



## **UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL DE CHIMBORAZO**

### **FACULTAD DE CIENCIAS DE LA EDUCACIÓN HUMANAS Y TECNOLOGÍAS**

### **CARRERA DE PEDAGOGÍA DE LOS IDIOMAS NACIONALES Y EXTRANJEROS**

#### **TITLE OF THE RESEARCH WORK:**

Analysis of the use of Tandem method and its impact on speaking skill

**Trabajo de Titulación para optar al título de:  
Licenciado en Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros**

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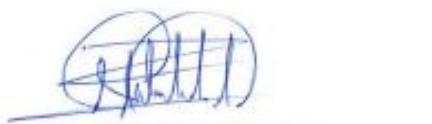
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## **DEDICATORY**

*This achievement is dedicated to my parents, José Cabay and Rosa Yuquilema, who are the fundamental pillars in my life, for always trusting me throughout my university journey. To my siblings, who are an essential part of my life and motivate me to keep going with their support and companionship. To my grandfather, Pedro Cabay, because I love him very much, and his example accompanies me wherever I go. To my darlings, Marjorie, Dayana, and Edison, because their love and company make the journey more beautiful. And I also dedicate this to everyone who has been with me along the way, because thanks to you, I am here today.*

*Franklin Cabay*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*First of all, I want to thank God because he is the one who guides me, protects me, encourages me during the most difficult moments, and leads me on this path to successfully complete it. I also want to thank my parents, José Cabay and Rosa Yuquilema; you are my example of struggle, perseverance, bravery, and courage to face every situation with dedication and bravery. Thank you for always accompanying me with your advice, love, and understanding, supporting me at all times. To my siblings, for being with me in good times and bad, for your company, understanding, and unconditional support. To my grandfather, Pedro Cabay, for his sincere affection and every piece of advice he has given me with so much love. To my Darlings, Marjorie, Dayana, and Edison, who have been with me through every important moment because with them I have laughed, cried, and they have never let me go. To my teachers, who not only shared their knowledge but also patience, passion, humility, and humanity. And to all the people who have given me strength or words of encouragement, I thank you because your support means a lot to me.*

***Franklin Cabay***

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## RESUMEN

Esta investigación tuvo como objetivo describir cómo el método Tandem contribuye al desarrollo de las habilidades orales en inglés en estudiantes de nivel B1 del South American Language Center (SALC) de Riobamba durante el período académico 2025. Para ello, se definieron tres objetivos específicos: identificar los principios y procesos del método Tandem, explorar las experiencias y percepciones de estudiantes y profesores sobre su contribución a la enseñanza y aprendizaje de la expresión oral, e interpretar dichos principios a la luz de las experiencias recabadas. El estudio adoptó un enfoque cualitativo de tipo interpretativo con orientación fenomenológica. Se empleó el método biográfico-narrativo, con empleo de técnicas de recolección de datos el análisis documental y entrevistas semiestructuradas aplicadas a una población de 20 estudiantes y 2 profesores extranjeros del SALC. Los datos fueron analizados mediante triangulación metodológica con el apoyo de un software. Los resultados evidenciaron que el método Tandem fortalece la competencia oral. Los participantes reportaron una notable mejora en la fluidez, la comprensión auditiva, la pronunciación y, especialmente, en la confianza y reducción de la ansiedad al hablar. Un pilar esencial que actuó como recurso motivacional fue la dimensión intercultural. Pese a ello, fueron identificadas carencias en el orden logístico, así como el tiempo insuficiente para la práctica individual por estudiante, además de la necesidad de agrupar a los estudiantes con arreglo a sus respectivos niveles de competencia lingüísticas y la agrupación de niveles heterogéneos, que pueden restringir su potencial. Se concluye que el método Tandem es una estrategia pedagógica eficaz para desarrollar la habilidad oral de manera integral, al crear un entorno seguro y auténtico que prioriza la comunicación fluida y la autonomía del aprendiz. Se formulan a la institución varias recomendaciones para mejorar las potencialidades formativas del método.

**Palabras claves:** Método Tandem, habilidades orales, comunicación, idioma inglés, percepciones

## ABSTRACT

This research aimed to describe how the Tandem method contributes to the development of oral English skills in B1-level students at the South American Language Center (SALC) in Riobamba during the 2025 academic period. To this end, three specific objectives were defined: to identify the principles and processes of the Tandem method, to explore the experiences and perceptions of students and teachers regarding its contribution to the teaching and learning of oral expression, and to interpret these principles in light of the experiences gathered. The study adopted a qualitative, interpretive approach with a phenomenological orientation. The biographical-narrative method was used, employing document analysis and semi-structured interviews as data collection techniques. These interviews were conducted with 20 students and 2 foreign teachers from the SALC. The data were analyzed using methodological triangulation with software support. The results showed that the Tandem method strengthens oral competence. Participants reported notable improvements in fluency, listening comprehension, and pronunciation, as well as in confidence and a reduction in anxiety when speaking. An essential pillar that served as a motivational resource was the intercultural dimension. Despite this, logistical shortcomings were identified, including insufficient time for individual practice per student, the need to group students according to their respective levels of linguistic competence, and heterogeneous grouping of levels, which can limit their potential. It is concluded that the Tandem method is an effective pedagogical strategy for developing oral skills holistically by creating a safe, authentic environment that prioritizes fluent communication and learner autonomy. Several recommendations are made to the institution to improve the method's educational potential.

**Keywords:** Tandem method, oral skills, communication, English language, perceptions

Reviewed by:



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## CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Antecedents

In the current era marked by globalization, the mastery of foreign languages especially oral communication has become a key competence to promote intercultural understanding and professional mobility. Without ignoring the fact that verbal skills are essential in academic, work, and social contexts, traditional teaching methods still present certain limitations. Despite their long-standing use, these methods show notable shortcomings in fostering learners' oral proficiency in a foreign language, which is the main statement of Qing-xue & Jin-fang (2007), Samad (2014), Al-Madani and Nam (2021), among others. Scholars such as Şan et al. (2020) sets that these approaches are not enough to develop genuine oral practice, which can lead to anxiety and insecurity when learners attempt to express themselves. Likewise, Qing-xue & Jin-fang (2007) outstand the tendency of conventional procedures to prioritize grammar and writing over oral communication, downgrading speaking skills to a subordinate position.

From this pedagogical gap, interest in innovative methodologies has grown, such as the Tandem method, which promotes reciprocal linguistic exchange between native speakers of different languages. When the roles of student and tutor alternate, participants engage in an exchange that strengthens fluency, listening comprehension, and cultural awareness in real-time interaction environments.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that empirical evidence on the use of this method in English language teaching remains insufficient. However, there are studies that report promising results, such as those by Batardière y Jeanneau (2020), Cruz (2023), Elo & Pörn (2021), and others that will be examined in detail later. In any case, the initial analysis highlights the need for systematic research to evaluate its potential in developing oral competence among foreign language learners. Regarding this topic, González (2023) states that foreign language learning is an essential condition for achieving integration into an increasingly interconnected world.

One of the recent precedents that deserves to be highlighted is the systematic review carried out by Wilczewski and Alon (2023). The author's researcher collected 313 works published between 1994 and 2021 on language and communication in the intercultural adaptation of students from various countries. Using bibliometric evaluations and content

analysis, they identified foreign language proficiency and interactions in the host country as the two main lines of research. They found in their search on the impact of communication with fellow citizens that these are not definitive, so new studies are required to explore what is related to adaptation.

The authors also recommend expanding research to non-English-speaking contexts and exploring how remote communication in online learning influences student adaptation. While this study acknowledges that recommendation, the present research focuses on face-to-face Tandem interaction in a presential learning context, addressing the call for contextualized studies in Ecuador.

Within this background, the Tandem method, initially introduced by Wambach (1971), suggests mutual language learning between native speakers of different languages. At the time they alternate roles as tutor and pupil, participants engage in communicative interactions that progress fluency, listening comprehension and intercultural comprehension. This approach accentuates student autonomy, reciprocity and the natural use of language in real-world contexts, making the process effective and personally meaningful for those involved.

The Tandem method was expanded and systematized by Huber (2014), thought it was initially conceptualized as mutual learning between native speakers. Huber provided essential pedagogical guidelines for its academic application. The approach typically involves presential conferences where participants alternate roles, divide time equally between the two languages and hold spontaneous or guided conversations on topics of common interest. Feedback is provided in an informal and supportive way. The steps characteristically include pairing students with complementary native languages, planning regular meetings, balancing time equally between both languages, engaging in mutually beneficial discussions and respectfully proposing corrections. These phases allow learning to evolve logically, which take into account the participants' real communicative needs.

