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TESIS

**THE USE OF TELETANDEM TO REDUCE LINGUISTIC
INSECURITY AND IMPROVE SPEAKING SKILLS**

**Para obtener el título de
Enseñanza en la Lengua Inglesa**

PRESENTA

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ABSTRACT

The present study explores the impact of Teletandem on the reduction of linguistic insecurity and the improvement of speaking skills among students of the B.A. in Social Work at the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo. While English is the most widely spoken language in the world, many learners find speaking to be the most challenging skill, often experiencing a high affective filter and linguistic insecurity when engaging in real-time communication. This research proposes that Teletandem, as a virtual, autonomous, and collaborative environment, can provide learners with the necessary practice to develop their language skills through direct interaction and feedback from a partner who is a native speaker of the target language.

A qualitative case study was conducted, involving four female participants with a B1 proficiency level. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify the triggers of linguistic insecurity. The findings revealed that students experience linguistic insecurity primarily due to a fear of mispronunciation, instances of miscommunication, and a perceived lack of knowledge concerning the topics of discussion. However, the results suggest that through this learning mode, learners improve their oral proficiency—specifically vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and fluency. The study concludes that Teletandem offers a strategic complement to formal instruction, allowing learners to take responsibility for their own learning and improve their language skills in an authentic communicative setting.

Keywords: Teletandem, linguistic insecurity, speaking skills, affective filter, communication.

INTRODUCTION

It is widely acknowledged that learning a foreign language can become demanding due to the lack of consistent situations for students to practice the language for real communication purposes outside the classroom (Hernández, Hidalgo & Espinosa, 2018). Because of this, there is a need for further innovations in foreign language learning in order to encourage learners to improve their language skills in a foreign language, especially the one they find most challenging, speaking and to dispel the linguistic insecurity they face. Hence, new technologies have been developed to facilitate this process, allowing language learners from all over the world to interact with each other. Teletandem is an instance of these new technologies, it is a form of telecollaboration, a virtual and collaborative learning environment in which two students help each other to learn their own language (Telles, 2015).

Speaking involves interacting and exchanging communication to share ideas or feelings and reach common ground. Without a doubt, language learners find themselves in situations where they must discuss, share or debate a topic or issue in order to gain a better understanding of it and act according to what has been discussed and agreed upon. Speaking necessarily involves listening and maintaining an attentive and receptive attitude. In short, oral expression consists of listening to and speaking integrated language; for instance, being attentive and receptive to all the signs that help to interpret the message, and emitting all kinds of signs that enhance its communicative richness.

Linguistic insecurity and Teletandem are two concepts that have been studied in depth separately; however, I propose to bridge this gap by bringing them together to improve speaking. Therefore, I aim to discuss the difficulties that Social Work undergraduate

students face when speaking such as the fear of mispronunciation, miscommunication, and lack of knowledge of the topic, and I suggest that Teletandem can reduce this linguistic insecurity.

I propose to frame this study within Krashsen's (1985) Affective Filter hypothesis. This theory suggests that emotions such as anxiety can be reduced or increased during language learning. Learners can perform better when the tension created, as a result of being exposed to the authentic use of the language, is reduced through the Teletandem exchange. Therefore, the following research question is set:

- *To what extent does Teletandem reduce Social Work students' linguistic insecurity to gain confidence and develop their speaking skills?*

In order to answer this research question, a constructivist worldview was adopted as I conducted a qualitative case study design, since the data was collected through semi-structured interviews, with eight Social Work students of the UAEH.

This thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 describes the introduction of the research project. Chapter 2 provides a review of Linguistic Insecurity and Teletandem, focusing on defining these terms and the previous studies that inform my own research. In Chapter 3, after this literature review, I describe the methodology used in this study namely the worldview, approach and design, the setting and participants. Chapter 4 discusses the results along with a discussion of them. Finally, Chapter 5 summarizes the results of my research and I discuss the implications of the study.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a comprehensive description of the theoretical framework that supports this study. Some concepts are central to this study; therefore, this chapter explains how new learning modes like Teletandem have been implemented to facilitate students' learning process, allowing language learners from all over the world to interact with each other. Other concepts such as linguistic insecurity, linguistic anxiety, and the Affective Filter hypothesis are addressed in order to fill a gap in the current literature, as there is limited qualitative research exploring how they converge to affect students' speaking performance in virtual exchange contexts such as Teletandem. Drawing on these perspectives, I propose to offer a more complete understanding of the emotional and social challenges learners face when speaking a foreign language. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of examining key factors in foreign language pedagogy, underscoring the need for increased pedagogical attention to issues of linguistic insecurity among students.

2.2 Teletandem

Teletandem, is a form of telecollaboration, a virtual, collaborative and autonomous language learning environment in which two students help each other learn their own language (Telles, 2015). According to Bower and Kawaguchi (2011), Teletandem, also known as Telecollaboration or eTandem, enables learners to practice real-time communication online with native speakers of their target language, allowing learners to engage in authentic, reciprocal, intercultural communication to negotiate meaning and receive timely feedback, and to take control and responsibility for their own learning. By using text, voice, and webcam images, learners create a virtual space where, under the supervision of a teacher depending on the modality that is being implemented, the participants decide on the pace and content of their target language learning. However some authors make a distinction between Teletandem and eTandem.

Through Teletandem, learners engage in a flexible, mobile setting designed for real-time language practice, and it promotes an intercultural exchange. Interlingual and intercultural communication have become valuable in an increasingly interconnected world. This considerable asset has manifested itself diversely across several fields, including education (Topal, 2024).

The term “Tandem” was first used in 1968 when it was applied to a French-German youth exchange program to learn from each other’s language. Then, in 1973, inspired by the French-German projects, the model was applied by Liebe-Harkort and Cimilly in the German-Turkish area for work with immigrants in Munich. In 1979, inspired by an article by Liebe-Harkort, Jürgen Wolff organized individual Spanish-German tandem partnerships in Madrid. This event laid the foundation for the establishment of the TANDEM® Network in 1983, where language schools in 16 countries (Austria, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Great Britain, Portugal,

Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Peru, Spain, and Switzerland) offered language courses with a Tandem language learning component (Hernández, 2016; Wolff, 2023).

In 1994, TANDEM® Fundazioa was founded by Jürgen Wolff, to improve academic cooperation and ongoing teacher training (Wolff, 2023). This initiative was supported by 23 member schools forming Tandem International, which continues to offer Tandem experiences to language students (Hernández, 2018). In the same year, Brammerts created the International Email Tandem Network with the participation of 11 European universities. This later evolved into the International Tandem Network, comprising 12 universities located in Denmark, Germany, Portugal, Spain, France, Great Britain, Ireland, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Italy (Hernández, 2018). In 2003, most of the schools from the TANDEM® Network established the TANDEM International association, headquartered in Frankfurt, Germany, focusing on marketing and promoting language courses (Wolff, 2023).

As discussed above, there is a long tradition of research in different countries, with Brazil standing out as one of the most significant contexts. This is particularly evident through the thematic project *Teletandem Brazil: Foreign Languages for All*, funded by FAPESP in 2006, which generated extensive academic production, including dissertations, theses, and journal articles. This project established Teletandem as a virtual, autonomous, and collaborative environment for foreign language learning (Telles, 2009; Telles & Vassallo, 2006, 2009; Vassallo & Telles, 2006). Furthermore, the project promoted “virtual synchronous intercultural contact between Brazilian students who are learning a foreign language and learners of Portuguese abroad, so that they can help each other with practicing and improving their proficiency” (Aranha & Rampazzo, 2022, p. 236).

According to Hernández (2018), both public and private educational institutions have integrated tandem language learning as a strategic complement to formal curricula.

This pedagogical approach facilitates the acquisition of linguistic competence by combining structured instruction with the immediate feedback inherent in direct interaction with native speakers. Consequently, this situation has created interest for the development of international institutional networks and digital platforms, specifically designed to provide learners with authentic communicative contexts and exposure to native-like linguistic models (Hernández, 2018). Therefore, Teletandem is a highly effective option for second language acquisition, as students report that these practices engender feelings of security and confidence when interacting with native speakers.

Teletandem is characterized by principles of autonomy, reciprocal exchange, and the avoidance of language mixing, and was adapted for virtual environments (Telles, 2014). This adaptation is crucial as it allows Teletandem to transcend geographical and temporal limitations, making language learning more accessible.

