As already mentioned in sub-section 4.2.4.1, the first part of my questionnaire was devoted to questions about free access. This first question was created to assess the percentage of respondents who are familiar with this term. We can see here that only 23,2%, that is thirteen out of 56 people, know this term. Hence, it seems that this method is unrecognised by language teachers and this might be reinforced, and partly explained, by the fact that there is very little mention of it in the curricula. In order to go further, I decided to ask people who answered “yes” to this first question if they could provide a definition of free access. What comes up most (eight out of the thirteen responses) in their answers is the fact that learners can work at their own pace on various skills while having free access to multiple sources. The five other answers are not really in accordance with the definition of this method, as they only mention the notion of having free access to documents, for example in these two answers “Avoir accès par ses propres moyens à tout moment”, and “Quelque chose qui est accessible, disponible pour tous”, while forgetting that the goal of free access is to allow learners to work at their own pace and independently on a skill and document they choose.

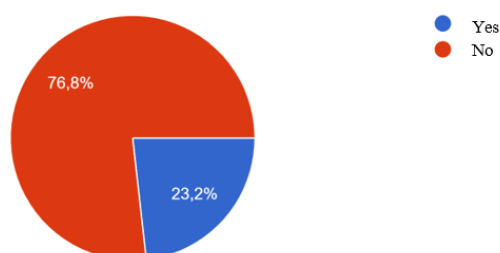


Figure 11. Question 1 “Do you know the term ‘free access’?”

I then provided the respondents with the definition of free access that I use in order for them to answer the following questions having the same common definition in mind. The following question, question 3, was designed to evaluate the number of respondents who use free access in their classrooms. We can see in Figure 12 that 35,7% (20 people out of 56) use this method in their course. We can conclude that seven respondents use free access in a way

that differs from the definition that I provided, as only thirteen of them answered “yes” to “do you know the term “free access”. It could therefore be interesting to improve this study by interviewing teachers who use this method in a different way.

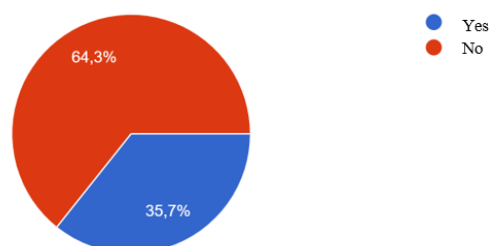


Figure 12. Question 3 “Do you practise free access in your classroom?”

In order to make a link with question 3, the respondents who answered “yes” to the previous question had to argue why they use free access in their classroom. Figure 13 shows a strong tendency for using free access with the aim of developing learners’ autonomy, as five people agree and fourteen strongly agree with this item. This could therefore confirm my first hypothesis, which is that “free access works on the learners’ autonomy”. The other item that stands out in this graph is “allow learners to work on the reading and listening comprehensions at their own pace”. Then, the use of free access to “increase the amount of language input with which learners are confronted” is quite controversial for the respondents, since nine people disagree but seven of them agree with it. A study that would be conducted among language learners could therefore be carried out to confirm or refute my third hypothesis which assumes that “free access enhances the learners’ linguistic input”, since the answers I got from this study do not allow me to verify this hypothesis. The last item “enable me to work with a few learners who are struggling while the others work independently” shows the largest variation among the answers given. The reasons why teachers use this method are therefore varied but they quite agree with the fact that it is useful to enable learners to work at their own pace and develop their autonomy. One person also added another proposition, which is to “enable more advanced learners or learners with special needs to be fed with more work”.

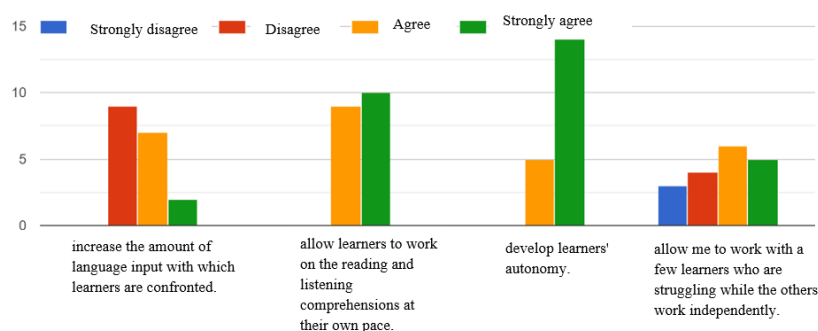


Figure 13. Question 4 “If yes, I use free access to...”

People who answered “no” to question 3 were also asked a sub-question which was “why do you not use this method?”. Figure 14 clearly shows that the majority of respondents agree or strongly agree with the idea that “free access is difficult to set up”, “it is difficult to manage free access activities in the classroom” and “to work with free access, learners need to be able to manage their work on their own and it is difficult for the teacher to check that a learner is completing the task”. Then, “free access takes too much time” is the item for which respondents have the most divergent opinions, since thirteen people disagree and eighteen agree with this. Next to this, 23 out of these 36 people agree or strongly agree with the item “lack of time due to the amount of subject matter to be taught”, which would be in line with my seventh hypothesis, namely “teachers think they do not have time to move beyond the didactic sequences”. Lastly, some people also added other reasons, such as the difficulty of practising free access as a young teacher and the lack of equipment.