Although gradually recognized, the method's efficacy in teaching English remnants underexplored in practical research. Due to this reason, the present study aims to find address this shortcoming by analyzing the oral skills of B1 students at the South American Language Center, with the goal to inform innovative language teaching strategies. The review process followed stern standards for inclusion of bibliographic sources, such as research quality, type of study, period, language and participant profile. Consequently, those jobs that did not meet these criteria were excluded.

A Comprehensive literature examination revealed advances, trends and breaches in research, while accenting how previous findings informed the theoretical and methodological foundations of the present study. For instance, Cruz (2023), in his work intended to promote learner autonomy by using Tandem Learning in a Japanese ESL Context, examined how the method fosters autonomy in English language learning. Based on a qualitative design that combined case studies, participant observation, semi-structured interviews and student daily reflections, the researcher explored the experiences of Japanese ESL students. While results confirmed autonomy growth and oral skill development, cultural and linguistic differences and fluctuating learner commitment, which permitted to underscore the importance of institutional backing and adequate resources.

In the same line, Isai & Rodríguez (2020) in their study about using academic E-Tandems to foster English language learning in a Mexican University, investigated online tandem interactions between Mexican university students and native speakers. Their mixed-methods approach incorporated digital communication tools, field notes, investigations, focus groups and so on. Discoveries indicated notable advances in fluency and self-assurance, though persistent challenges involved technical complications and time-zone differences.

On his turn, Zhou (2023) in his mixed methods study about the influence of online language interactions on second language speaking and inclination to communicate of Chinese EFL learners, assessed virtual language exchanges with Chinese postgraduate students. Through a quasi-experimental pre- and post-test study, in addition to observation and interviews, this researcher compared an e-tandem group with a traditional in-person group. Both showed improvements in their speaking skills, but the e-tandem participants showed greater gains in fluency, accuracy, confidence and willingness to communicate. Despite this, persisted glitches such as technical glitches, limited interaction and scheduling conflicts.

The greater student autonomy, increased fluency and confidence, as well as meaningful interaction with native speakers and the integration of technology for authentic language use, were strengths emerged across these three studies. Methodologically, Cruz (2023) offered an essentially qualitative perspective, Isai and Padilla (2020) applied a mixed-methods approach, while Zhou (2023) combined both quantitative and qualitative measures to corroborate the findings.

However, these studies also share common limitations, such as technical, cultural and logistical obstacles, which limit the scalability and sustainability of the method. On the other hand, the long-term impacts on broader language skills remain insufficiently researched, as larger samples are required to generalize the findings. These gaps present opportunities to refine the Tandem method in various academic settings. In this context, the study presented here delves into the influence of this resource on English oral skills among B1-level students at the South American Language Center in Riobamba, in order to understand its role in the development of effective communicative competence.

The effectiveness of communication in foreign language learning environments has in oral competence an essential pillar (Baxter, 2024). Yet, under traditional instructional procedures, it remains one of the least established linguistic skills (Qing-xue & Jin-fang, 2007). This disparity creates significant challenges for learners striving to achieve advanced levels of fluency. The study Analysis of the Use of the Tandem Method and Its Impact on Speaking Skills addresses the persistent limitations of conventional methodologies in fostering efficient oral skill development (AL-Madani, 2021; Nam, 2023; Qing-xue & Jin-fang, 2007; Şan et al., 2020).

Since traditional methods play an imperative role in English instruction, their effectiveness in improving oral expression has been reviewed and questioned. This issue has sparked interest in the application of creative strategies. Among the best-known conservative approaches are the Grammar-Translation Method, the Audiolingual Method and the Direct Method. The first focuses on grammatical rules and the translation of texts, offering slight oral expression practice. The Audiolingual Method uses repetition and structured exercises to establish verbal habits (Tian, 2025). The third encourages direct instruction in the target language, eliminating dependency on the learner's native language (Qing-xue & Jin-fang, 2007).

These methods share limitations such as scarce opportunities for genuine communicative practice with native speakers and an emphasis on grammar and writing over oral interaction. Such constraints can heighten learners' anxiety and insecurity when speaking a foreign language, ultimately impeding their progress (AL-Madani, 2021; Nam, 2023; Qing-xue & Jin-fang, 2007; Şan et al., 2020). Consequently, it becomes necessary to examine alternative approaches like the Tandem method, which is grounded in peer-to-peer language exchange. The purpose is to determine if this procedure can more effectively enhance fluency, confidence and communicative competence than traditional instruction.

Students at the South American Language Center consistently demonstrate strong oral skills in English, which fosters interest in the methodologies used. One of these is the Tandem method, which, as explained, is a pedagogical model based on collaborative interaction between two interlocutors seeking to learn each other's language. In this case, the two are native English speakers and students acquiring English as a foreign language. The approach encourages practice in real, specific academic settings, which contributes to enriching the learning experience through activities such as conversations in the target language and active listening in everyday communicative situations, designed to develop fluency and listening comprehension.

Despite its widespread use, there is still a lack of empirical evidence and systematic analyzes within the institution that confirm the real impact of the Tandem method on the oral competence of EFL students. Furthermore, students' experiences and perceptions of this strategy, compared to other methods, have not yet been investigated. This knowledge gap highlights the need to evaluate how the Tandem approach influences the development of oral skills among B1 level students at the South American Language Center in Riobamba. In this way a modest contribution would be made to the constant improvement of the teaching process.

### **1.2. Problem formulation**

Taking into account the situation described, this study adopts as its research question:

What contributions do the use of the face-to-face Tandem method make to the strengthening of communicative autonomy in English among B1-level students at the South American Language Center in Riobamba?

### **1.3. Justification**

This research is justified from several perspectives due to its potential to generate useful and actual knowledge and tangible impact in the field of teaching English as a foreign language. First, the practical justification lies in addressing a need identified within the South American Language Center (SALC). According to established practice, there is a gap between the implementation of the Tandem method and systematic evidence regarding its actual effectiveness in the development of oral proficiency. Thus, this study seeks to generate contextualized empirical evidence that allows the institution to understand the scope, dynamics, and perceived impact of a pedagogical strategy already in use, contributing to a more informed understanding of students' learning experiences.

From a theoretical point of view, the study contributes to enriching knowledge about current methodologies for foreign language teaching. Certainly, current literature highlights the principles of the Tandem method, but in Ecuador there is a lack of studies that explore in depth its application and results in educational settings at the B1 level. This research provides qualitative evidence from a phenomenological perspective by delving into the experiences and perceptions of the direct participants.

Methodologically, the study is justified by its design, which is ideal for understanding the complexity of a social and educational phenomenon such as the learning process, where subjective, affective, and cultural dimensions are essential. The research employs the tools of the qualitative paradigm to explore the perceptions, criteria, experiences, and feelings of the participants. This model that can be replicated or adapted in future studies.

From a social perspective, this work is justified by the need to continuously improve and enhance the academic development processes of foreign language students. Therefore, by investigating a methodology like this, the impact of its use as part of study programs is reviewed. In this regard, specific recommendations are presented to foster improvements in the application of Tandem sessions, based on the experiences shared by the participants in this study.

Regarding feasibility, this study is viable due to the institutional, academic, and contextual conditions under which it is conducted. The research is carried out at the South American Language Center in Riobamba, where the Tandem method is already implemented as part of regular English instruction. This context ensures access to B1-level students, the collaboration of instructors, and the availability of authentic learning environments necessary for data collection.

## **1.4.Objectives**

### **1.4.1 General objective**

In order to answer that question, the general objective of this research is:

To describe how the Tandem method contributes on English Speaking Skills in B1 level students at the South American Language Center in the city of Riobamba, Chimborazo Province, during the 2025 Academic Period.

### **1.4.2. Specific objective**

To achieve that goal, they were defined three specific objectives:

1) To identify through a bibliographic review, the principles and processes associated with the Tandem method.

2) To explore the experiences and perceptions of students and teachers regarding how the Tandem method contributes to the teaching and learning of oral skills

3) To interpret the principles and processes of the Tandem method obtained through the bibliographic review and the experiences and perceptions of students and teachers from interviews, on its contribution on the teaching and learning of oral skills.

## CHAPTER II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1. Foundations of Oral Competence in Foreign Language Learning

#### 2.1.1. *The Importance of Oral Skills in Global Communication*

In today's interconnected world, oral competence in foreign languages stands as a fundamental pillar for effective communication, sociocultural integration and professional advancement. As González (2024) notes, mastering verbal abilities goes beyond the simple exchange of information; it serves as a vehicle for constructing intercultural identities and participating in globalized spaces. This view is in general terms coincident with recent studies that show that oral fluency facilitates everyday exchanges as well as it opens academic and professional opportunities in multinational environments (Wilczewski & Alon, 2023). In educational contexts, Baxter (2024) emphasizes that speaking activates complex cognitive processes such as negotiating meaning and adapting pragmatically, which are essential for navigating real-life situations where language functions as a tool for social agency.