The three theoretical principles of Teletandem are defined as follows (Vassallo and Telles, 2006):

- Language separation (avoiding language mixing): Each Teletandem interaction consists of two parts, with each part devoted to practising a single language to avoid language mixing and ensure focused practice.
- Autonomy: Each participant has the capacity to determine how they wish to engage in the learning process. This autonomy encompasses decision-making regarding the time, place, method, and duration of learning, as well as the evaluation of their own progress.
- Reciprocity: Participants are required to alternate in assuming the roles of foreign language learner and expert in their native language (or language of competence). This is a fundamental aspect of the exchange, wherein both participants derive equal benefit, ensuring a balanced exchange of knowledge.

These principles ensure that every synchronous exchange, whether in written or oral form, is structured into two distinct phases. This setup requires participants to alternate their roles, acting successively as both language learners and expert mentors (Cavalari & Aranha, 2016; Tang, Qian, Wang, & Hu, 2021, as cited in Satar, Aranha, Cavalari, & Almijawl, 2024). While these principles provide a clear framework for successful exchanges, their practical application in higher education may face structural challenges.

Using qualitative research, O'Dowd (2013) studied seven practitioners from various European cities with prior experience in Teletandem. Through interviews and extracts from the online exchanges, the author aimed to identify the institutional barriers practitioners encounter when organizing online intercultural communication, and then identify the strategies they use to overcome these barriers; thus, he identified five factors that are significant for the integration of Teletandem in university, and stated that:

These factors demonstrate that an understanding of blended telecollaborative exchanges should not be reduced merely to the successful integration of online and classroom activities. Instead, blended telecollaborative learning needs to involve a blend of online intercultural exchange as a whole and other aspects of institutional activity such as international and educational policies. (O'Dowd, 2013, p. 53)

In Mexico, Teletandem has been researched by Hernández (2018) who conducted qualitative research through interviews and learning portfolios with five students of the B.A in English Language Teaching (ELT) at the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo (UAEH). The author examined the effect of language learning in Teletandem with native speakers through simultaneous oral CMC (Computer-Mediated Communication) on the improvement of English speaking proficiency of Mexican

students. This study suggested that learners improve their oral proficiency, such as vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and fluency. In addition, the author mentioned that learners used compensatory strategies, such as asking for clarification, to overcome communication difficulties. Not only is there formal and corrective feedback on the linguistic aspects that each partner wishes to study or work on, but also through learning partnerships, learners will improve their language skills.

By using a qualitative research, Hernández, Hidalgo and Espinosa (2018) found through a survey that nine students of the B.A in ELT at the UAEH, by means of this type of learning improved their speaking skills and learned cultural aspects of their peers on the other side of the screen, Therefore, the authors explored how Teletandem helps students to learn more about the language in order for both learners to benefit from the exchange. In addition, learners take responsibility for their own learning by defining and communicating what and when they want to learn.

These studies show that Teletandem offers learners the opportunity to be carried out in different ways, along with the option of learning and practicing the target language with native speakers in their own country.

2.2.1 Advantages

Teletandem offers significant advantages for language learning. Hernández, Hidalgo, and Espinosa (2022) through qualitative research with eight students who are pre-service English teachers of the B.A in ELT at the UAEH, using semi-structured interviews, found that the exchange provided opportunities to practice their speaking skills and improve their performance.

Furthermore, Teletandem can foster a proactive role in the learning process, enabling students to determine what they want to learn and how they want to do so. This suggests that Teletandem exchanges may raise students' awareness of their

communicative competence. This approach is consistent with the principle of autonomy, which allows learners to control the pace, content, and timing of their interactions.

In their study on the integration of eTandem in Higher Education, Pomino and Gil-Salom (2016) documented the experience of the pilot project between a group of 12 German learners and a group of 20 Spanish learners. The project was designed to promote action-oriented and autonomous learning, effective communication skills, and intercultural exchange. The findings indicated that participants highly valued the opportunity to interact with native speakers. The authors observed that “students developed more confidence in their speaking skills and worry less about making mistakes when they speak” (Pomino & Gil-Salom, 2016, p. 672). Therefore, this increase in confidence and reduction in fear of making mistakes is significant, as students attributed this change to their ability to take full advantage of the opportunity to improve their academic speaking skills.

In addition, research on Telecollaboration has proven to increase motivation, linguistic output, accuracy, and fluency, as learners develop intercultural communicative competence and awareness of cultural differences (Helm, 2015). This type of interaction enhances authentic communication with native speakers through Synchronous Computer-Mediated Communication tools (SCMC), allowing learners to practice real-time conversations across distance (Bower & Kawaguchi, 2011). According to Hernández et al. (2018) eTandem participants reported improvement in vocabulary, fluency, and grammar after interacting with their partner.

The results reveal that students identify two main benefits of this type of learning namely, improving their speaking skills and learning about their partners' culture. They also highlight the importance of talking to a native speaker since they feel they can practice the language in a real context. (Hernández et al., 2018, p. 5)

The authors also noted that students' oral confidence increased as speaking with a native partner helped them correct pronunciation errors and feel more confident. Furthermore, the students acknowledged that some words and expressions learned during the exchange had become part of their own language repertoire.

Tian and Wang (2010) conducted a study on learners' perspectives of eTandem learning via Skype with fifteen Chinese learners of English and fifteen Australian learners of Chinese in terms of their improvements in language proficiency and intercultural understanding. The study concluded that synchronous oral CMC exchanges are highly effective for promoting overall language competence. The participants agreed that the online exchange through CMC with their peers significantly increased their confidence in speaking, and led to improvement in their pronunciation, intonation, and fluency in the target language.

In addition, Hernández's (2018) study of the factors contributing to learners' improvement in speaking competence found that practicing the language with a native speaker and receiving feedback from their partners were key, and that the oral exchange with native speakers helped learners improve their discourse competence. In the same study, Hernández (2018) observed that participants expanded their vocabulary and informal expressions, and gained awareness of cultural differences, benefiting linguistically in ways that were not addressed in their English language classroom.

Furthermore, Lee's (2007) study on a classroom project using one-to-one desktop videoconferencing to enhance second language oral communication, also concluded that this approach is effective in developing speaking skills. Although her study did not involve Teletandem reciprocal language exchange, it demonstrated that interaction with expert speakers provided learners with exposure to authentic language, thereby enhancing communicative skills through audio and visual interaction. Participants

largely agreed that these exchanges were an effective medium for authentic language exposure in a way that is not possible in the language classroom. In this regard, Silva and Scarlota (2021) argued that:

Interacting with native speakers does not guarantee EFL students will improve their English, but it does encourage the use of English in ways that are not accessible in the traditional classroom. There is no one-size-fits-all formula for teaching a second language and teachers are constantly searching for innovative ways to connect to students (para. 24).

In this sense, being exposed to authentic input from an expert speaker from a different cultural background was an effective method in a way that is not possible in the language classroom, as the communication required spontaneous and quick responses in real time (Lee, 2007). However, these interactions do not automatically lead to an overall improvement in language skills. Their effectiveness depends on how they are structured and implemented with clear pedagogical intentions.

These studies show that Teletandem offers many benefits to language learning since students practice the language with a native or proficient speaker and as a result, they improve their language skills and reduce their anxiety, which contributes to building their confidence.

2.2.2 Limitations

Despite the numerous advantages of Teletandem having been addressed, it is also essential to consider the limitations and challenges associated with this type of interactive communication. Telles (2015) conducted a qualitative study of the Teletandem interaction between two university students, one from Brazil and one from

the United States. Through observations of their linguistic performance, the author explored how students express and negotiate their national identity during intercultural exchanges. The study found that while Teletandem provided a context for students to share their national identities, often by marking and discussing differences between their countries, it can also reinforce stereotypes. The author argues that when the conversation turns to sensitive historical or social topics, they can touch upon what he calls “national wounds”. He stated that:

Every nation has its “national wound(s)”, which are frequently connected to feelings of shame, guilt, or revolt on the part of its peoples. Discussing such themes is like putting one’s finger in the other’s wound, and it poses challenges to transcultural communication, particularly at times when its costs become ever-increasingly lower due to the development of new technologies. (Telles, 2015, p. 25)

Therefore, the ways of using Teletandem for transcultural and transcontinental communication must include, among other aspects, an awareness of the power issues and the performative processes of identities (Telles, 2015). These are aspects that, if not handled carefully, can reinforce stereotypes when students tell and share their stories with their peers abroad. This is consistent with O'Dowd's (2013) findings, who noted that without the right framework, teletandem sessions risk reinforcing cultural prejudices instead of promoting genuine intercultural exchange. In this regard, Telles emphasises the importance of the teacher as a mediator in order to make the conversation more constructive and critical in relation to the context and cultural differences.