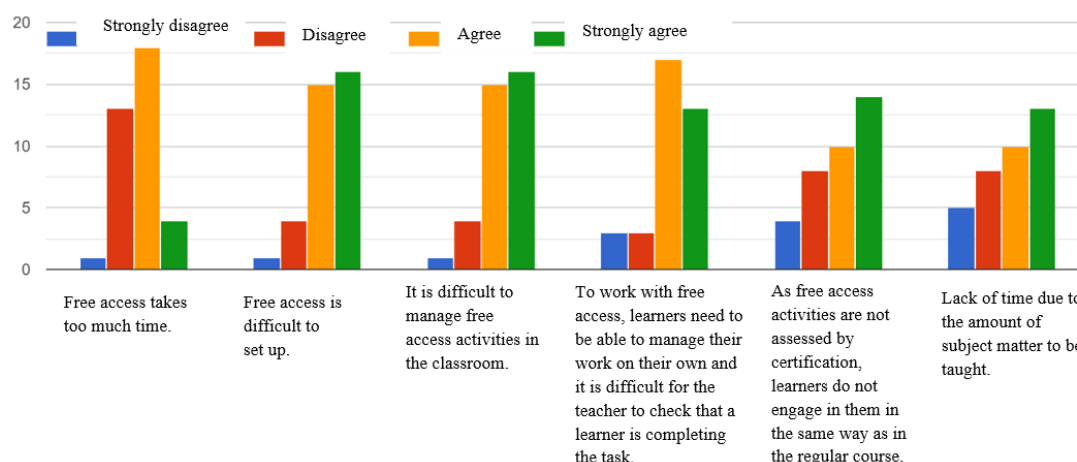


Figure 14. Question 5 “Why do you not use free access in your classroom?”

People who agreed or strongly agreed with the item “it is difficult to manage free access activities in the classroom” had to argue their answer. The most recurrent answers were: it is beneficial for learners who are doing well at the language lesson but not so much for learners who are struggling, the lack of necessary equipment, rooms that are not spacious enough, the excessive number of students per class, the fact that it takes too much time and lastly, the difficulty of checking and assessing what the students are doing.

The last question of this first part about free access is about the frequency of use of this method. Figure 15 shows that a large majority (30 people) never use free access, three people use it 1 hour a year, 13 people practise it less than 10 hours a year, 5 people 4 hours per term

and lastly five people use it 4 hours per month. The ideal frequency of use of free access advised in Beckers, Simons *et al.*'s study⁸⁴ is once a week.

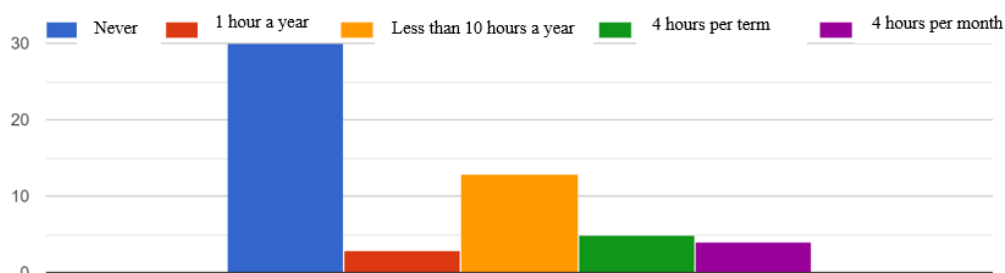


Figure 15. Question 6 “How frequently do you use free access in the classroom?”

4.2.5.2 Part two: Tandem learning

The second part of the questionnaire was about the second method, namely tandem learning. The first question of this part was created, as was already the case for the first part, to evaluate whether a majority or minority of respondents know the term “tandem learning”. What can be concluded from Figure 16 is that, as with free access, a large majority (67,9%) do not know about this term. This method is, however, slightly more familiar to respondents than free access. Those who answered “yes” to this first question were then given the opportunity to define the term “tandem learning” in their own words. They all defined it as being pair work but only four out of the eighteen people who answered this question mentioned the correct definition, which is that both learners do not share the same mother tongue and want to learn the other person’s language. The definition given by one of these three people is the following: “On met en contact les élèves avec des élèves natifs. Ils cherchent à apprendre la langue de l'autre et s'enseignent donc la langue mutuellement à travers diverses activités, qu'elles soient organisées virtuellement (ex.: e-mails, lettres) ou physiquement (ex.: rencontre dans le pays).”

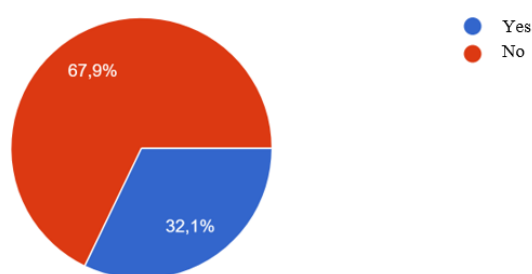


Figure 16. Question 7 “Do you know the term ‘tandem learning’?”

⁸⁴ Simons, G. (2020–2021). Cours de Didactique des langues modernes. Partim II. Module : autres modes d’organisation de la classe de langue étrangère que les séquences didactiques [Syllabus]. Liège : Université de Liège. Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres. Service de didactique des langues modernes.

I then provided the respondents with the definition I use for tandem learning, like in the first part on free access, so that they all have the same understanding of this method before answering the following questions. It appears that, based on Figure 17, only a very small minority of respondents (six respondents) use tandem learning in their classrooms and this percentage is even lower than for free access. The results of questions 7 and 9 are indeed in opposition to those of questions 1 and 3 on free access, since more people are familiar with the term “tandem learning” but fewer use it in their classrooms. The reasons for this are going to be analysed with the help of Figure 19.

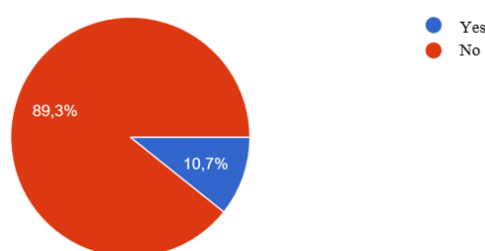


Figure 17. Question 9 “Do you use tandem learning in your classroom?”