This skill becomes even more relevant when considering the demands of the 21st century. Zhou (2023) reveals in his study that professionals with strong oral skills tend to be more resilient in international work environments, as they can coordinate ideas more clearly and, consequently, manage intercultural conflicts and build collaborative networks. In the educational field, oral expression fosters critical thinking, since when articulating arguments in a foreign language, students organize their ideas logically, evaluate different perspectives and develop a metacognitive awareness of their own learning (2023). In this way, a question is raised towards the pedagogical myths that privilege grammatical improvement rather than oral communicative precision. In the words of Nam (2023), effective communication requires a balance between precision, that is: the correct use of structures, and effectiveness, understood as the transmission of clear messages in real time.

Even with their undeniable merits, traditional teaching models have historically tended to relegate the development of oral skills. In contemporary studies on the subject, it is seen that approaches such as the Grammatical Translation and Audio-Lingual methods promote mechanical repetition and text analysis, which gives rise to gaps in the preparation of students, who demonstrate more capacity to solve written exercises, but certain difficulties to interact spontaneously (Şan et al., 2020). This breach is particularly evident in middle levels like MCER B1, where learners have basic linguistic resources, but they lack self-

confidence to use them in a authentic dialog. AL-Madani (2021) refers to a vicious cycle where the fear of making mistakes inhibits oral practice and consequently, unsatisfactory practice deepens insecurity. In opposite, innovative approaches such as the Tandem method pursue to break this cycle by creating spaces for reciprocal and judgment-free exchange.

Additional evidence is received from cognitive neuroscience that supports the need to prioritize the development of oral skills. For Baxter (2024), the act of communicating in a foreign language reinforces the neural connections that influence the procedural memory that intervenes in automated skills, as well as speeds up decision-making processes. This mechanism explains why continuous oral practice promotes not only fluency but also listening comprehension and linguistic processing. Such results strengthen the conception of oral competence as a transversal component that positively influences other skills and accelerates overall language acquisition. Dealing with Suwarno (2017), oral expression proficiency is a key pointer of communicative competence, which requires curricula and pedagogical approaches absorbed on this skill. Giving prominence to oral production leads to greater learning outcomes and supports the effectiveness of language teaching programs.

From what has been seen up to now, it is clear that the primacy of oral skills lies in their role as a central axis of comprehensive communicative competence. Their expansion transcends linguistic borders, by encompassing sociocultural, cognitive and professional dimensions and has become an essential requirement for full participation in the global knowledge society.

### ***2.1.2. Challenges in the Development of Oral Competence: Anxiety, Pedagogical Gaps and Contextual Factors***

The development of oral competence in foreign languages faces several obstacles that extend well beyond purely linguistic challenges. Recent research has highlighted three closely linked problematic areas-affective-emotional barriers, methodological restrictions and socio-contextual constraints-which, when tangled, significantly hinder the development and effective use of oral skills. When these factors interact, they foster the creation of a collaborative network of tasks that must be understood by both students and teachers to achieve sustained oral proficiency.

One of the most frequently mentioned barriers is affective-emotional in nature. The concept of foreign language speaking anxiety (FLSA) remains a source of inhibition for many students. Neuroscience research on this topic suggests that the stress present in oral

interaction situations can activate the pituitary gland, a brain structure associated with emotional processing. This can interrupt or delay normal access to previously memorized linguistic resources. Self-awareness of these errors is often more intense in students at an intermediate level, such as CEFR B1, given the development of metacognitive processes regarding their own mistakes (Rahmadani & Eftita, 2022). In practical terms, this means that students, despite possessing adequate grammatical knowledge and vocabulary demonstrated in evaluative exercises, often have difficulties using these same resources for spontaneous oral communication, since the fear of making mistakes cancels the communicative intention.

Methodological limitations also play a significant role. The persistent disconnect between theoretical objectives and practical implementation in traditional classrooms has been described as a “communicative paradox”: language is trained in order to enable communication, yet few genuine chances are created for learners to actually communicate. Comparative analyses all over more than a dozen of countries indicate that more than the tree third parts of classroom time in English teaching is devoted to monologic activities, specially teacher-to-student exchanges, rather than dialogic or interactive formats that are essential for developing conversational competence (Sato, 2024). As a consequence of the above, the classroom often becomes a space for the passive reception of knowledge about the foreign language instead of promoting the active production of language.

Social factors tend to reinforce these problems. In predominantly Spanish-speaking environments, such as much of Latin America, opportunities for authentic linguistic development outside the school setting remain limited. According to some published studies, in Ecuador, just under 12% of English students practice their communicative skills outside the classroom. This lack of extracurricular practice, despite being well-designed in the classroom, limits its ability to manifest as spontaneous and confident discourse in English-speaking contexts.

The study leaded by Wijaya (2022) emphasizes that language teachers, as key educational stakeholders, must fully understand the factors driving high levels of foreign language speaking anxiety and implement innovative approaches across varied L2 communicative contexts. Creating supportive oral environments, providing intensive speaking practice and using meaningful materials can gradually reduce learners' anxiety and enhance both performance and academic achievement. However, due to the small-scale qualitative nature and small sample size, the results should be interpreted with caution and cannot be widely extrapolated. In this regard, it is suggested that data collection instruments

be diversified and expanded, as well as those strategies tailored to the needs of Indonesian EFL learners be investigated. This will support teachers in designing motivating and contextualized conversation knowledges that sustainably strengthen communicative competence in real-life contexts. Even with its limitations, Wijaya's study provides valuable understandings for practitioners, policymakers and teachers seeking to optimize L2 conversation education.

In short, addressing these challenges requires adopting teaching approaches capable of breaking down the triad of anxiety, isolation and the fossilization of restricted linguistic patterns. The most effective interventions should foster authentic and secure interactions that minimize the fear of error, expand the possibilities for dialogic exchange and integrate language use into meaningful, real-life settings. This principle paves the way for a critical investigation of prevailing traditional methodologies, whose structural limitations often perpetuate the problems they seek to overcome, a topic developed in more detail in section 2.2.

### ***2.2.3. Critical Analysis of Traditional Language Teaching Methods***

Despite notable advances, the persistence of traditional pedagogical approaches in foreign language teaching reflects a concerning disconnect between contemporary communicative needs and prevailing classroom practices. Methods such as the Grammar Translation, the Audio-Lingual and the Direct Approaches, even with their historical contributions, present structural limitations widely documented in specialized literature. Empirical studies indicate that these models perpetuate an instructional imbalance, privileging fragmented linguistic dimensions over general communicative competence (Yassin et al., 2024).

In line with the development of digital technologies, various teaching resources have emerged, such as the Audiolingual method, whose emphasis on repetition has generated intense debate. Scientific evidence indicates that the stimulation provided by the systematic repetition of certain intellectual exercises is less than the effects of practical activities involving interaction, communication, reasoning, and agile thinking. The different processes that occur at the brain level partly explain why, despite achieving clear and understandable pronunciation, many students trained with this method show a limited capacity to adapt to communicative exchanges outside of academically designed programs (Daher et al., 2017).

Similarly, research in India and Mexico indicates that when speakers are corrected in their pronunciation, they experience a degree of demotivation and a reduced likelihood of taking communicative risks. This phenomenon is associated with what is known as grammatical hypervigilance syndrome, in which students focus more on avoiding errors in message transmission, thus tending to inhibit oral initiative (Musa & Khazaei, 2020).

According to Labenko (2023), traditional teaching approaches place central emphasis on grammar, terminology and text-based work, relegating communicative competence to the background. They are founded on imitation, have a imperfect creative dimension and are criticized for not sufficiently preparing students to interact in real-life contexts, despite their historical relevance in the field of language teaching. This issue aligns with Beshir's (2024) review, in which the author outstands the extensiveness of language teaching methodologies, by surrounding Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and the Direct Method, each contribution distinct benefits and considerations for instructors. Emphasis is placed on the centrality of well-grounded techniques and principles as a framework for circumnavigating methodological diversity. Synthesized best practices point to adaptability and a design centered on learner, supported by the integration of technology, interdisciplinary content and gamified learning opportunities.

Technological advances –continues Beshir— are shown to improve personalization and interactivity, aligning with the shift toward online and remote learning. Ultimately, actual language teaching appears as a dynamic synthesis of principles, responsiveness to learner needs and openness to innovation, sustained through collaboration among educators, investigators and technology to address evolving educational contexts. According to Sadiqzade (2024), listening is an essential pillar for the development of oral proficiency in foreign language learning, as it improves comprehension, pronunciation and fluency. Planned listening practice, especially when maintained by authentic materials, permits students to engage in real-life conversations and effectively fortify their communication skills.