Additionally, technical limitations such as poor internet connectivity and scheduling difficulties across time zones frequently disrupt the learning process (Hernández et al.,

2018). These findings suggest that Teletandem's effectiveness depends on careful implementation and support mechanisms.

Another limitation mentioned by Telles (2015) is that some students did not enjoy their Teletandem partner, in some cases, they even considered changing them. This was partly due to limitations in the oral proficiency in the foreign language of some of the partners, and the under or over preparation for the session, this also affected the reciprocity principle and the general experience.

Furthermore, Helm (2015) who studied the practices and challenges of telecollaboration faced by teachers and students in higher education in Europe, utilized a quantitative survey approach, with a small amount of qualitative data to summarize attitudes, practices, and perceived obstacles. The study involved 210 university language teachers from 23 European countries and 131 university students who had taken part in telecollaborative exchanges. Most educators reported positive attitudes towards telecollaboration; however, participants responses indicated that:

The greatest barrier perceived by experienced telecollaborators was time, whereas for those without experience, technology issues appeared to be the greatest concern. The other principle barriers considered by those with experience were a lack of recognition, technical as well as organizational issues. (Helm, 2015, p. 211)

The findings identified significant barriers to the exchanges. Participants reported challenges with time management, compounded by a lack of institutional interest and recognition. Technological issues, particularly concerning access, and organization also presented a significant obstacle. Moreover, Helm's (2015) study highlighted that the unconventional approach to assessment and the awarding of credits created a dual

challenge; teachers found it difficult to measure student performance effectively, while students reported the evaluation criteria confusing.

The study provides insight into the main limitations and obstacles, such as organizational issues, time constraints, the lack of institutional recognition, and insufficient technical support, and how these influence exchanges to obtain favourable results in the performance of learners. In order to achieve the expected results, a dedicated and strategic framework for planning and support is required. Furthermore, better institutional support and clearer assessment frameworks are also necessary.

Notwithstanding the limitations previously referenced, Teletandem has been demonstrated to facilitate the acquisition of a second language in a conducive, flexible, and secure environment, thereby fostering the development of linguistic proficiency, confidence, and intercultural comprehension.

So far I have discussed Teletandem and its advantages and limitations, now I turn to discuss the Affective Filter hypothesis to later introduce linguistic anxiety, which become central to this study in order to show how they can be interwoven with Teletandem.

2.3. Affective Filter

Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter hypothesis emphasizes that learners' emotional states play an important role in Second Language Acquisition (SLA), significantly influencing their success in language learning. The challenges students face, such as fear of mispronunciation and miscommunication, are explained by the Affective Filter hypothesis, which identifies emotional states as potential obstacles in SLA. Therefore, students who suffer from linguistic insecurity can be unable to speak fluently even if they technically know a grammar rule or a word.

Krashen mentioned four main factors that can influence SLA: motivation, attitude, self-confidence, and anxiety. In this study; however, I focus on this last one since it has been proven that it can trigger students' performance. That is, a positive filter reduces anxiety and a negative filter increases it.

Gardner and MacIntyre (1993) defined "Language Anxiety" as "the apprehension experienced by the individual in the language class or any situation in which the language is used" (p. 183). This means that there are correlations between anxiety and performance in the L2 because high levels of anxiety can interfere with students' ability to process information, often leading them to avoid speaking and make them feel less confident in communicative situations.

Gardner and MacIntyre (1993) studied the measurement of affective variables in Second Language Learning through a quantitative study using a multimethod analysis and factor analysis to examine the attitude and motivation of 92 students enrolled in two introductory French courses at the University of Western Ontario in Canada. The authors highlight the critical role of "Language Anxiety" as an affective variable in language acquisition, negatively related to the self-ratings of proficiency, how students perceive their proficiency in the second language rather than the objective measures, indicating concerns about perceived inadequacy.

Additionally, Mehak, Kamran and Tanveer (2025) through a mixed-methods approach explored the correlation between presence and absence of Krashen's Theory on learner's input and affective filters. These studies were conducted in diverse educational environments, including language centers, universities, and public secondary schools across different countries. The participants varied including B2 English learners in Pakistan, Iranian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students at a university, university students of French, and Thai EFL secondary school teachers. The authors mentioned that emotional factors such as anxiety can block a learner's

ability to process comprehensible language input, slowing their acquisition process. On the contrary, “according to the filter, relaxed, confident, and determined language learners are more likely to succeed in language learning because they can obtain input more effectively” (Mehak et al., 2025). For this reason, teaching methods that incorporate Krashen’s principles, focusing on comprehensible input in a low-stress environment tend to enhance learner motivation and lower anxiety. When teachers create a positive and supportive classroom environment, students are more likely to feel comfortable taking risks, experimenting with the language, and expressing themselves without fear of judgement (Mehak et al., 2025).

As stated before by Gardner and MacIntyre (1993), “Language Anxiety” has a negative impact on language proficiency and academic performance. This is because students often feel apprehension, nervousness, tension, and worry in relation to language use, which leads to discomfort or anxiety, which in turn negatively affects their overall language learning process, particularly concerning their listening and speaking skills.

Because of these challenges, and the paramount importance of applying effective language learning strategies, the aim of this research is to analyze how Teletandem could lead learners to reduce their Linguistic Insecurity and improve their speaking skills. I now discuss linguistic anxiety.

2.3 Linguistic Insecurity (LI)

For most language learners, becoming communicatively competent in the classroom has become a challenge, this is due to the fact that they often face some Linguistic Insecurities. As revealed by Kanwal and Aftab (2021), humans are social beings who cannot live alone and need language to communicate with others. As the world progresses, learning a language is no longer enough to live and share with the rest of

the world. As a result, the number of people speaking and learning English is increasing, mostly as a second language. "Due to the demand of English every country is paying a lot of attention towards ESL learning" (Kanwal & Aftab, 2021, p. 37).

Trudgill (2003, as cited in Kanwal & Aftab, 2021) said that the unequal prestige of the different languages is creating linguistic insecurity among language speakers. Hence, learners face feelings of worry and negativity when learning and using a language that is not their mother tongue. Pineda (2022) defined Linguistic Insecurity as one of the most significant factors that prevents learners from performing orally their proficiency in the language, and for this reason, it is essential to consider the student's emotions in their learning process.

Baldaquí (2011), an author interested in the subject of Linguistic Insecurity, carried out a quantitative study through a questionnaire in the Valencian Community, Spain, with the aim of finding out in a wider context how the perception of LI is self-assessed, with the participation of students in the last two years of compulsory education, specifically in the 3rd and 4th grades, aged between fourteen and sixteen years old. Based on the questionnaire's answers, the author found out that it was evident that the perception of LI is self-assessed by speakers to determine their willingness to use the language. This variable is particularly relevant for young people who have only acquired the language through schooling and may not have attained enough proficiency to use it confidently.

Likewise, in order to measure linguistic insecurity, Daftari and Tavit (2017) adopted a convergent parallel design, gathering both qualitative and quantitative data through independent but synchronous means, the instruments used were two, an interview and a questionnaire. The participants of his study were upper-intermediate and advanced EFL learners ranging in age from 15 to 31 years, who were interviewed twice. Therefore, this process allowed the author to obtain an LI rating for each student and

to further segregate them into categories ranging from very low to very high levels of linguistic insecurity, and whether this had anything to do with the non-native English teachers' own linguistic insecurity and its impact on the learners' language skills. The study concluded that there is not a significant relationship between learners' speaking proficiency with non-native English teachers' linguistic insecurity. Whereas, Foo and Tan (2019) using a quantitative survey of 278 Singaporeans, examined whether English-speaking Singaporeans experience language insecurity and how this is related to lack of language proficiency. The results showed that Singaporeans are linguistically insecure, but this does not affect their language proficiency.