Regarding the reasons why respondents use tandem learning, Figure 18 really shows a strong trend for three main purposes: to enable learners to communicate at a distance with native speakers of their own age (virtual tandem), to enable learners to meet native speakers of their own age (physical tandem) and finally to enrich learners’ knowledge of the culture of the foreign country. It therefore seems, taking these answers into account, that my fifth (“Tandem learning is motivating for learners as it provides them with a real-life situation”) and sixth (“Tandem learning provides learners with cultural knowledge”) hypotheses could be validated, since teachers choose to use this method to enable learners to talk with native speakers, which is a real-to-life situation, and make them learn about a foreign culture.

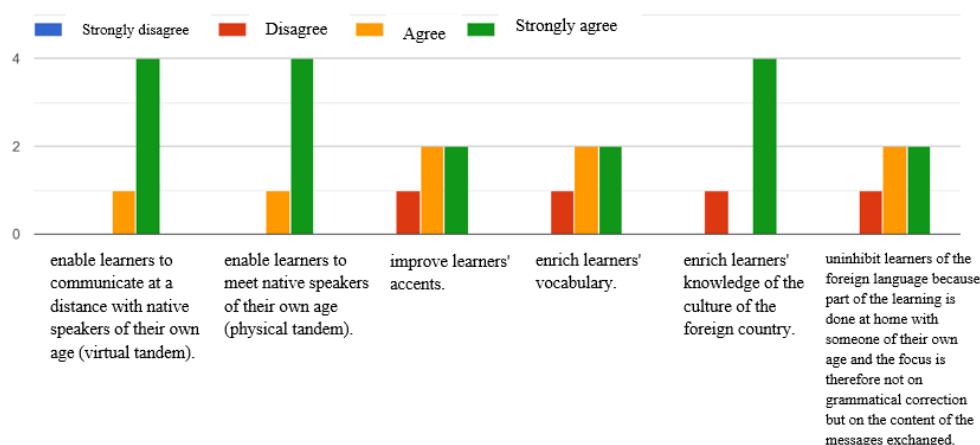


Figure 18. Question 10 “If yes, I use tandem learning to ...”

In order to be able to confirm or refute my eighth hypothesis (i.e., *Exchanging with native speakers can only be practised with learners having a higher level of language skills (from upper-secondary level onwards).*), I analysed the answers provided by the six respondents who answered “yes” to question 9 and who all strongly agree with the first two items from question 10. It appears that four out of those six respondents practise tandem learning with learners from the upper-secondary level onwards (one of them uses this method at university college level). The two remaining respondents practise it with learners from “promotion sociale” (namely “social advancement” in English) and from lower-secondary level (1A1 and 2A1). The outcome of my eighth hypothesis could therefore be that communication with native speakers is mostly practised with learners from upper-secondary level onwards but it is still possible for teachers to practise it with lower-level learners.

Figure 19 reveals the reasons why teachers do not use tandem learning in their classrooms. The majority of respondents agree that it is difficult to find native speakers to communicate with. Then, the other two main reasons are the difficulty to set up tandem learning and the difficulty to manage the exchanges which take place outside the classroom. It seems that teachers do not think it takes too much time but it is rather the implementation of this method that is problematic for them. This could therefore be related with the non-occurrence of tandem learning in framework and curricula, since teachers do not get any advice on how to implement and use this method in practice.

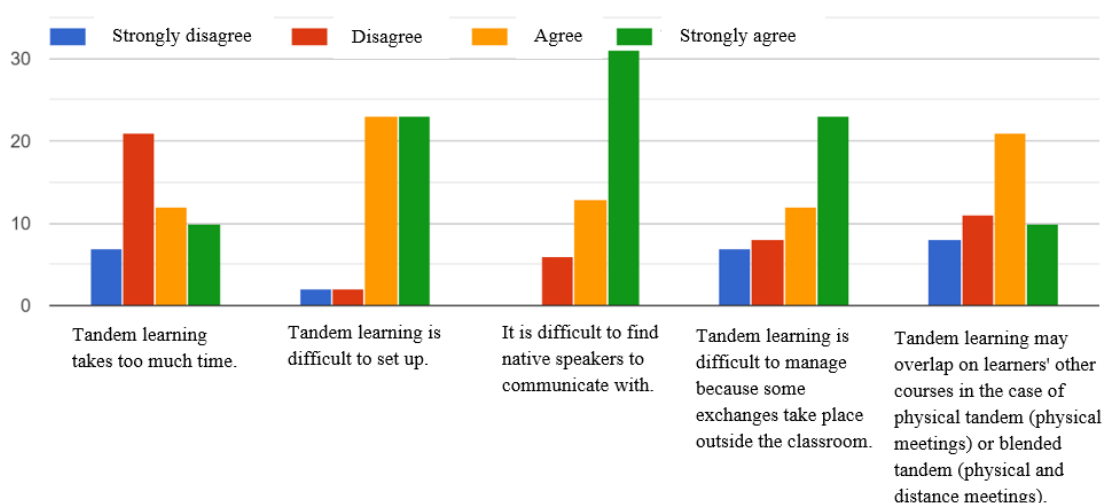


Figure 19. Question 11 “Why do you not use tandem learning in your classroom?”

The last question of this second part about tandem learning was dedicated to the frequency of use. Figure 20 shows that the vast majority of respondents never use tandem learning and think that learners do not use it either outside the classroom. An additional study

could be conducted in order to verify this with learners. With regard to the minority who choose to use this method in their classrooms, they mostly use it less than ten hours a year.