A comparative analysis of the three methodologies examined reveals four common limitations supported by recent studies. In the first place, the practice is characterized by its artificiality, removed from genuine conversational genres such as negotiations or academic presentations, which makes it hard to transfer to the real world. In the other side, according to data from Global ELT Monitor (2024), the teacher's predominant control over the

collaborating dynamic significantly reduces students' oral construction time. Third, assessments focus almost exclusively on the product of the learning activity, that is, phonological accuracy or lexical precision. This shifts the focus away from interpsychological strategies or turn-taking. Finally, and importantly, the cultural homogenization of the learning materials undermines the preservation of local identities in efforts to practice a foreign language effectively.

Given this scenario, substitute methodologies are required, such as the Tandem approach, which deeply reconfigure the guiding principles of the teaching-learning process. Overcoming these limitations entails prioritizing reciprocity over hierarchy, genuineness over imitation and collaborative construction over one-way transmission (Vaydulla, 2023). In this critical context, the Tandem method arises as a pedagogical innovation and also as a structural response to the shortcomings of traditional models, an aspect that will be addressed in the following section through an analysis of its theoretical and operational foundations.

## **2.2. General Overview of the Tandem Method**

### ***2.2.1. Origin, Evolution and Pedagogical Foundations of the Tandem Method***

The genesis, evolution and pedagogical foundations of the Tandem method are essential elements for understanding its current application in foreign language learning. The term “Tandem” first appeared in 1971, associated with Wambach’s Audiovisual Method, although its earliest implementations date back to meetings between German and French youths as early as 1968. These experiences sought, in addition to linguistic mastery, intercultural rapprochement, laying the groundwork for the subsequent development of the method.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the Tandem method expanded rapidly thanks to the creation of international networks (the International (E-mail) Tandem Network founded in 1992 by Helmut Brammerts) and then appears as an option of alternative schools that facilitated language exchange between speakers of different countries. This spread was made able by the translation of materials and the implementation of courses in several languages, enabling the adoption and adaptation of the method in academic and social international contexts (Wolf, 2023).

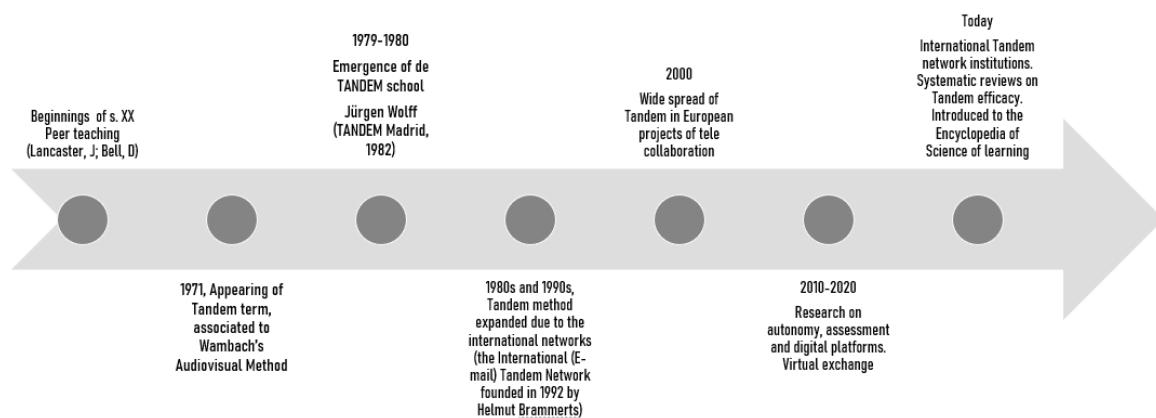
Tandem is characterized by function in bilingual pairs, in which participants alternate between the roles of teacher and learner in each native languages and personal goals. This format adopts both language learning and direct and everyday contact with the partner’s

culture and social environment, which make it one of the most relevant forms of autonomous learning in language education. Autonomy becomes a main principle, granting the learner concern over the content, pace and mode of education. Give-and-take interaction and authentic communication create an environment conducive to the development of communicative competence and intrinsic motivation, aspects outstanding in recent literature as key to success in the acquisition of a foreign language (Morán, 1998).

The evolution of the Tandem method is closely linked to technological advances, especially from the integration of digital tools and the proliferation of applications that enable exchanges without geographical limitations. Platforms such as HelloTalk, Speaky and Tandem Language Exchange make it possible to carry out international language exchanges in real time with native speakers of the desired language. This technological leap has revitalized and broadened the Tandem method beyond face-to-face education, integrating new modalities such as e-Tandem, which leverages synchronous communication for more flexible and contextually adapted practice (Cortes et al., 2020). The figure 1 illustrates in a condensed way, the main points of Tandem evolution to these days.

**Figure 1**

*Timeline illustrating the principal events that have marked the Tandem evolution*



Note: Author's elaboration, adapted from Batardière (2020); Morán (1998); Musa & Kahzaei (2020); Petryk (2022); Rodríguez (2024) and Salziger (2022).

Regarding its pedagogical basis, the Tandem method draws on theories such as learner autonomy, collaborative pedagogy and learning based on communicative interaction. Henri Holec (quoted by Rodríguez, 2024), in his work, sustains that education should serve to awaken the learner's awareness and transform their environment. Tandem strengthens these principles by promoting decision-making, metacognitive reflection and the equal

exchange of knowledge (2024). The communicative and intercultural approach is also present, establishing that language learning is not merely a matter of grammatical competence but of integration and deep understanding of the native speaker's culture and context. This interdisciplinary and person-centered nature of the Tandem method is supported by recent research that emphasizes the importance of including multiple cultural and social perspectives in the teaching–learning process .

On Rodríguez's (2024) opinion, Tandem learning is an attempt to acquire foreign languages in which pupils from different countries and linguistic circumstances interrelate with the determination of exchanging knowledge and repeatedly purifying their proficiency in the language they are studying. It is characterized by its autonomous charm, as each participant decides which content to work on, how to approach it and how to evaluate their own advancement. Likewise, it promotes the development of intercultural skills by fostering direct contact with speakers from other backgrounds, thus facilitating the understanding and use of the language in real contexts.

Paredes (2024), on her side, notes that Tandem learning lays on three fundamental principles. In first place, it strongly emphasizes on autonomy, with learners taking responsibility for their own educational process, including recognizing their requirements, setting goals and developing strategies to achieve them. Secondly, the principle of reciprocity underlines the significance of mutual benefit, as both partners pledge to foster mutual learning and ensure a beneficial exchange for all. Finally, intercultural learning is essential, as tandem learning fosters communication between people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, thus endorsing intercultural understanding and learning.

Studies conducted over the past two decades suggest that the Tandem method growths students' motivation, advances oral proficiency and enhances intercultural understanding. Thus, it emerges as a flexible, autonomous and collaborative pedagogical resource, with growing empirical evidence of its benefits in both in-person and virtual contexts. This conceptual foundation makes it possible to understand the dynamics and organization of Tandem sessions, an aspect to be addressed in the next subsection, which will detail the practical procedures and current modalities that integrate this method both in and outside the classroom.

### ***2.2.2 Dynamics and organization of Tandem sessions.***

The use of tandems fosters a remote connection between native speakers of the target languages involved. As Alvarado and Bueno (2023) explain, the objective of virtual language tandems is to achieve effective communicative competence between two people with different native languages, since this allows them to correct each other constructively during the interaction. This format fosters in students a strong willingness to help and cooperate with each other to facilitate communication. At the same time, it acts as a promoter of interculturality, as it improves student autonomy, since each participant assumes responsibility for their own learning process and develops a shared consciousness with others.

The dynamic of tandem sessions is based on alternating roles between participants, with each acting successively as a tutor in their native language and as a learner in the target language. Sessions are usually separated into two equal blocks, with time reserved for spontaneous dialogue and activities intended at developing specific skills. In the first half of the session, Speaker 1 assumes the role of tutor in their native language, modifying and shaping expressions for Speaker 2. This exchange encourages oral production through open-ended questions and pre-designed conversation tasks. In the second half of the exercise, the roles are reversed. Here, Speaker 2 guides the interaction and provides feedback in their native language. According to Paredes (2024), this approach ensures balance in communicative practice and fosters autonomy in learning, as each participant focuses on their own linguistic progress rather than monitoring or criticizing the other's errors.