Pineda (2023) studied linguistic insecurity in six learners of English as a Second Language studying English at Universidad de Chile, in contrast to eight learners of Spanish as a Second Language studying Spanish at Stanford University. Through qualitative analysis, she conducted individual interviews to analyse their background, family, and knowledge of the target language, as well as the concepts that may influence their feelings of insecurity and anxiety when learning a second language. The author found out that Linguistic Insecurity is a sudden interruption in the learning process of a second language, or at least, a barrier to speaking output in real-life communicative scenarios, and it is imperative to consider it when teaching second languages. These findings also show that linguistic insecurity is not an isolated issue in Second Language Acquisition (SLA), but indeed a central impediment because it can affect students' learning.

Hashemi (2011) investigated the factors behind language anxiety in the classroom and in social contexts, employing qualitative research approaches that include semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The study found that "learners feel more anxious and under stress in the classroom environments that follow the traditional learning systems" (Hashemi, 2011, p.1813). Therefore, formal classroom

environments create pressure and discomfort for learners. The author also noted that learners were highly apprehensive about errors, revealing that students' fear of making mistakes is closely linked to their desire to maintain a positive image in front of their teachers and classmates (Hashemi, 2011).

Moreover, Hashemi (2011) acknowledged that in countries where exposure to the English language is limited, such as Iran, language learners encounter significant challenges in developing their communicative skills. This is a matter of concern for second language learners when they are required to speak.

It has been found that linguistic insecurity can have a significant impact on the ability to learn a foreign language. In their studies on language anxiety, many researchers have suggested a variety of strategies to cope with this multifaceted issue. The most common suggestion from learners is to make the language classroom environment less formal and more welcoming, where students can make mistakes without fear of appearing incompetent (Hashemi, 2011).

Therefore, the following research question is set:

- *To what extent does Teletandem enable students to gain confidence and develop their speaking skills?*

Although Linguistic Insecurity and Teletandem are often studied as separate concepts, their connection is relevant when considering the challenges faced by foreign language learners. Linguistic Insecurity is characterized by language learners expressing anxiety, apprehension, and nervousness when learning a new language (Hashemi, 2011). Teletandem; however, offers an alternative to conventional classroom interaction by encouraging a flexible, authentic, and low-pressure environment for language practice. Through structured one-on-one exchanges with peers from different

linguistic backgrounds, learners can gradually take communicative risks, negotiate meaning, and develop greater confidence in their speaking abilities.

This section has shown that Teletandem can act as an environment that reduces linguistic insecurity as it be the positive filter that enables students to reduce their anxiety when engaged in an exchange.

In the following chapter, I discuss the methodology used to conduct this research, the worldview, approach, and design are reviewed; in addition, the setting and participants are described. Finally, the instruments used to gather the data and the process are described.

3. METHODOLOGY CHAPTER

3.1 Overview

This chapter focuses on the overall design of the study which intends to analyze how Teletandem could lead learners to reduce their Linguistic Insecurity and improve their speaking skills. Therefore, the following research question was set: “To what extent does Teletandem enable students to reduce linguistic insecurity and develop their speaking skills?”.

This section outlines the worldview, methodology, and design employed in the study. It proceeds to detail the setting, research instruments, and provides a systematic explanation of the process followed for the data analysis. The chapter concludes with a summary of the conducted study.

3.2 Worldview, approach, design

Linguistic insecurity and Teletandem are two separate concepts that have been studied in depth; however, as stated in the introduction section, the relationship between them to improve speaking skills has yet to be studied as a whole. This research was carried out by adopting a constructivist worldview. As outlined by Creswell and Creswell (2014), “Social constructivists believe that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. Individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences” (p. 48). By interacting with native speakers, language learners can improve their speaking skills and exchange points of view.

3.2.1 Approach

This study adopted a qualitative approach because the purpose of the research was to describe and analyze Teletandem as a strategy to reduce the linguistic insecurity that students face, and how they improved their speaking skills as they interacted with a native speaker; likewise, it fulfills the aim of the research. Creswell and Creswell (2018) state that one factor of collecting data in this way is observing the behavior of the participants during their participation in activities. This means that qualitative research allows researchers to explore the subjective meanings that individuals attach to their experiences.

Also, qualitative research has an interpretive approach, and it is an observational method for data, which means that the aim is to understand reality in its real context and to interpret the facts according to the meanings given. This approach in the context of linguistic insecurity and Teletandem, the understanding of learners' subjective experiences, motivations, and perceptions is essential in order to comprehensively examine their effects on language learning and speaking skills improvement.

3.2.2 Design

Thus, this research was conducted through a case of study design since the outcome of case studies in new case settings requires well-documented qualitative procedures, such as a protocol for documenting the questions in detail and the development of a complete case-study database (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This allows a deep analysis, improving understanding of a phenomenon, and a description of how linguistic insecurity and Teletandem are experienced in a real-life context and how this information is interpreted.

3.3 Setting

The research was conducted at the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo (UAEH), a major public educational institution situated in Central Mexico. The study was situated specifically at the Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities (ICSHu), which is one of the prominent faculties at the UAEH, and is located in the capital of the state of Hidalgo, Pachuca. This institute was a significant site for this study as it offers 11 bachelor's degrees. Currently, the total enrolment at ICSHu is 3,259 students, out of which 3,077 are at the Bachelor's level.

Among the various programmes offered, the Bachelor's Degree in Social Work was selected as the focal point. This eight-semester programme stands out with 311 students currently enrolled, and a curriculum of 36 subjects. This programme aims to equip students with the scientific, technical, and humanistic knowledge necessary to effectively address social problems and contribute to community development (Juárez, 2023). This vision was significant for the present study, as the communicative and intercultural competencies fostered through Teletandem align directly with the needs of social workers.

3.4 Participants

Four female students from the fourth semester of the Bachelor in Social Work program were selected by their English teacher for this study. The participants, aged between 19 and 21, had a B1 (Intermediate) level of English proficiency according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). They were contacted by their English teacher from the same institute who teaches English as a subject in the B.A. in Social Work, with two classes of the subject per week. Since the university has already participated in Teletandem in previous semesters, all four

students had previously attended six structured Teletandem sessions as a compulsory component of their English classes, with their teacher as mediator in the exchanges. Participants were partnered with students from a university in the United States following a selection process, and were switching partners. The teacher was responsible for the organisation of the subjects for the exchanges, with the students preparing the subject in advance. However, on occasion, the interactions between pairs were more open-ended. The students were tasked with writing reflections on their exchanges, which they then presented to their teachers. However, there was no formal grading evaluation.

It is relevant to mention that the students were contacted and recruited through their regular English teacher. They were previously asked for their consent to participate in this study and they were also notified about the research objectives, the procedures involved, and the confidentiality of their data.

3.5 Instruments

As mentioned in the overview section, qualitative research has been adopted for this study. The instruments used were semi-structured interviews, which is a qualitative research method that is often used to collect more detailed information.

3.5.1 Interviews

I conducted semi-structured interviews in Spanish, which were subsequently translated into English. This type of interview follows a guide or protocol created before the interview and focuses on core topics to provide an overall structure, semi-structured interviews also allow discovery and provide space to track topic progression as the conversation progresses (Magaldi & Berler, 2020). This allowed flexibility to explore deeper perspectives and to ask additional questions based on what the interviewee

had mentioned. In this way, I was able to gather detailed information and was free to explore new themes that emerged during the interview. The data was analyzed through thematic analysis. An interview guide was designed, it consisted of about 15 open-ended questions that covered the topics of linguistic insecurity and the use of Teletandem. The interview focused on meeting the research objectives and answering the research question.

3.6 Data analysis

The data analyzed was conducted through thematic analysis. According to Medelyan (2017), thematic analysis includes uncovering themes by analyzing patterns and relationships within a set of qualitative data. Firstly, I read all the interview transcripts to familiarize myself with the information. Then, the method of coding was used to categorize the key data. In this case, the commonalities and coding patterns identified were organized based on relevant findings through the analysis of words and sentence structure, and how they relate to one another, using different colors.