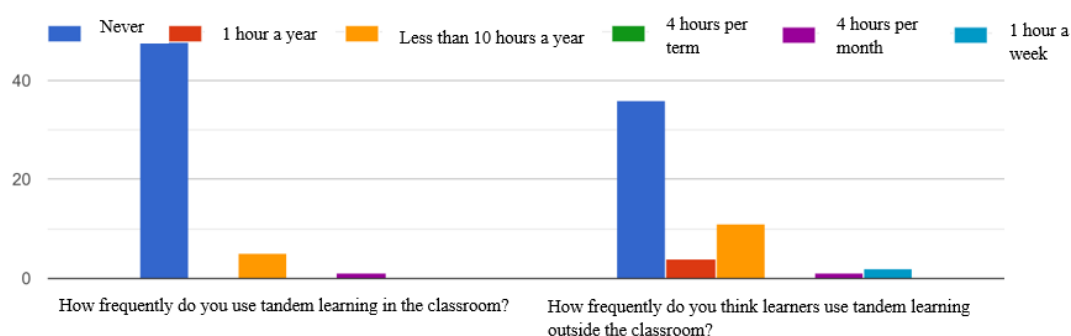


Figure 20. Question 12 “How frequently do you use tandem learning in the classroom? How frequently do you think learners use tandem learning outside the classroom?”

4.2.5.3 Part three: Videoconferencing platforms

This last part of the questionnaire was designed to evaluate how videoconferencing platforms are used in the language course. Figure 21 shows that the percentage of teachers who were using videoconferencing in their classrooms before the Covid-19 pandemic is very low.

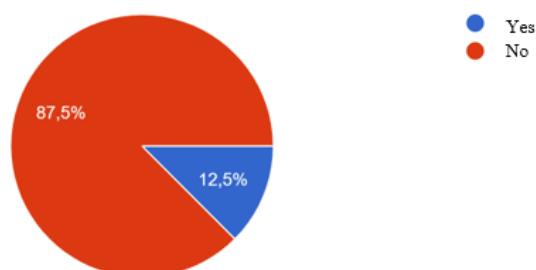


Figure 21. Question 13 “Were you using videoconferencing platforms as part of the language course before the Covid-19 pandemic?”

Figure 22 illustrates the various ways in which teachers used these videoconferencing platforms before Covid. Most answers agree on the use of these platforms to provide distance learning, especially for learners who cannot attend lessons at school, as mentioned by one of the respondents in a comment. Using videoconferencing platforms in order for learners to be able to communicate with other learners or native speakers is almost non-existent in this graph, except for one person who strongly agrees with the use of videoconferencing platforms to communicate with other learners who are not native speakers. This figure will be confronted with Figure 24 to assess whether there has been an improvement since the pandemic.

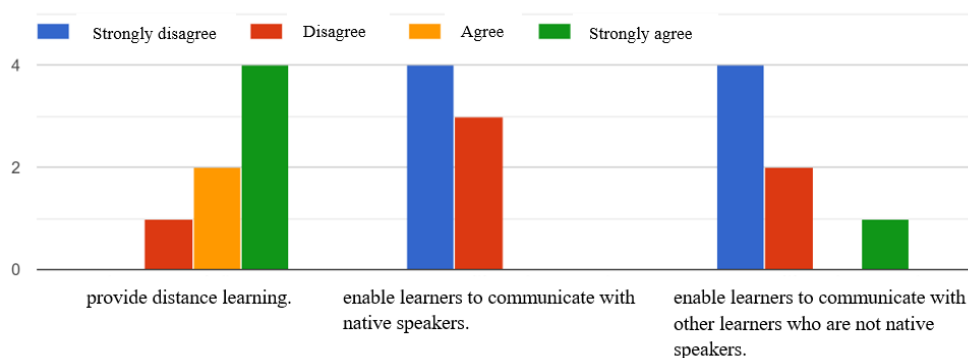


Figure 22. Question 14 “If yes, what use(s) did you make of these videoconferencing platforms? I used them to ...”

A big shift can be observed with Figure 23, since the majority of respondents have been using videoconferencing platforms since the Covid-19 pandemic.

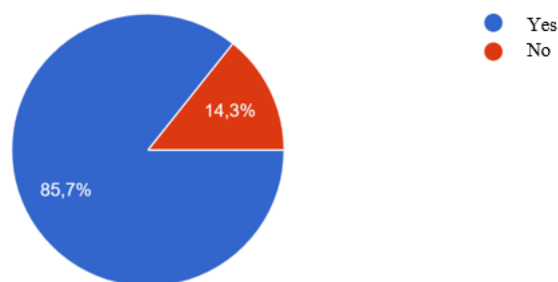


Figure 23. Question 15 “Do you use videoconferencing platforms in the language course since the Covid-19 crisis?”

As mentioned above, Figure 24 is interesting to evaluate whether teachers changed their ways of using these platforms since the pandemic. The major trend is still the use of videoconferencing platforms to provide distance learning but there is a slight increase for the other two items, namely “enable learners to communicate with native speakers” and “enable learners to communicate with other learners who are not native speakers”. Three respondents also added that they now use these platforms to practise learners’ individual oral skills and to answer specific questions that learners may have. It therefore seems that having been confronted with videoconferencing platforms during the pandemic has changed the way teachers use them by exploring other uses.