To ensure that each meeting runs in an organized and productive manner, it is essential that participants define precise objectives, conversation topics and support resources in advance. In some tandems, dialog guides covering everyday topics such as family, studies, or work are used, as well as role-playing activities such as mock interviews or debates and exercises to correct linguistic errors. These guides can be developed jointly by participants or provided by the institution, allowing tasks to be tailored to learners' interests and needs. Likewise, as noted by Cortes et al. (2020), the option to choose between diverse formats, presential, synchronous or asynchronous virtual, widens the choice of the method and encourages the integration of digital tools such as video calls, messaging applications, or shared sources for exchanging written and audiovisual resources.

Interaction regulation in Tandem sessions follows principles of fairness and mutual assistance, based on a peer relationship. It is endorsed that interlocutors establish

communication rules, such as non-invasive reciprocal correction, observing and respecting speaking turns and using metacognitive strategies. For instance, instead of interrupting, the tutor might note errors and suggest a brief corrective activity at the end of the exchange, which develop trust and minimizing communication anxiety (González, 2015; Paredes, 2024). Similarly, planning moments for self-assessment and mutual feedback at the end of the session promotes reflection on achievements and areas for improvement, strengthening meaningful learning and learner autonomy.

Authors such as Topal (2024), Musa & Khazaei (2020) and Yurinova et al. (2024) highlight that, in practical implementation, educational institutions often provide prior training for participants to optimize the quality of Tandem meetings, both in face-to-face and virtual formats. This first section is dedicated to understanding methodological objectives, using technological platforms and developing intercultural skills. In addition, many programs assign an external tutor or coordinator to monitor and guide progress, offer guidance and resolve conflicts that may arise during connections between language pairs. Supervision by the teaching institution ensures consistency with curricular objectives and smooths data collection for program evaluation, what allows systematic adjustments and feedback from students and teachers.

Tandem sessions are structured through role alternation, joint activity arrangement and the establishment of common norms, with institutional sustenance. This approach encourages oral practice in real-life contexts, promoting participants' motivation and autonomy by providing a collaborative, fair and contextualized learning environment. Understanding these undercurrents helps explain why this method enhances the development of oral skills, a topic that will be discussed in more depth when analyzing its research-based profits.

### **Tandem Method Process (Brammerts, 2003)**

**Group organization:** Participants are organized into small groups with complementary languages or proficiency levels, which allows them to support each other, share linguistic knowledge, and promote reciprocal learning from the beginning of the interaction.

**Initial orientation:** A brief orientation is provided where clear rules and expectations are established. This includes the principles of reciprocity, learner

responsibility, and balanced use of the target languages, ensuring that all members contribute and benefit equally from the exchange.

**Communicative interaction:** Learners engage in authentic and meaningful oral communication activities. Throughout the sessions, they alternate roles as learners and tutors, helping one another clarify meaning, solve language problems, and negotiate communication within the group.

**Reflection and self-evaluation:** At the end of each exchange, students reflect on their linguistic and communicative progress and receive peer feedback. This process strengthens learner autonomy, since students become aware of what they improved and what they still need to develop.

### ***2.2.3 Benefits of the Tandem Method According to Research Evidence***

The Tandem method, as a pedagogical strategy for learning foreign languages, has been the subject of multiple studies that highlight its benefits in both the development of linguistic competences and in socio-emotional and cultural aspects. Numerous studies in educational contexts have shown that the reciprocal interaction and collaborative approach of the method foster significant improvements in learners' oral fluency, listening comprehension and communicative confidence.

Among the most notable benefits is the upgrading in fluency and spontaneity of speakers. By allowing students to practice straight with native speakers or more proficient peers in a comfortable environment, free from the inflexibility of a traditional classroom, the Tandem methodology inspires repeated practice and linguistic structures. Studies on the subject report that this partial engagement experience, combined with mutual rectification, reduces communication anxiety and promotes natural language internalization. In this regard, Beshir (2024), Cruz (2023) and Nam (2023), among others, also note that the alternation of teacher-learner roles fosters a deeper, more active understanding of the language by motivating participants to reflect on their own linguistic use and correct errors.

Another key advantage of the method is the strengthening of intercultural competence. Direct communication with a native speaker entails not only learning the language, but also immersion in the values, customs and ways of thinking characteristic of another culture (Musa & Khazaei, 2020). Tandem interactions have been recognized as privileged spaces for developing intercultural skills such as empathy, tolerance and adaptability. Several studies conducted in general education and teacher training programs

show that this cultural dimension stimulates learning motivation and offers new opportunities for enriching experiences that transcend the linguistic sphere. This, as Elo and Pörn (2021) point out, contributes to the development of more aware and competent global citizens.

The development of student autonomy is another widely documented positive outcome. In the Tandem context, students manage their own learning, from choosing content to planning and self-assessing sessions. In Rodríguez's (2024) experience, this responsibility translates into greater intrinsic motivation and the ability to self-assess and self-correct. This, obviously, makes students active protagonists of their progress and subjects of their own transformation. Academic literature highlights how this autonomy fosters overcoming the limitations of traditional methods, as it provides students with the tools to continue learning independently beyond the formal course.

Indeed, autonomy is one of the most praised qualities in Tandem. In this regard, Cortes et al. (2020) point out that within the Tandem method it is essential to value responsibility and perseverance, the ability to reach agreements with one's partner, self-motivation and independence in defining goals and working methods. As a cooperative experience, Tandem also needs shared responsibility and compromise, flexibility to negotiate and adapt to the other's needs, inclination to motivate both one's partner and the joint dynamic and an attitude geared toward enabling the achievement of shared goals. Likewise, mutual interdependence becomes a fundamental pillar, as each participant's improvement is thoroughly linked to reciprocal support and the excellence of interaction established.

In turn, Salzinger et al. (2022) highlight the usefulness of implementing Tandem in language-teaching programs during the difficult years of the COVID-19 pandemic. Interaction in international settings is increasingly relevant in STEM disciplines (also known as the hard sciences). To strengthen this student population's linguistic and intercultural competences, Tandem.MINT was created—an innovative program specifically designed for their needs. Initially developed in person, fostering mutual support between local and international students, it switched to a virtual format during the pandemic, which made it possible to collaborate with foreign universities and expand participation. Evaluations showed that both the in-person and—especially—the e-Tandem modalities were well received and significantly improved these competences.

In addition, the Tandem method fosters the integration of multiple skills by combining oral production, listening comprehension and the use of technological tools in either face-to-face or virtual formats. The mixture of these elements has made it conceivable to improve overall communicative competence, what simplify expression as well as active listening and effective interaction in real or replicated contexts. According to Petryk (2022) and Vaydulla (2023), this advantage has been particularly noted in language-teacher training.

Digital Tandem platforms have amplified these benefits, enabling flexible connections and the amalgamation of multimedia sources that augment the learning experience. For instance, as Schug & Torea (2023) explain, the e-Tandem language-teaching system involves pairs of students from different native-language backgrounds engaging in virtual meetings to practice each other's language, alternating between conversation and relevant activities, which enhances motivation and communication skills in the target language.

However, research evidence also points to certain challenges associated with the method, such as the need for adequate teacher training and support, time management and adaptation to cultural and linguistic differences that may hinder interaction (Tian, 2025). These challenges have been addressed through institutional support strategies and careful pedagogical design that ensure the quality and effectiveness of the Tandem program.

Current research evidence confirms that the Tandem method is an innovative and effective strategy for language teaching, capable of greatly enhancing learners' oral skills, intercultural competence and autonomy. Its application in globalized and digital environments reinforces its value, while encouraging the search for new resources and modalities to optimize its implementation. This favorable outlook naturally leads to reflection on its specific use in developing oral expression, which is an aspect addressed in the next section through the analysis of indicators, motivations and pedagogical resources involved.