To organize the codes into categories, a chart was created to show all the codes obtained. For instance, one of the codes that was found was “Linguistic Insecurity”, which is related to feelings of worry and negativity that learners face when learning and using a language that is not their mother tongue. Also, another code that was found was "Confidence", this is related to how learners felt about the Teletandem sessions and how they improved their language skills.

3.7 Summary

In this chapter, the research methodology used in the study was discussed, detailing the chosen research approach and design. Furthermore, the methods

employed were thoroughly reviewed, and the justifications for their selection over alternative approaches were explained. The setting and the participants in which the research was conducted were also described. In addition, the development of the semi-structured interviews was described as well as the data source used for this study and data analysis in order to answer the research question:

- To what extent can Teletandem enable students to reduce linguistic insecurity and develop their speaking skills?

In the following chapter the results and the discussion of my study are reported.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Overview

This chapter discusses the results obtained from this research project and answers the research question:

- *To what extent does Teletandem enable students to reduce linguistic insecurity and develop their speaking skills?*

This chapter is divided into three sections. First of all, I will discuss the “linguistic insecurity” that the students faced while speaking a second language. Secondly, I describe how the students developed their confidence during the Teletandem sessions, and how their self-esteem enhanced. Finally, I address the main advantages of using Teletandem, and how the students’ linguistic insecurity decreased as they improved their linguistic skills. Moreover, a summary of the chapter is provided.

4.2 Linguistic insecurity

Daftari and Tavit (2017) argue that pronunciation is mostly related to speakers' linguistic insecurity. Baldaquí (2011) found that it was evident that the perception of Linguistic insecurity is self-assessed by speakers to determine their willingness to use the language. The present chapter conducts an analysis of linguistic insecurity. I found that students experience linguistic insecurity when speaking a second language, which manifests itself in a fear of mispronunciation, instances of miscommunication, and a perception of lacking knowledge on the topics under discussion. It is important to note that these factors do not act in isolation; rather, they are interrelated and collectively determine students' confidence and their ability to participate in Teletandem.

4.2.1 Fear of mispronunciation

One interviewee stated that having a conversation with someone she does not know generates nervousness and fear, especially when it is the first time, because she didn't know what to say, and being in front of a computer also made her feel afraid as shown below,

The first time I attended I was very nervous because I didn't know what I was going to say, even if I didn't know a person, even if it wasn't like. Face to face? But the fact that she was on the computer and I didn't know her, I was scared (Student 1).

In this extract, we can see that in a first conversation, nerves and insecurity are generated; however, as the sessions progressed, she gained more confidence. But when this student changed partners, she became nervous and fearful again, wondering whether the new person assigned to her will be a male or female student. However, once she established a rapport with the same partner constantly, communication becomes easier and she regains her confidence as shown below,

But since we've changed people, we've also had the same feeling of wondering who it will be and whether it's a man or a woman. However, the last two times we were with the same people, so communication has been calmer, and we've gained more confidence (Student 1).

It is evident that the development of confidence in conversational interactions is facilitated by engagement in structured sessions and by maintaining consistent interaction with the same partner.

During the course of the conversation, a number of emotions may be experienced, including feelings of nervousness, insecurity, and even embarrassment, which may be exacerbated when the conversation is conducted in a foreign language. As interviewee

2 observes, even if one is able to formulate questions with structure, there may be a lack of confidence in the pronunciation of words, which can also contribute to feelings of insecurity:

Before, before, well yes, I was a bit insecure about not knowing what to ask because it was like, well yes, I have the ability to structure questions. But at the same time, the diction and some words were difficult for me, I didn't know if it went like that. That is, if I was embarrassed to pronounce another word (Student 2).

Interviewees acknowledged that they were able to structure questions but struggled with diction and certain words during their Teletandem exchange with their American partners. There are various factors that arise before, during and after a conversation between speakers of different languages who participate in Teletandem. This difficulty made them unsure about whether they were using the correct words, which led to embarrassment when pronouncing unfamiliar words.

Interviewee 3 refers to the person's accessibility as another aspect that influences both before and during the conversation. The interviewee emphasises that this aspect of the interlocutor's personality is important because their accessibility facilitates interaction.

In this regard, she comments:

It also depends a lot on the personality of the person we get, because I've seen that my colleagues have such approachable people. I can't remember who they showed their room to, showed them their things and so on. I mean, it's like a person who is very easy to interact with (Student 3).

Interviewee 3 comments: *'The difficult part is getting started,'* because as you progress through the sessions, you gain more confidence. Insecurity is transformed, especially

when they are paired with people with whom they identify in terms of tastes and interests:

I had my first session with a guy and he made me feel very secure, apart from the fact that he also went along with me by asking me more questions, which helped me to structure his questions more. It was confidence (Student 3).

The discussion of mutual tastes and interests has shown to engender a sense of confidence in the conversation, facilitating a more fluid exchange. This is due to the identification of common ground that occurs when individuals find commonalities in their preferences. The conversation then becomes interesting and meaningful, and when interest is fading and that confidence is lost, the conversation continues with easier topics and the questioning stops as stated below,

It's like asking about tastes and interests and if they match, then taking advantage of that so that we both feel confident enough to keep asking questions. If I see that it's not working, then I try easier things and stop interrogating (Student 3).

The flow of interaction is characterised by a sense of ease as long as there is an established rapport between participants, a common ground of interests, and a mutual understanding of the vocabulary. This is consistent with Pomino and Gil-Salom's (2016) study, as it highlights the increase of confidence and reduction of making mistakes during the exchanges. However, the moment this interest wanes, or when the available vocabulary is finished and no longer aligns with the subject matter or the English language curriculum, the initial enthusiasm is diminished. This results in a state of inhibition, where participants experience a loss of interest and the initial purpose is missing as shown below:

That does inhibit you, yes, because it's like when you've run out of basic English words and you don't know what to say anymore, you've already used up how you say your name, your favourite colours, so then your vocabulary, even though it's related to the sessions we've been doing in English this semester, if you don't know how to say it or structure it anymore. Well, in my case, I've already lost the excitement, the point of it (Student 1).

This statement illustrates that when participants feel their vocabulary has been fully utilised, and despite the awareness that additional words exist, they are unable to pronounce them or formulate further inquiries to sustain the dialogue, they experience a decline in interest and enthusiasm. This is due to the fact that they no longer perceive the same level of security and confidence in the conversation and in their ability to continue learning.

In this regard, it is imperative to draw attention to the Affective Filter Hypothesis proposed by Krashen (1983), which points out that high anxiety and low motivation can prevent language input from being effectively immersed, eventually hindering the learning process. “The absence of Krashen’s theory from the language classroom, on the other hand, can lead to increasing anxiety around learning a foreign language” (Mehak et al., 2025). This hypothesis also addresses the challenges encountered by learners, such as the apprehension of incorrect pronunciation or the inability to comprehend the language. It is evident that students’ emotional state significantly impacts their learning outcomes.

When students experience feelings of self-consciousness and insecurity, they tend to lose motivation and a positive attitude towards speaking a second language. The loss of self-confidence is accompanied by the onset of linguistic insecurity. Consequently, this can lead to feelings of anxiety, as the individual may question their own competence or the correctness of their pronunciation when attempting to articulate

themselves verbally in a language that they are not proficient in. This can engender feelings of vulnerability, particularly when confronted with limitations in their own language that constrain oral expression, as interviewee 3 elucidates:

Well, yes, sometimes there are people who are fluent in English. Well, there are people on this side who speak Spanish well, but there are people who don't speak Spanish well, so whether you ask them something in English or Spanish, they don't quite understand you, no, so yes, it's awkward to want to talk to the person because of the discomfort of not being sure and if I make a mistake, yes, I mean, I know how to say it in Spanish but not how to structure it in English, and I get anxious and decide not to speak anymore (Student 3).

Anxiety is characterised by feelings of uncertainty regarding one's linguistic abilities, often manifesting as concerns about making errors (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993). This is what happens to my interviewees when they are unsure of what they are going to say because they know how to say it in Spanish, but they are afraid of making mistakes when doing so in English. They then experience linguistic anxiety and decide not to speak, which affects their performance in improving their speaking skills in a foreign language. Therefore, not only is there a lack of confidence in their ability to sustain the dialogue, but also a restriction in the enhancement of their speaking skills.