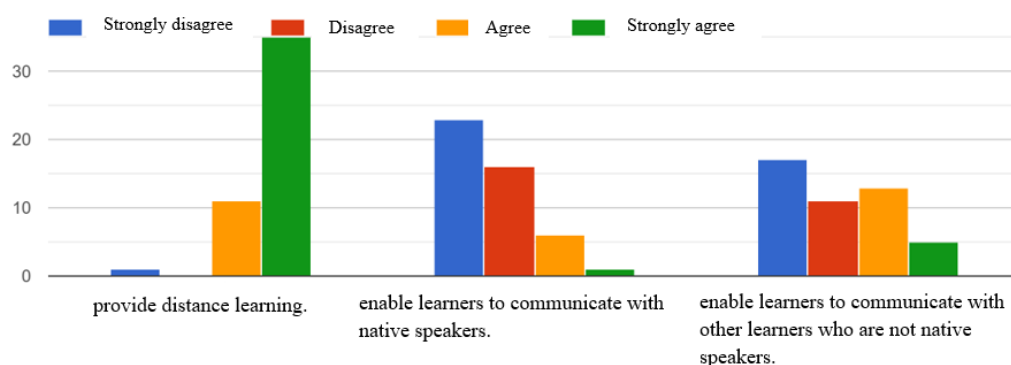


Figure 24. Question 16 “If yes, what do you use these videoconferencing platforms for? I use them to ...”

In order to understand why teachers chose not to use videoconferencing platforms in their language courses before the pandemic, Figure 25 shows two main reasons. The respondents mainly agree with the fourth item, which is “the attention of the learners is not the same as in a face-to-face lesson” and with the last item, namely “my usual course gives very good results without using these platforms”. Two respondents added that some learners do not have the necessary equipment or do not know how to use it and another respondent thinks that it is important to limit screen time for learners, since it could be harmful.

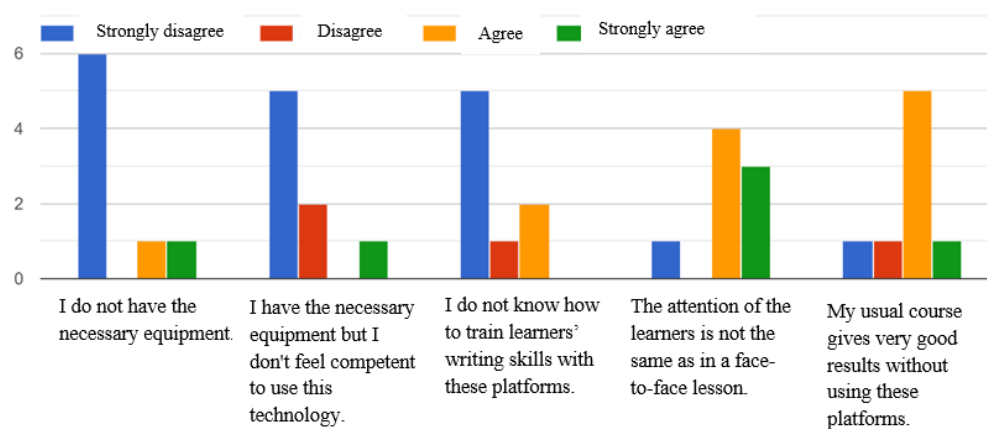


Figure 25. Question 17 “If not, why didn't you use videoconferencing platforms in your language courses before the Covid-19 crisis?”

The two main observations to be derived from Figure 26 are that most respondents disagree or strongly disagree with the first item “using videoconferencing platforms is a waste of time” and agree with the fourth item “the use of videoconferencing platforms allows learners to learn about native speakers’ culture”. The majority of respondents therefore seems to have a good opinion of these platforms, since they provide a real benefit for learners, which is to learn about a foreign culture. There is still a large number of respondents who think that the use of videoconferencing platforms is difficult to set up because of the potentially bad internet

connection, the need to master new technologies and learners who are not motivated when lessons take place via the Internet.

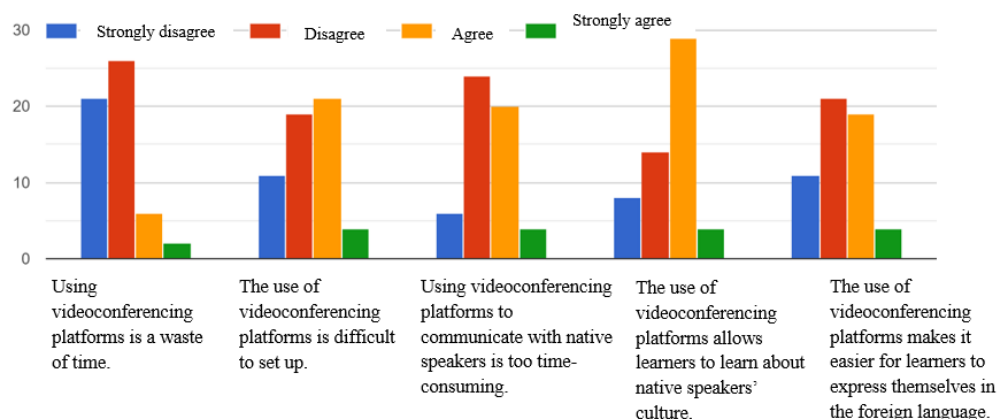


Figure 26. Question 18 “To what extent do you agree with the following statements?”

Figures 27 and 28 illustrate the evolution of the use of videoconferencing platforms before and since the Covid-19 crisis. On the one hand, the results of Figure 27 are very clear, as they mean that nearly all respondents never used these platforms before the pandemic. On the other hand, Figure 28 shows more mixed views concerning the use of videoconferencing platforms to teach courses during the pandemic. The majority still never use these platforms to enable learners to communicate with native speakers.