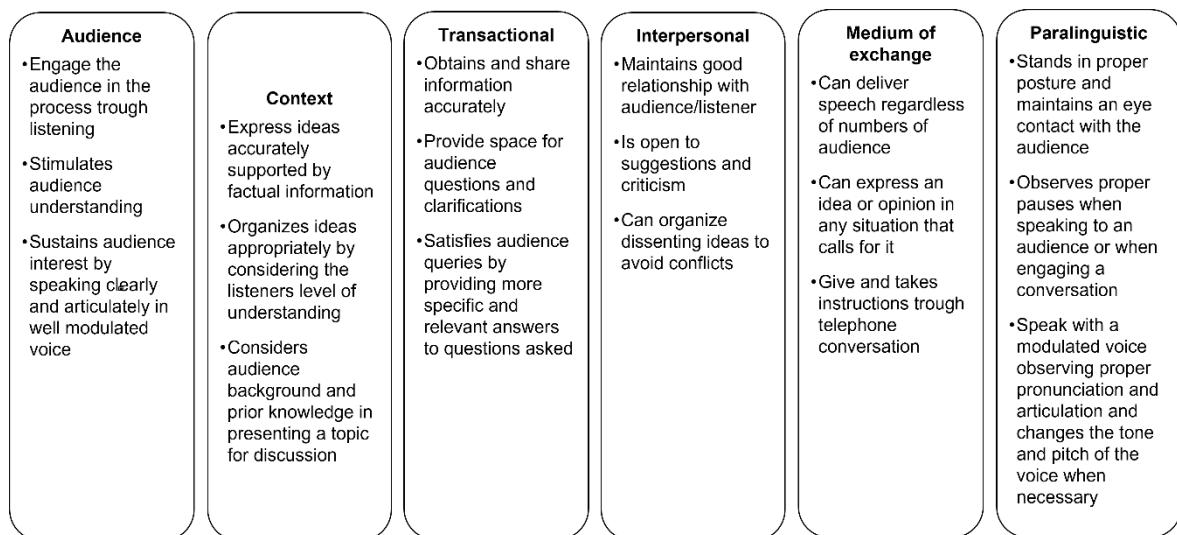
### **2.3. Conceptualization of the Tandem method in developing oral skills**

#### **2.3.1 *Indicators of oral skills***

Oral skills in foreign language acquisition represent a central axis of communicative development, whose assessment requires the definition of precise indicators that consider not only grammatical accuracy but also effectiveness in interaction, fluency and sociocultural appropriateness. According to Muñoz et al. (2023), in the last decade, research

in language teaching has promoted a holistic approach to establishing such indicators, integrating linguistic, pragmatic and functional dimensions, as well as affective and strategic factors. In this way, the literature addresses the issue from multiple perspectives. For example, Salagan (2025) refers to oral skills from six perspectives: audience, context, transactional, interpersonal, means of exchange and paralinguistic, as shown in figure 2.

**Figure 2**  
*Indicators of speaking skills*



Note: Author's elaboration, adapted from Salagan (2025, pp. 4549-4552).

According to this study, the greatest difficulties arise in communicative skills as a means of exchange, for which a curriculum review, policy formulation and specific intervention actions are recommended. Additional training is advised for both students and teachers. In turn, Durruthy et al. (2024) present research results aimed at developing activities that foster the development of oral expression in English among Medical Sciences students, using a different taxonomy.

**Table 1**  
*Dimensions and indicators of speaking skills in general professionals*

Dimensions	Indicators
Semantic coherence	Clarity and quality of ideas Logical articulation of ideas
Pragmatic coherence	Appropriate expression of intentions in academic context Appropriate expression of modal attitudes according to context Appropriate expression of stylistic register according to context Use of communicative strategies
Cohesion	Organization of the oral text according to communicative event Connection between parts of the text and their discourse markers
Linguistic accuracy	Correct use of articulation patterns and intonation

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- Correct use of vocabulary
- Correct use of grammatical forms
- Use of necessary pauses and rhythm that contributes to fluency

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Note: Taken from Durruthy et al. (2024, pp. 541-542).

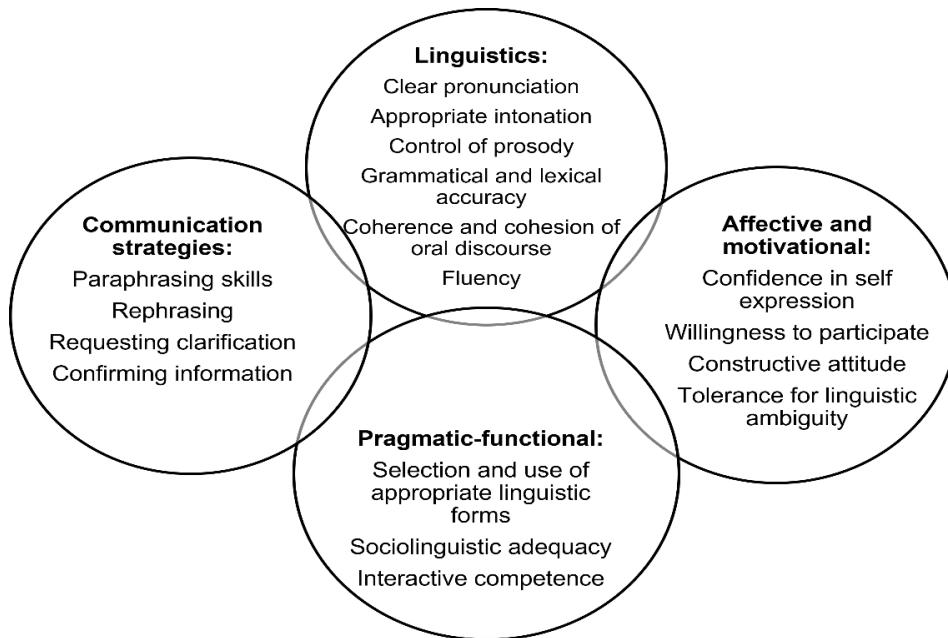
Their study shows deficiencies in the English subject related to developing oral expression skills for effective communication in that language.

Recent studies propose multiple dimensions to define oral competence indicators. In the linguistic domain, clear pronunciation, appropriate intonation and prosodic control are considered key to intelligibility, along with grammatical and lexical accuracy and discourse coherence and cohesion. De la Cruz (2025) call the attention on the fact that, although essential role of these factors, they are not enough to assess competence in real contexts, where fluency (considered as permanent, continued and natural speech) is decisive, measured by rhythm, speed and spontaneity of the oral expression.

From a pragmatic-functional perspective, it is crucial to adapt language use to the communicative situation, managing registers and courtesy formulas specific to the target culture, as well as negotiating meaning. Interactive competence includes maintaining conversations, managing turns, asking and answering questions and applying strategies to resolve communication breakdowns (Petryk, 2022). Paraphrasing, reformulation and clarification requests are valued alongside affective factors such as confidence, willingness, attitude toward errors and tolerance of ambiguity, all of which require anxiety-free environments. These ideas are summarized in figure 3.

### **Figure 3**

*Different perspectives of speaking skills*



*Note:* Author's elaboration

The assessment of oral production is carried out through various instruments, including structured oral tests, interviews, role-play simulations and observation of Tandem interactions. These practices are usually supported by detailed rubrics that weight criteria such as fluency, accuracy and interaction, enabling comprehensive formative evaluation. Observing the recommendations of Sorial (2024), analytical rubrics divide general performance into specific mechanisms, measuring each criterion individually to deliver detailed feedback on explicit aspects of communicative ability. This method evaluates clarity, pronunciation, content accuracy and language use. That permits students to improve specific areas of oral performance. Possible criteria include the accuracy of sounds and intonation, the variety and relevance of vocabulary, the organization and coherence of discourse and the ability to maintain audience interest.

This same author also suggests peer assessment based on rubrics, which define criteria for oral tasks such as pronunciation, fluency, content and interaction. This instrument allows students, by listening to their peers, to detect clarity, intonation and natural rhythm, evaluate the relevance and completeness of information and recognize the ability to maintain a conversation. The use of rubrics facilitates constructive, specific and useful feedback, encouraging concrete suggestions for improvement. In teacher-led evaluations, rubrics offer transparency and objectivity, by feedbacking to defined criteria and balancing positive aspects with areas for progress, thus improving oral skills and fostering mutual trust among students. In this regard, the Performance Descriptors for Language Learners, developed by

the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACFLT), are especially useful.

The American Council is a leading organization dedicated to the enhancement and enlargement of foreign language teaching. With decades of experience, ACTFL has developed comprehensive ideals, guidelines and performance descriptors that function as essential tools for educators. These instruments provide clear benchmarks for assessing language proficiency and presentation crosswise different age groups and educational sceneries. ACTFL resources focus on practical communication skills, cultural awareness and real-life language use, supporting educators in designing appropriate curricula and assessments. Their ongoing work reflects a commitment to advancing language teaching and fostering meaningful, authentic language learning experiences worldwide.

The diagram in Table 2 reflects the main domains recommended observing and assessing to measure learners' oral proficiency, organized according to their performance ranges (Novice, Intermediate, Advanced) and communicative modes (interpersonal, interpretive and presentational) (ACFLT, 2015).