In the conversations during Teletandem sessions, there are moments of silence which offer the possibility to think, to reflect on the topic in question, but also students have other feelings, as the interviewee expresses:

In the moments of silence, again there is discomfort and even if the other person speaks better English, because you think about the stereotypes they have about Mexicans (Student 1).

In this sense, the interviewee thinks that having a conversation with someone who speaks a foreign language is also uncomfortable because it is often associated with "knowing how to speak well". It creates an uncomfortable environment as they don't know what their peers are thinking. It is also believed to have some stereotypes of Mexicans and this causes anxiety, unease and discomfort because even if you speak well in Spanish, it is complicated to speak in English:

Although throughout the sessions it gets a bit intense because there are moments of silence when you say you are going to say something new, it becomes uncomfortable. Even when we go in pairs, it's easier. And when there is someone from another institute who can speak English better, you become more self-conscious (Student 1).

Thus, we found that having a conversation also generates certain "stereotypes" that refer to mental reproductions of reality and that these also make the conversation turn uncomfortable, as our interviewee comments:

Well, yes, I also think that it is uncomfortable to a certain extent because it is talking to a new person who surely has stereotypes of Mexicans and who asks you things like, how the girls then laugh, and ask me if we drink tequila here or things like that, so they are like stereotypes that they have of us that become uncomfortable and apart from the fact that sometimes I do not know how to pronounce things or if I am pronouncing it well, I even say it and say it, and I

wonder if it is said like this? and the girl says “yes or no”, “you said it wrong”.

And I say, well, I think that's the purpose, like we correct each other. (Student 1).

In the extract above the interviewee mentioned a situation where they had the feeling that their Teletandem partner had stereotypes and this made them feel uncomfortable, as well as not being sure if they were pronouncing correctly. Telles (2015) argued that when the conversation revolves around sensitive historical or social issues, what he calls “national wounds” can be touched upon, which are frequently connected to feelings of shame, guilt, or revolt on the part of its peoples. Teletandem provides a context for students to share their national identities and discuss the differences between their countries (Telles, 2015), as is the case, when they ask, ‘*Do you drink tequila?*’ It causes a certain amount of discomfort, because possibly, this topic of tequila is related to feelings of embarrassment or shame on the part of our interviewees and in some way, it also reinforces those stereotypes that people have that here in Mexico we drink tequila.

According to my interviewees, nervousness and even discomfort are also felt by the ‘others’ with whom they are in conversation, as one of our interviewee expressed it: “*I also feel that she was nervous, but I feel that she was trying to get more information out of me than I was trying to get out of her*” (Student 2). These responses show that the interviewees have experienced feelings of nervousness, discomfort, also known as “linguistic insecurity” (Baldaquí, 2011). This is caused by the interviewees’ awareness of a distance between their mother tongue and the target language variety that they consider to be legitimate.

Awkward moments also arise when questions are asked that somehow touch on painful feelings. Such was the case with our interviewee 2, when she commented:

It was a session with a girl, and I asked her a question about how her parents were doing, but unfortunately, she told me that they were both in prison. It was one of those moments where I felt like, “No, I’m sorry,” and I apologised to her many times, but even so, I still felt bad for asking that question, so I didn’t really like that session very much (Student 2).

According to our interviewee, talking about things like this — the pain of not having parents, and even more so the circumstances they are going through — is uncomfortable, so it is better to change the subject and try to 'appease' them by asking instead: *'How are you getting on with Spanish?'* Talking about this seems to go better, although she says, *'It went very well, but I don't know where to put accents in a sentence or in a word' (Student 2).*

In this sense, the importance of the teacher as a mediator is crucial in order to make the conversation more constructive and critical in relation to the context and cultural differences (Telles, 2015). The fear of mispronunciation persists even in topics of greater interest and knowledge, as seen in this case where emotional topics are avoided. When someone feels insecure speaking a second language, they may also feel afraid of a lack of communication, which is the next linguistic theory to be analysed based on the research results.

4.2.2 Miscommunication

Attempting to express oneself orally in front of others during Teletandem sessions in a language that students do not master can mean a great vulnerability, and even more when one's own language has limitations in terms of oral expression which can lead to miscommunication, as one of the interviewees mentioned:

Well yes, sometimes there are people who have a good command of English.

Well, there are people on this side who speak Spanish well, but there are people who don't speak Spanish well, so even if you ask them something in English or Spanish, they don't understand you, no, so yes, it's uncomfortable like wanting to talk to the person but not being able to because of the discomfort of not being sure if, I mean, I know how to say it in Spanish but I don't know how to structure it in English. (Student 2).

Moreover, in these Teletandem sessions, when students have to talk about topics or in the past or future tense, the fluency of the language is limited because they don't have enough vocabulary, leading to miscommunication: ... *"Well, I don't have any more vocabulary to say about pollution or globalization... the same when they ask us to speak in the future or past, it's like sometimes I say how was -ed or -ing or just let them go and see what they tell me" (Student 1).* In this sense, we wait to see *"what they say"*, because somehow the same thing happens to them in Spanish, in the words of our interviewee: *"Let's see what they say, then I see that the same thing happens to them in Spanish, right? (Student 1).*

In this sense, interviewees describe the challenges they faced while participating in Teletandem sessions, where they practice a language that they are not fluent with native speakers. Also, they explained that they had difficulties communicating, whether in English or Spanish. This can create discomfort and hinder effective communication. Communication is limited because, without sufficient L2 vocabulary, students find it difficult to express their knowledge and understanding; consequently, effective communication becomes impossible. As Telles' (2015) study notes, insufficient preparation or language proficiency issues have the potential to impact the overall

experience, often resulting in participants seeking to change partners, as this impacts the principle of reciprocity.

4.2.4 Lack of knowledge of the topic

During Teletandem sessions, these linguistic insecurities are exacerbated by a lack of knowledge of the topic. When interacting and communicating with others, certain vocabulary is used depending on the purpose and the people involved in the interaction:

Well, I think that especially when we are asked to talk about a specific topic, for example, last time we had to talk about globalization and there were many terms that I didn't understand (student 1).

In that sense, the conversation becomes uncomfortable again, not only because participants do not understand some terms, but also because they have to think about them in Spanish and then speak them in English.: *"...and I actually started thinking about what globalization means in Spanish and then I had to speak it in English, so it was kind of uncomfortable" (Student 1).* In essence, the interviewee describes the cognitive load and discomfort of not only being confronted with unfamiliar terms, but also having to mentally switch between two languages.

On the other hand, the person may be able to express themselves well in English but find it difficult to understand: *"I don't know, I'm good at pronouncing it but I find it difficult to understand it" (Student 2).* In other words, the other person may be speaking English and asking questions, but not understanding, they can only manage to say: *"...yes, yes, yes..."*. This is consistent with Gardner and MacIntyre's (1993) study, regarding the perception of language competence among students, who, as indicated

by the objective measures, may experience concerns regarding their perceived inadequacy, despite having knowledge of pronunciation. This is exemplified by the students' awareness of the correct pronunciation yet expressing feelings of insecurity regarding its articulation.

Therefore, the conversation does not flow, as there is not enough confidence to clarify that they are not understanding what they are talking about: *"I was embarrassed to say I didn't understand or something like that (Student 2)"*. In this sense, our interviewee considers that this can also happen to English native speakers:

One time we were two girls who spoke Spanish and one who spoke English and it was time to speak in Spanish and the girl started talking in Spanish about her uncle and I don't know what, and I saw the look on the girl's face of not understanding. And I say, I think we make the same face as if we were uncomfortable, that you don't understand, but you're too embarrassed to tell her, I don't understand what you're telling me. (Student 2)

In the words of our interviewee, there is another way in which the conversation does not flow and linguistic insecurity has to do with it: *"I don't know how to listen to what they are saying to me"*. This is because listening is one of the four language skills needed to communicate effectively in all kinds of situations. Nevertheless, linguistic insecurity prevents students from seeking clarification or acknowledging that they do not understand their partner's statements, as they may feel embarrassed or worried about appearing incompetent in the language.

The lack of proficiency second language, for both English and Spanish speakers, makes it difficult to understand what is being said and creates insecurity in communication:

I think they see our insecurity as much as we see theirs when we speak Spanish, and it's like I want to talk but I don't even know what to say to you"
(Student 1).