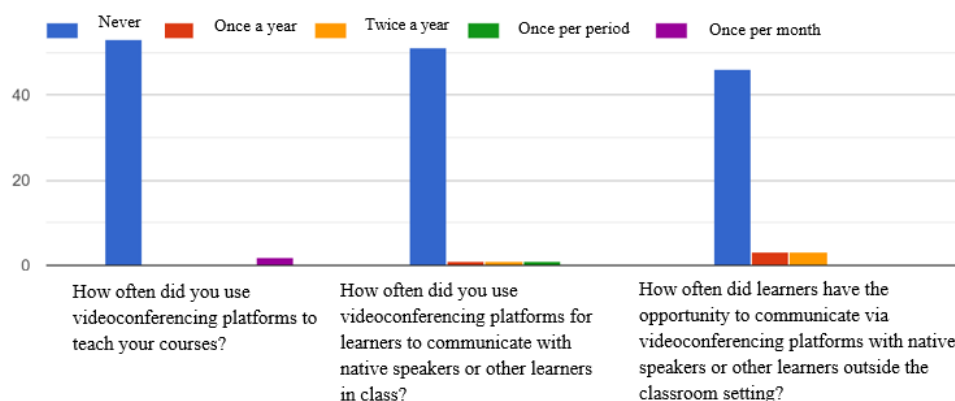


Figure 27. Question 20 “Select the propositions that suit you best: BEFORE the Covid-19 crisis.”

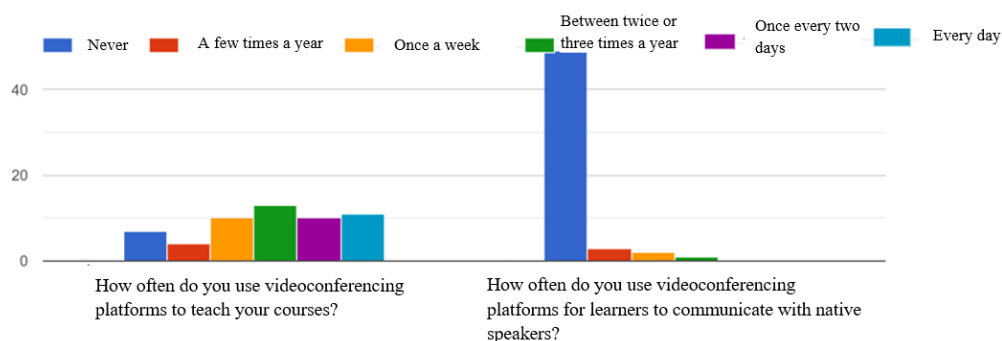


Figure 28. Question 21 “Select the propositions that suit you best: SINCE the Covid-19 crisis.”

Figure 29 illustrates some recurring problems which can be associated with videoconferencing platforms. Most respondents agree that the most frequent problems are that learners claim to have connection problems and claim not to have a built-in camera or to have camera problems. These are issues on which teachers have no control and which may be a barrier to the use of these platforms.

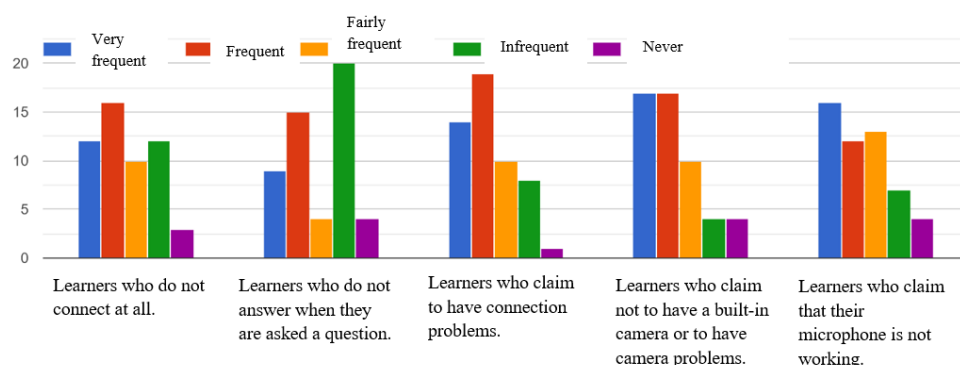


Figure 29. Question 22 “In order of frequency, which of these problems do you encounter most often?”

The last question of this third part of the questionnaire was intended to know what teachers will keep from these videoconferencing platforms in their future practice after the Covid-19 crisis. The majority of answers is quite negative, as teachers do not want to keep anything from these platforms, since they feel they need reality to be able to teach in a proper way. However, some answers are quite positive, especially concerning the ability to post everything online and have more contact with the learners. What is also mentioned several times in the answers is the possibility of working with learners individually on their oral skills in order for them to get a more precise feedback. Some respondents also refer to the possibility of posting more complex exercises for more advanced learners but also revision exercises for learners with difficulties.