**Table 2**  
ACTFL recommended indicators for assessing oral language skills

INDICATOR	DESCRIPTION	KEY CHARACTERISTICS
Language Control	The level of accuracy and command over grammatical structures, vocabulary, and language conventions.	Learners produce comprehensible language with sufficient control for the assessed performance range.
Vocabulary	The breadth and appropriateness of vocabulary used to express ideas in various contexts.	Use of high-frequency vocabulary, formulaic expressions, and personalized or specialized vocabulary by level.
Communication Strategies	Techniques used to maintain communication and construct meaning when faced with limitations.	Includes paraphrasing, self-correction, asking for clarification, non-verbal cues, and overcoming communication breakdowns.
Cultural Awareness	The use of cultural knowledge to adapt language and behave appropriately in social and cultural contexts.	Recognition and application of cultural norms, expressions, and communicative styles according to the situation.
Communicative Functions	Types of tasks the learner can perform, such as requesting, describing, narrating, conversing, arguing.	Ability to use language for socially relevant functions appropriate to the performance level.
Contexts and Content	The thematic areas and situations in which the learner can function communicatively.	Includes personal, <u>everyday</u> , academic, work-related, and social topics suitable for the learner's level.
Text Type	Formats and structures of spoken language the learner can understand or produce.	Ranges from words and simple phrases to organized, detailed oral discourse (oral paragraphs).
Fluency	Capacity to produce speech with speed, naturalness, and minimal pauses or hesitations.	Implicit in the assessment of interpersonal interaction and oral production performance

Note: Proper elaboration, adapted from ACFLT (2015)

Although these indicators allow for systematic analysis, experience in contexts such as Tandem shows that oral competence develops dynamically in close connection with real interaction and communicative culture. Therefore, assessment should incorporate flexibility and cultural sensitivity, aligning with learner motivation and autonomy—topics addressed in the next section.

### ***2.3.2. Pedagogical resources for assessing the development of language skills.***

Assessing the development of language skills in Tandem contexts requires current and flexible pedagogical resources adapted to the interactive nature of learning. The contemporary approach prioritizes formative and continuous assessment, in which the student is actively involved, receives feedback and can reflect on their progress (Baxter, 2024). Recent research indicates that combining diverse instruments strengthens the comprehensive assessment of oral communicative competence, favoring the identification

of real progress in both face-to-face and virtual environments (Alvarado & Bueno, 2023; Batardiere & Jeanneau, 2020).

As explained in the previous section, rubrics have gained prominence in language education and are widely recommended for assessing oral production. They allow for the objective assessment of dimensions such as fluency, pronunciation, discourse cohesion, sociolinguistic adequacy and interaction. Its structure facilitates self-assessment and peer-to-peer evaluation, promoting critical reflection and metacognitive improvement (Sorial, 2024). In the Tandem method, their use is encouraged at the beginning and end of each communicative activity, to integrate criteria designed based on the objectives of each session and adjusted to the sociocultural context of the participants.

Another indispensable tool is checklists and field diaries. Both of them are used to systematically record performance indicators. These resources allow monitoring specifics such as the level of participation, the use of communicative tactics, the overcoming of obstacles and the attitude toward errors pointed out to them. Field diaries have proven particularly useful in qualitative research, where students record feelings, difficulties, achievements and strategies used, which encourages reflective analysis and personalized assessment (Álvarez et al., 2023).

The incorporation of digital technologies has enhanced oral evaluation, both in e-Tandem and hybrid situations. The use of speech recognition platforms, artificial intelligence correction systems, recorders and automated feedback applications allows for the documentation of pronunciation patterns, error analysis and the formulation of immediate endorsements for speech rectification. Video conferencing and online chat applications have expanded the possibilities of recording sessions, analyzing interactions and including asynchronous assessments that mitigate anxiety and promote active participation (Delgado et al., 2025).

Another emerging resource is guided self-assessment and peer assessment, where students and their peers provide performance evaluations using instruments such as ordinal scales from 1 to 5, questionnaires and reflective discussions following the Tandem activity (Zayas et al., 2025). This practice, maintained by empirical studies from the last two years, nurtures autonomy, increases consciousness of learning processes and occupies students in decision-making concerning their continuous perfection (Bernal, 2021).

The mixture of varied pedagogical resources including oral diagnostic tests, active observation and collaborative projects, matches and enriches the comprehensive evaluation of language abilities in tandem contexts (Rodríguez, 2024). This process is consolidated through learning strategies—metacognitive and affective-motivational—that are continuously detected, modeled and incorporated. This advantage allows for immediate adjustments and personalized attention based on identified needs.

The integration of instruments such as rubrics, checklists, field diaries, digital tools, self-assessment and peer-assessment facilitates accurate assessment while encouraging the ethical and reflective engagement of participants. This approach makes students active agents of their own progress, stimulating their autonomy and commitment (Meneses & Medina, 2021). Thus, the holistic assessment perspective not only completes the methodological cycle of oral expression development in Tandem settings, but also consolidates learning and guides the planning of future strategies to optimize and innovate in language teaching.

## CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY

From a constructivist ontological perspective, reality is seen as socially constructed through interactions (Pretorius, 2024). Epistemologically, this study adopts an interpretative approach, focusing on understanding participants' subjective experiences within their social context (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022).

The present study adopts a phenomenological tradition because it seeks to understand and interpret the lived experiences and perceptions of participants regarding the use of the Tandem method to develop English speaking skill. As it was explained by Creswell and Poth (2018), phenomenology, in terms of scientific research, attempts to describe the shared sense of a phenomenon as experienced by numerous individuals by focusing on the essence of those experiences. This approach is well-suited to the this planned study, due to the fact that it allows for an in-depth exploration of how participant's perception, feeling and making sense of their contact with the Tandem method in real-life educational sceneries. By the mean of semi-structured interviews and narrative accounts, the research appropriates the subjective perspectives of the actors complicated, which is also characteristic of the phenomenological research model that was described by Creswell (2025).

### 3.1 Research approach

Qualitative research provides methods and philosophical foundations that guide the research process and construct theoretical frameworks to understand phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study adopts an epistemological constructivist approach, which holds that knowledge is socially constructed through human interaction the purpose is to interpret the perceptions of the participants, who are directly involved in the study (Justine & Goicoechea, 2010).

The spirit of the qualitative approach is to comprehend reality in its natural context, discovering the subjectivity and explanation of participants' social relations. It collects essentially non-numerical data in order to provide a profound understanding of the phenomenon (Oranga & Matere, 2023). This approach is convenient to the objectives of analyzing the influence of the Tandem method on the development of oral proficiency in English and exploring the experiences and perspectives of students and teachers concerning its effects.

### **3.2 Type of Research**

This study follows an interpretative type of research with a phenomenological orientation and field modality, as it aims to explore how students and teachers give meaning to their lived experiences with the Tandem method the South American Language Center (SALC). It seeks to understand how students perceive the development of their speaking skill through this methodology and how teachers address the opportunities and limitations that arise in its implementation. This type of research emphasizes the importance of context and personal meaning, allowing the researcher to uncover how participants interpret their reality. As Daher et al. (2017) interpretative research focuses on capturing subjective meaning, with Darley et al. (2025) highlights that qualitative studies seek to understand social phenomena through natural interactions.

### **3.3 Research Method**

This study allows the biographical narrative method, this method is used to understand the experiences of participants through their life stories and reflections. According to Castaño et al. (2023) narrative inquiry allows researchers to reconstruct the subjective meaning of educational experiences from the voices of those who live them, giving rich insight into personal perspective and social context.

### **3.4 Research Level**

This study is exploratory, aiming to investigate the impact of the Tandem method on or proficiency in English as a foreign language. Exploratory research is flexible and adaptable to new discoveries during the study, generating initial knowledge and hypothesis rather than confirming them Samad (2014). It is suitable for research topics that have been little studied and helps open new areas for future investigation.

Additionally, this research has an interpretative character, focusing on understanding how students and teachers experience and perceive the use of Tandem methods for oral skill development. The goal is to explain the meaning behind participants' experiences by deeply analyzing their subjective views, contributing theoretical and practical insights to foreign language education (Daher et al., 2017).

### **3.5 Data Collection Techniques and Instruments**

To achieve objective number 1, the documentary analysis technique will be used, using a guide for bibliographic review aimed at identifying the background, foundations,

principles and processes linked to the Tandem method. Bowen (2009) maintains that document analysis is essential to examine written sources and obtain contextualized information. For his part, Kiger (2020) emphasizes that this type of investigative resource allows for an organized and systematic extraction of relevant data from the selected sources, which facilitates both thematic categorization and interpretation of the findings.

For the second objective, the interview technique was employed, using semi-structured interview guide as an instrument to explore the experiences and perceptions of students and teachers. Ruslin et al. (2022), highlight that semi-structure interviews facilitate the collection of detailed and in-depth data and qualitative research. Additionally, Tegan (2022), state that the interview guide is essential to guide the conversation and ensure the collection of relevant information.

The interview was organized into four main categories: (1) experience with the Tandem method, which explored how the sections were carried out and the participants level of comfort; (2) perception of oral skills development, focused on how fluency, vocabulary and speaking confidence were improved by Tandem sessions; (3) intercultural interaction and collaboration, which examined how cultural diversity influenced language learning; and (4) strengths and limitations of the method, where benefits, challenges and suggestions for improvement are identified (see appendix 1). The validity of the interview was insured through expert review in linguistics, intercultural education, and qualitative methodology, who accessed the clarity relevance and coherence of the questions.