However, there is the great advantage of having tools to translate from one language to another, which makes it easier to continue the conversation, as acknowledged by one of my participants below:

We see that we both use, wait for me, you look it up in the translator and then you say what you want to say, or you say it super slowly (Student 2).

According to the interviewees, there are other ways to communicate more fluidly during Teletandem sessions, although it depends a lot on the person you communicate with, and the major they study. Some of them are more open and the conversation flows well, others are more serious; in this sense our interviewee comments:

There is also the possibility to write in the chat. So sometimes when I talk to a girl, when I talk to her in English, she doesn't understand me at all. I don't know why, I don't know if my pronunciation is that bad, but it hasn't happened to me with other people. And if I don't know, I write it in the chat. There are architects, there are others who study economics, those who study psychology, they are very open and talk to you very nicely and so on, but those who study economics or architecture are more serious (Student 1).

Based on the comments above, the lack of knowledge of certain topics can be a barrier for the conversation to flow naturally. Also, their major can significantly impact a conversation in different ways, influencing how you are perceived and how your contributions are received. Because they find it difficult to be understood in English, they rely on writing and communicating via chat. To have a more fluid conversation, they argue that it also depends on their area of study, as those studying Business or Psychology are more open, whereas those studying architecture are more serious.

Through the interviewees' experiences, we see, to some extent, the negative impact of linguistic insecurity on the development of speaking skills. This is because learners often experience apprehension, nervousness, tension, and worry when using the language, which manifests as discomfort or anxiety and affects oral production. Although some linguistic insecurities in Teletandem have been addressed, it is also essential to consider its advantages, such as improved confidence in using a second language.

4.3 Confidence

In this study, confidence is defined as learners' self-assurance when using the second language, specifically their willingness to speak, make mistakes, and express their ideas without fear of being judged or criticized. During Teletandem sessions, confidence is important because learners interact with native speakers in real communicative situations, which can reduce their anxiety and linguistic insecurity.

In this section, the main advantages of Teletandem are described, in relation to the answers of the participants of the study and how it influenced their oral performance during the exchanges.

In accordance with Telles (2015) study in learning foreign languages in Teletandem, after a few meetings, students showed great enthusiasm and a positive attitude towards their Teletandem background and sessions. The results also showed that they liked their remote tandem partners. This finding goes in accordance with one of our interviewees, through her Teletandem experience she comments that starting a conversation with someone you do not know may cause nervousness:

The first time I attended I felt very nervous because I didn't know what I was going to say, even if it wasn't like. Face to face? But the fact that she was on the computer and that I didn't know her, well, I was afraid (Student 3)

However, she comments that as the sessions progressed, more confidence was acquired:

You feel more confident, but as we have switched partners, it has also been the same feeling of "who it will be?" and if it is a man and if it is a woman, but the last two times we have been with the same partner, so the communication has already been calmer and more confidence was acquired (Student 3).

During the process of developing language skills, they become more confident in speaking a second language during Teletandem sessions, and even more so when they start talking about their likes, there is more openness, or in the words of our interviewee, 'more coverage', as our interviewee also mentions:

"The fact that the teacher has done these sessions has allowed us, well yes, to get involved or influence things that we didn't do in previous semesters, well

yes, I was a bit stuck, but now I have the opportunity, well yes, to talk, things that we didn't have in previous semesters" (Student 2).

This extract states that the fact that the teacher has a different way of working, the Teletandem sessions has given them other opportunities to practice the language that they did not have previously.

4.3.1 Self-esteem

According to the Affective Filter Hypothesis, Teletandem creates a favorable environment where language learners feel more autonomous, relaxed, self-confident, and determined, and this increases the likelihood of success in language learning. Therefore, focusing on understandable information in a low-stress environment tends to improve student motivation and reduce anxiety.

Being in contact with the language in a "natural" way creates a favorable atmosphere: *"it gives me this confidence, and to see that they had a hard time and that I had a hard time as well, it made me feel good (Student 1)".* Above all, taking part in Teletandem is *"like a chat"*, says one of our interviewees, which gives you confidence when you have to go on an exchange:

You know what you're getting into when you go on exchange, I mean, you know you have more chances of understanding when you meet someone from the United States (Student 4)".

This response shows that Teletandem serves as practical preparation, giving students a clearer expectation and better comprehension when they engage with native speakers in real-world situations.

Nevertheless, it is perceived that talking about a specific topic is a bit complicated because, although they are willing to talk about it, it is not with the same freedom and confidence as when they talk about their tastes or topics of interest. And, as mentioned above, when talking about issues such as pollution, they feel restricted and it also becomes more methodical, as one of the interviewees said:

I feel that it does help you to solve this linguistic approach, but leaving it as if it were very methodical, that is, as if in fact when they put so much of so many topics in the classroom, it becomes more tedious, because apart from the fact that perhaps we don't have a good pronunciation or we don't have so much vocabulary, you lose the sense. There is no longer, well, yes, cool, the dynamic of continuing to talk and when there are tastes or when we agree on something in common, it becomes easier to talk (Student 3).

Additionally, they also comment that it gives them more confidence when they interact with a Teletandem partner and have the opportunity to agree on and negotiate what they are going to talk about:

For example, when I had my Teletandem partner it was, look, I want to know the slang words they use in the United States. She wanted to know about the Day of the Dead. So I prepared for her a presentation (Student 1).

However, there are some doubts about whether they really help each other to learn both Spanish and English, because it is possible that "you only get to know a person through a phone call".

The interviewees' responses clearly show that during Teletandem sessions, they improved their confidence while speaking in the target language in a natural setting and how these interactions encouraged their self-esteem as they saw their progress compared to previous semesters.

4.4.1 Improvement and motivation

In accordance with Hernández et al. (2018), Teletandem is useful to improve speaking and listening skills, and in this way benefit both sides to learn more about the language in a natural context. One of the interviewees says that the different structure of the sessions, not only focusing on writing and grammar, had certain advantages, because by paying more attention to pronunciation and listening, it was possible to make progress in learning and strengthen listening and speaking skills:

Yes, the truth is that in the other semesters, we had teachers who focused on pronunciation, writing, and grammar, and nobody had ever paid attention to how to pronounce and listen well, right? So up until now, we've had that opportunity, I think. Even if it's just a little bit, but we have made some progress in learning to listen, in learning to speak it, and because it's not so "uncomfortable" (laughter, which seems to confirm agreement) (Student 1).

When these opportunities arise in class, as one of the students points out, they feel that they are making progress in their learning and are therefore less uncomfortable. It seems that they feel more comfortable when more comments are made about pronunciation and speech than when comments focus solely on writing and grammar.

This also seems to be related to the student's ability to maintain interest in continuing to seek out more vocabulary, since when faced with someone who speaks English very well, they say very little because their vocabulary is very limited, and the person they

are interacting with continues to speak in English, and they cannot understand everything the person is saying. This gives the student the motivation to continue learning, so it is necessary to continue searching for more vocabulary and expand their vocabulary. This also seems to be related to the student's ability to keep searching for more vocabulary because even when others understand what is being said, what is actually said is very limited:

I say very minimal things just to say to the girl in front of me. She keeps talking in English, but I say that maybe I understand some things, but I feel that it is also the student's ability to continue learning and looking for more vocabulary"
(Student 1).

In the absence of a broad vocabulary, there are limitations to understanding what the other person is saying, even if they are not native speakers, but they understand and speak English to a certain level. The extent of understanding is limited due to limited vocabulary, resulting in concise responses and instances of discourse for its own sake. However, the validity of the assertions made is not fully assured. Consequently, students are motivated to continue learning and seeking more vocabulary.

In this sense, being with native English speakers motivates and encourages students to expand their vocabulary; in students' words, it serves as a point of reference for speaking a second language. While their teachers suggest watching English films or listen to English music, as this can be another advantage in overcoming linguistic insecurity, but our interviewee feels that it would be better to practice first and then watch the series; for instance, you have to learn to speak English first to be able to understand films or songs in English: "...For example, the teacher says listen to music in English, watch series in English, but I think you have to practice English first to

understand what they say in films or in music" (Student 2). This perspective challenges the teachers' recommendation, suggesting that direct interaction in Teletandem may be a more effective starting point for overcoming linguistic insecurity than only consuming content in English.