4.2.6 Conclusion

To conclude the analysis of results, I will provide a summary of the answers collected with the help of the online survey in connection with the research hypotheses. With regard to my first hypothesis, which concerns learners' autonomy, only hypothesis 1a (i.e., *Free access works on the learners' autonomy*) can be validated, as nineteen out of 20 respondents who use free access in their classroom use it in order to develop the learners' autonomy, and agree or strongly agree with this item. Secondly, hypothesis 3a "free access enhances the learners' linguistic input" cannot be verified against respondents' answers, as these are quite contradictory given that nine people disagree and seven people agree. Then, my fourth hypothesis (i.e., *Tandem learning enhances the learners' linguistic output*) would need more answers to draw a conclusion, since only six respondents use this method in their classrooms. Four people agree or strongly agree and one person disagrees with the items "I use it to improve learners' accent" and "I use it to enrich learners' vocabulary". These results are therefore not conclusive enough to validate this fourth hypothesis. Next, as already mentioned in sub-section 4.2.5.2 with the analysis of Figure 18, my fifth ("Tandem learning is motivating for learners as it provides them with a real-life situation") and sixth ("Tandem learning provides learners with cultural knowledge") hypotheses could be validated, since the items with the highest number of answers are "I use it to enable learners to communicate at a distance with and/or meet native speakers of their own age" and "I use it to enrich learners' knowledge of the culture of the foreign country". Concerning my seventh hypothesis, namely "Teachers think they do not have time to move beyond the didactic sequences", 23 out of the 36 respondents who do not use free access in their classroom agree or strongly agree with the item "lack of time due to the amount of subject matter to be taught". Most respondents seem to feel they do not have enough time to practise free access in addition to the traditional course. Lastly, I have only six answers that could help me support my eighth and last hypothesis, which is "Exchanging with native speakers can only be practised with learners having a higher level of language skills (from upper-secondary level onwards)". This number of responses is insufficient to provide reliable evidence for this hypothesis. Only one person out of the six practises communication with native speakers with learners from the lower-secondary level. On the basis of these few answers, it could however be assumed that most teachers enable learners from the upper-secondary level onwards to communicate with native speakers. It would still be worthwhile to investigate this further with the help of another study.

4.3 Limitations of the study

The main limitation of my research is the sample size. Indeed, 20 out of 56 respondents use free access in their classroom and only 6 of them use tandem learning. This sample therefore does not always allow the hypotheses to be validated in a totally reliable and realistic manner. Next to this, as mentioned in sub-section 4.2.2, the questionnaire was sent to internship supervisors who for the most part work in the Province of Liège and who are therefore in contact with the University of Liège. Consequently, the sample may not be perceived as representative, since it mainly focuses on one and the same region (Liège) and some methods may be known to these teachers as they have recurrent contacts with the university.

Moreover, a study among learners could also be conducted in order to compare their answers with those of the teachers.

Another limitation may lie in my inability to observe free access and tandem learning in practice due to the Covid restrictions. This practical experience would have a real added value for a further study.

Lastly, tackling and observing an intermediate solution, such as Freinet pedagogy for free access, could also complement this study and be a source of additional suggestions.

5. Final suggestions for teaching

The free access and tandem learning survey which was carried out with teachers from Belgium concluded that these methods are not well known and mastered by them. This section therefore aims to give guidelines to teachers who are willing to practise these methods with their learners. In order to create a comprehensive list of suggestions for teaching, I have based my work on Beckers, Simons *et al.*'s publications on free access and tandem learning, but also on the practice of two people I interviewed, who are themselves experts in these methods. I interviewed a first person who has practised free access for many years, and another person who conducted numerous studies on tandem learning⁸⁵.

Various elements on the establishment of free access arise from Beckers, Simons *et al.*'s studies⁸⁶. Firstly, they advise to dedicate a part of the classroom only for this purpose. They also mention the importance of having the necessary material (e.g. computers) and enough worksheets. According to their study, the role of the teacher should be determined: the teacher can be non-interventionist, a controller of the organisation, an unsolicited helper or even an interventionist, depending on the autonomy that is given to learners. Ideally, markers should be installed as a first step and then removed as time goes by. Next to the teacher, logbooks also have an important role to play in free access. These logbooks are indeed a dialogue tool between teachers and learners. They are presented for example in the form of a table with several pieces of information such as the targeted skill (reading, listening, etc.), the subject of the text, the objective, the type of task, the level of difficulty, the language to be used in answering questions and a space for possible remarks. They enable teachers to have a view on learners' progress and can become a way of assessing learners' learning if the teacher decides to do so. In this instance, teachers have the possibility to collect learners' logbooks to control and assess their learning formatively, since certifying assessments are not recommended by the authors of this study. The role of formative assessment is meant for teachers to identify what learners are able to do and what they are not able to do and remedy this as quickly as possible⁸⁷. Another important

⁸⁵ See Appendices B and C for the transcriptions of these interviews.

⁸⁶ Beckers, J., Simons, G. *et al.* (2005). L'accès-libre : une reconfiguration efficace du métier de l'élève et de l'enseignant ? Observation et analyse des conditions d'efficacité : rapport intermédiaire de la première année de recherche. Université de Liège, Faculté de Psychologie et des Sciences de l'Education, Service de Didactique Professionnelle et de Formation des Enseignants.

Beckers, J., Simons, G. *et al.* (2006). L'accès-libre : une reconfiguration efficace du métier de l'élève et de l'enseignant ? Observation et analyse des conditions d'efficacité : rapport final de la deuxième année de recherche. Université de Liège, Faculté de Psychologie et des Sciences de l'Education, Service de Didactique Professionnelle et de Formation des Enseignants.

⁸⁷ This is therefore in line with the definition given by "Enseigner pour Wallonie-Bruxelles Enseignement" on page 12: "L'évaluation formative fait partie de l'apprentissage de manière continue. Elle a pour but de déceler, le

means to make free access effective is to integrate what is done during free access in the ordinary lesson (mentioned on page 34). Ways of integrating free access activities that are mentioned by Beckers, Simons *et al.* are: explicitly teach the strategies that will be used in free access, encourage learners to discover the themes that are tackled in free access and/or share learners' discoveries with the whole group afterwards, reflect with learners on the most common types of errors and how to correct them, get learners used to using the dictionary, and help them to reflect on what they have learnt and how to assess themselves in their logbooks.

The person I interviewed about free access also provided suggestions for the implementation of this method. It is first of all crucial for this person to teach learners to use the documents correctly. The beginning of the implementation should therefore be dedicated to this in order for learners to become totally autonomous thereafter. The sheets must be numbered, describe the context of the task and must be available in several copies. The exercises should be broken down into various levels of understanding (full understanding, key ideas or focused questions) and a specific file should be devoted to self-correction sheets. It is also important to renew the material to keep it up to date. This person also advises to create advice sheets on how to solve a problem or how to approach a listening or reading task. The creation of remediation modules is also recommended. These modules are offered by teachers to learners in difficulty and can be used to teach learners strategies through targeted exercises. With regard to frequency, the interviewee practised this method one hour every two weeks instead of the original once a week rhythm recommended by Beckers, Simons *et al.* This frequency of use is more sustainable in the long term according to this person. Another way of sustaining effectiveness over the long term is by setting objectives. The interviewee decided to establish a list of objectives for the reading and listening skills consisting of a minimum of five compulsory readings and five compulsory listening activities over the year. The idea is then to select a listening activity from the list that is given to learners as a test at the end of the year to reward learners' work. Lastly, new technologies allow teachers to digitise resources in order for learners to be able to practise free access at home.

What emerges from Beckers, Simons *et al.*'s study on tandem learning⁸⁸ is firstly a pattern consisting of four main steps to be followed. The first step involves the presentation of

plus vite possible, ce que l'élève est capable de faire ou non, de remédier à ces difficultés et de lui indiquer les moyens de progresser."

⁸⁸ Simons, G. *et al.* (2006). *L'apprentissage en tandem : apprendre une langue étrangère de et avec l'autre*. [CD-Rom]. Administration Générale de l'Enseignement et de la Recherche scientifique, Service général des Affaires pédagogiques et du Pilotage du réseau d'enseignement organisé par la Communauté française.

learners. This would be, at first, a group presentation in the form of a poster presenting learners' country, city, school; and then an individual presentation through personal cards. The information that would be exchanged would therefore be used to create tandem pairs. In a second step, virtual exchanges could start with an initial presentation of how exchanges have to take place (guided by teachers), followed by comprehension activities about learners' personal and foreign culture, and lastly the preparation of the face-to-face tandem which will take place both in the foreign country and in the country of origin. The third step will then be dedicated to face-to-face tandem sessions, including the reception of pen pals and the presentation of the school and a tour of the city (with or without street interviews). The fourth and final step is devoted to debriefings. For tandem exchanges to work well and be more fluid, it is therefore crucial to form tandem pairs based on their personal cards. The fifty-fifty rule (already mentioned in sub-section 3.5.2.2) also needs to be followed in order for learners to be confronted with as much input as possible. Finally, Beckers, Simons *et al.* tackle the subject of evaluation and/or control of tandem learning. They advise three ways for teachers to be able to assess what has been done during tandem exchanges. These three ways of doing would be to collect all learners' written exchanges in a file, ask learners to send everything to teachers, or even create a common mailbox where all exchanges are gathered. It is up to teachers to decide whether or not to grade these exchanges.

Next to Beckers, Simons *et al.*'s suggestions, the interviewee for tandem learning also highlighted important elements to take into account when establishing this method in language teaching. A crucial step would be to express the objectives to the learners from the beginning in order to build their confidence and tell them what is expected of them. Then, in order for tandem learning to work on learners' autonomy, it is essential for learners to be able to choose their partners by themselves based on the information they received from the personal cards. This will enable learners to feel more involved in the task but also more autonomous. The teachers' role is therefore to leave room for learners' autonomy while guiding them, when necessary, for instance when setting up this method so that everything can go smoothly thereafter. The interviewee also mentioned a solution for teachers who struggle to find a school to collaborate with. Indeed, the European Union and some embassies provide lists of schools who want to work with foreign countries. These lists are not limited to tandem learning but can be an aid for teachers. Lastly, using videoconferencing platforms as a means for tandem learning is also advised by the interviewee. It can also allow teachers to find other teachers to

work with, since they have the possibility to enter their mother tongue and a foreign language they want to learn on HelloTalk⁸⁹ for example.

⁸⁹ The interviewee uses HelloTalk as a mode of communication for tandem learning.

6. Conclusion

The use of free access and tandem learning in foreign language teaching, whether via videoconferencing platforms or not, possesses several advantages. These methods are indeed very meaningful from the fourth year of secondary school onwards, since the focus is put on learners' autonomy.

This dissertation has shown, through eight research hypotheses, how free access and tandem learning are considered and used in the field of language teaching in Belgium. What was discovered from the analysis of the curricula and framework is the rarity of the occurrence of free access and the total non-occurrence of tandem learning. The lack of knowledge and use of these methods was then confirmed by the results of the online questionnaire which was sent to Belgian teachers, since only a minority of respondents use and know about free access and tandem learning. A possible link could therefore be established between the low occurrence of these terms in Belgian curricula and the low use that teachers make of it. With regard to videoconferencing platforms, what emerges from the interviews conducted is that both interviewees use new technologies to practise free access and tandem learning. Free access has evolved from using files in the classroom to posting resources on online classrooms, and tandem learning now offers the opportunity to discuss with tandem partners in a real-life environment via videoconferencing platforms. These methods are therefore no longer limited to the classroom setting, which probably makes it more real for learners and allows them to work even more on their autonomy.

As a conclusion, teachers need to be able to learn how to use these methods properly so that they no longer see free access and tandem learning as a waste of time and difficult to implement. They indeed require an investment of time at the beginning but this time should be rewarded afterwards, as learners will have learnt to become independent. These methods are alternative ways of organising the classroom and activities and should therefore be considered as beneficial complements to “ordinary” lessons.

Further research could provide a better understanding of free access and tandem learning. A specific study among teachers and learners who worked or are still working with these methods could bring real added value to this master's thesis. Being in contact with the authors of Belgian frameworks and curricula could also help us to understand the non-occurrence or low occurrence of these two methods.

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