Another interviewee explains that not understanding what is said in English also becomes a motivation. The motivation arises from the fact that not comprehending what is being heard in films, music, or during interactions with students, motivates them to continue learning. :*"So it motivates you to say that if I don't understand when I'm talking to the students, I have to learn, it creates motivation" (Student 2).* This response illustrates that Teletandem sessions not only allow students to overcome their linguistic insecurity, but they also motivate them to keep learning and practicing.

Although an atmosphere of trust is created, it is still not enough to improve oral skills and reduce linguistic insecurity, because they can talk about things that are difficult for them, such as the administration for an exam, but they do not correct each other, It is possible that certain mistakes or idioms may be perceived, however no form of correction or feedback is provided.

Even though it is felt that feedback would be very helpful in improving the language: *"...it would be good, like they would say yes, yes, like they would give you feedback" (Student 1).* One of the interviewees feels that she has had feedback that has allowed her to improve her learning: *"Yes, some of them helped us. We'd say the word in Spanish or the question like this and they'd sort of ask us to repeat it in English so that, ah, OK, this is how it's going to be said (Student 4)".*

For the interviewees, feedback comes when they say a word or ask a question in Spanish and are then asked to repeat it in English. This is how they feel supported and improve their oral skills. It is important to highlight that during Teletandem sessions, there are moments where there is a lot of participation and they are very important for learning; for instance, when they talk about similar preferences like music or when they share social networks with people who like the same thing, then, the dynamic becomes more interactive, as well as when in the sessions, everyone shares and there is more opportunity to interact:

In those opportunities where you can talk more, the person gives you the opportunity to get to know them. It's great because it's not just a school exercise, it's like, yes, interacting with someone else (Student 2).

As illustrated by the comment made by Student 2, the opportunity to engage in extended discourse is an opportunity to talk more with their partner and to get to know each other. It is important to mention that the exchange transcends into a genuine engagement between two individuals. The evidence demonstrates that these types of activities are of significant interest, particularly in the context of Teletandem sessions, where participants are able to discuss their preferences. These interactions facilitate the enhancement of oral proficiency, and although they have had some inconveniences, they consider that they have learnt and overcome some linguistic insecurities, and that it has given them the opportunity to meet other people and even establish friendships, as expressed by the next interviewee:

Yes, yes, the truth. Yes, it has helped me a lot and I feel that it is a good platform. I feel that apart from the fact that you exercise the... Language, it helps you to get to know more about some people and it's like making friends,

because I did make a friendship with a girl and it was, it was very nice. The truth is that it opens up doors for you (Student 2).

The establishment of such connections is of paramount importance, as it facilitates opportunities for the students. In other words, the students not only fulfil an academic requirement, but also, that these connections facilitate the acquisition of further opportunities. In line with Hernández et al. (2018), Teletandem is beneficial for enhancing speaking and listening skills, providing a natural context for language learning that benefits both participants. As our interviewees noted, the advantage of the session's structure goes beyond writing and grammar to focus on listening and speaking.

4.4.4 Language practice

According to our interviewees, the Teletandem sessions have helped them to overcome the limitations and insecurities of the language, as they allow them to practice and increase their vocabulary, preparing in advance what they are going to say, this also motivates them to continue learning, as one of them says:

Well, I prepare myself so that when I'm there I don't say things that I don't want to say and it helps you, more than increasing your vocabulary, it gives you motivation to continue learning (Student 3).

This is consistent with Hernández et al. (2018) as the students recognized that some words and expressions learned during the exchange had become part of their own linguistic repertoire. Participating in Teletandem has had a general impact on students' language learning because it allows them to be active participants when interacting with new people and to acquire strategies and tools, not only to meet academic

requirements, but, as mentioned above, students feel more confident and competent in case they have to go to the United States one day, as our interviewee says:

Yes, I think it helps a lot and it gives me a kind of general aspect, like you think, well, if at some point in my life I have to go to the United States, at least I know what I have to work on to improve it (Student 4).

In this regard, she also comments that they speak very fast, they put several words together, so participating in this activity gives a general overview of how they speak so that communication between people is better: *"so at least you get an idea of how they speak" (Student 4).*

They also consider that it is very important that they let them work with the same person because on other occasions, they had many changes and also that they were given the freedom to talk about the subject of their interest, as one of our interviewees says:

The first sessions we couldn't, that's why they changed it a lot of times, but now that we have the same person, it would be good, as if they told us that maybe they could talk about a subject you want to know about or something that catches your attention, to leave it more, more free (Student 1).

However, participants also believe that it is necessary to establish rules from the outset of the Teletandem sessions, as well as the principles of reciprocity, autonomy, and language separation, so they are aware of the purpose of these exchanges, as this greatly helps them to improve their speaking and listening skills. In this sense, participants commented that it would be good if they were given more established

rules, better instructions at the beginning of the Teletandem, because it helps them a lot to improve:

Yes, it helps a lot to know how they speak, what you have to say to them, how they pronounce, how to listen to them even, but it would be good if they told you no, because you have to give them feedback or talk about a specific topic that you want to learn from what they are doing there, maybe how to pronounce it (Student 3).

Students believe that discussing a specific topic is acceptable, but that they should be the ones to choose the topic and questions. Even though they prepare the questions, they discuss a topic about which they have little knowledge or are not interested. These sessions have allowed them to practice vocabulary that they do not always use at school, so another interviewee also considers that it has allowed him to practice vocabulary:

Yes, I like it because it helps us to practice more than anything else the vocabulary that suddenly we have, but we don't use it constantly here at school, so yes (Student 4).

This finding illustrates the positive impact of teletandem sessions on language learning, according to the interviewees, they acknowledge teletandem offers the opportunity to practice the target language in a natural context. As O'Dowd (2013) mentioned, teletandem can be carried out in different ways, having the opportunity to learn and practice the target language with native speakers, which demonstrates that teletandem is a favorable option for learning a second language. These interactions

create a favorable environment, particularly for the development of speaking skills and reducing linguistic insecurity.

4.5 Summary

This chapter has reported the findings from this project related to the use of Teletandem to reduce linguistic insecurity. It provided information about the overview; a description in detail from the participants' linguistic insecurity while speaking in the target language and how Teletandem creates a safe environment improving confidence. Additionally, it discussed the advantages of Teletandem as a tool to motivate students to practice and improve their linguistic skills.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This research aimed to show the use of teletandem to reduce Linguistic Insecurity in Social Work students based on their experiences throughout the Teletandem sessions. We provided evidence of how the use of teletandem allows students to practice the target language, enhancing confidence and as a result, they improved their speaking skills.

The results suggest that teletandem has a significant impact as a learning method. Not only do learners improve their oral proficiency, but their linguistic anxiety and affective filter are also reduced. These improvements are specifically evident in vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar and fluency. The study concludes that teletandem offers a strategic complement to formal teaching, as it enables learners to take responsibility for their own learning and improve their language skills in an authentic environment.

Some of the most significant results is that students find teletandem useful to practice their speaking skills in the target language with a native speaker, and this significantly reduced their linguistic insecurity as they were able to see their improvement each session, this encouraged them to continue practicing speaking a second language as they felt motivated after the interaction. The results also showed that learning a language in addition to one's native language brings great benefits in various areas for those who embark on it. This implies, in the first place, the desire to do it, accompanied by the commitment to dedicate time, effort, and persistence. Success depends on many factors and it is necessary to bear in mind that there are also obstacles and difficulties that can vary from person to person, some of these obstacles can be cultural, emotional, social and academic.

Activities such as Teletandem help to overcome the main obstacles and help to gain more confidence and fluency in the learning process, especially when it comes to speaking the new language. It creates an optimal and relaxed environment that encourages linguistic exchange, promoting more diverse learning in which various topics can arise during the conversation, both cultural and social. However, there are some limitations to consider. First, the success of Teletandem largely depends on the commitment and reliability of the participants, as inconsistent participation can hinder progress. Additionally, technical issues such as poor internet connections can disrupt sessions and affect the quality of the interaction. There is also the challenge of time zone differences, which can make scheduling sessions difficult. Furthermore, without proper guidance and structure, conversations may lack depth, limiting the effectiveness of the language practice. With perseverance, effort, dedication, and commitment, it is entirely possible to achieve the fluency necessary to master a new language.

This research can be used to develop new strategies and to improve students' speaking skills and reduce their Linguistic Insecurity when they speak a second language.

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