For the third objective, data triangulation was conducted by combining the documentary analysis technique and interview technique, aiming to strengthen the validity and reliability of the results. Moon (2019) emphasizes that triangulation helps to contrast different sources and perspectives, enriching the analysis. In addition, interview participants were provided with an informed consent form that clearly explained the purpose of the study, guaranteed anonymity, and ensured the confidentiality and voluntary nature of their participation, in accordance with ethical research standards (see appendix 2).

### **3.6 Techniques for analyzing and interpreting results**

This research employed methodological triangulation within a qualitative approach, using interviews and document analysis as the main data collection techniques. The ATLAS.ti software was used for data processing and analysis, enabling the organization, coding, and correlation of data from various sources. This tool facilitated a comparative and

in-depth reading of testimonies and documents, as well as the identification of key patterns, categories, and relationships related to the implementation of the Tandem method in the English language teaching and learning process (Oranga & Matere, 2023).

### **3.7 Population**

The dataset of interest for this research consisted of students from the South American Language Center in the city of Riobamba. The population was selected based on the approval and availability provided by the authorities, faculty, and students, who consented to the study being conducted at this institution. At the same time, the center offered the appropriate environment and conditions for observing and exploring the use of the Tandem method.

### **3.8. Sample**

Since the population was small and manageable, it was not necessary to take an independent sample. Therefore, the entire population, consisting of 20 students and 2 teachers, was included in the study.

## CHAPTER IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the analysis and interpretation of the qualitative data gathered through semi-structured interviews with students and foreign teachers at the South American Language Center. Following a phenomenological approach according to the methodological project, the results are organized around the themes that emerged from the participants' experiences with the Tandem method. The findings are structured into four main sections guided by the categories included in the instruments. Direct excerpts from the interviews are incorporated to ground the analysis in the participants' own perceptions and voices. The interviewee's names were exposed under their approval, except for the cases of five student that refused to appear in the text, that's why they are mentioned by their initials.

In the second epigraph of this chapter, the reader can find the discussion section where the author interprets these findings from a comparative perspective the theoretical framework, in order to provide a complete understanding of the Tandem method's impact on oral communicative skills.

### 4.1. Results

#### 4.1.1. *Lived Experiences with the Tandem Method: Expectations and Session Dynamics*

The initial engagement of participants with the Tandem method was characterized by a combination of high expectations and palpable anxiety, which gradually evolved into a sense of comfort and valued routine. Students' motivations for joining these sessions were predominantly instrumental and integrative, it means: academic, professional, and personal aspirations.

For instance, Fernanda Pantoja stated her motivation was to “*study my postgraduate degree in the USA*”. Asked about that issue, foreign professor Luis Bueño expressed a similar objective. For its part, Sofía Andrade underlined the communicative advantage at a global level by pointing out that English allows “*communicating with the rest of the world... a language that can be used to talk to everyone.*” (Andrade, J, interviewed student, 2025) These motivations fueled their expectations, focused mainly on perfecting pronunciation and achieving greater fluency through direct contact with native speakers.

A recurrent theme in the initial experiences was a significant level of foreign language speaking anxiety (FLSA). Participants like Pamela Tapa described this feeling in a very vivid way: “*The first time I was so scared and afraid... I just had a basic phrase in English and it wasn't enough to have daily conversations*” (Tapa, P, interviewed student, 2025). This sentiment was echoed by Gabriela Paguay, who expressed: “*I was nervous and*

*at the same time excited because I have never met people from other countries*” (Paguay, G, interviewed student, 2025).

Note that this aspect related to initial anxiety corroborates what AL-Madani (2021) stated, who describes a “vicious circle” in which the fear of error inhibits oral practice, perpetuating insecurity. This statement is supported by VQ's comment: “*at first it was very difficult for me to start talking, then I got over it, but I think not everyone reacts the same to the anxiety caused by someone else analyzing the way you speak.*” (QV, interviewed student, 2025).

An interesting assessment was given by the students LO, MP and Juan Carrera. According to them, at first, they were a little disoriented about how the exercise of interaction with foreign professionals was going to work. In this sense, they point out that it would have been very useful to have explanatory materials about the method, such as brochures, videos, etc. This coincides with the criteria of the two foreign participants. One of them, who has training as a teacher, explains that “*when doing exercises of this type, strong preparation must be carried out, so that discrepancies do not arise between the participants, for that in my country we use brochures and other informative materials.*” (Trani, T.Y, interviewed teacher, 2025).

The expectation of conversing with a native speaker initially created a barrier that several participants had to overcome. However, it was consistently noted that this concern decreased after the first meetings. An example is Mikaela Freire's comment: “*I felt happy and a little nervous... but I liked it,*” (Freire, M, interviewed student, 2025) which reflects a rapid transformation from anxiety to acceptance.

The positive transition from apprehension to greater communicative engagement aligns with approaches stemming from cognitive neuroscience applied to language acquisition. In this regard, Baxter (2024) points out that safe, low-pressure environments, such as those fostered by the Tandem method, deactivate the stress response associated with the amygdala, while facilitating smoother access to memorized linguistic resources and stimulating more spontaneous interaction.

The dynamics of the Tandem sessions were fundamental to facilitate this transition, as expressed by both the students and the foreign participants. The environment was perceived as clearly different from that of traditional classrooms. Both international participants highlighted reciprocity as a key element. One of them noted: “*When students understand that there is mutual benefit, they are more open and actively participate.*” (Trani, TY, interviewed teacher, 2025). Furthermore, he explained his own motivation: “*As you*

*know, I am not a Spanish speaker, so the Tandem method helps me. While the students improve their English, I learn Spanish with them*” (Trani, TY, interviewed teacher, 2025).

The principle of reciprocity, mentioned several times in the theoretical framework, is a fundamental pillar of the Tandem method. As defined by Paredes (2024) and Rodríguez (2024), the dynamics of collaborative and mutually beneficial learning break down the hierarchical structure typical of the teacher-student relationship. This fosters an environment conducive to autonomy and intrinsic motivation, essential for successful foreign language learning (Morán, 1998).

The structure of the sessions, though sometimes brief, was focused on authentic, spontaneous conversation. Students appreciated the practical focus. Bryan Hernández valued learning “*specific things and the specific costs of each country*” (Hernández, B, interviewed student, 2025), while professor Luis Bueño outstonded the importance of “*natural conversation... about daily activities*” (Bueño, L, interviewed teacher, 2025). The foreign participants adopted a facilitative role, because the engagement—according to them—was more important than the immediate correction. Foreign participant 2 described his approach: “*I engage them in speaking*” (Trani, TY, interviewed teacher, 2025), and emphasized that the preparation was more about cultural exchange than rigid material, stating: “*preparation isn't something you need to do a lot. All you need to do is prepare the cultural exchange that you want to share with the students*” (Trani, TY, interviewed teacher, 2025).

By considering the focus on authentic communication and cultural exchange over immediate grammatical correctness, one can appreciate its consistency with the critiques of traditional methods put forth by Qing-xue & Jin-fang (2007) and Şan et al. (2020). Both of these authors stays that conventional approaches prioritize grammar and writing, to the detriment of genuine oral practice.

As participants became familiar with the dynamics, their comfort level increased noticeably. José Villagómez described his experience as “*very good*,” (Villagómez, J, interviewed student, 2025) highlighting that the native teacher “*speaks clearly and makes learning English easier*” (Villagómez, J, interviewed student, 2025). Both Valentina Quisnia and AT described their “*interesting*” and “*fun*” experience, while Carla Vallego expressed feeling “*very comfortable*”. This transition from initial nervousness to a feeling of confidence and even enjoyment was a common pattern in the interviews carried out. The informal and conversational nature of the Tandem sessions created a low-anxiety environment, which encouraged students to take communicative risks more willingly.

Several interviewees expressed some dissatisfaction with the time allocated to this type of exchanges. AT stated: “*when I had managed to speak more fluently, I had to interrupt the activity to make way for another classmate.*” (AT, interviewed student, 2025) Salvador Cadena and Víctor Hernández spoke with similar ideas.

This lived experience is consistent with the pedagogical basis of the Tandem method presented in the theoretical framework, particularly with the principles of autonomy and reciprocity. The data confirm that the method succeeds in creating a space for authentic interaction, where the artificiality of traditional methods is overcome in order to address affective barriers such as anxiety.

#### ***4.1.2. Perception of Oral Skills Development: Fluency, Confidence, and Linguistic Accuracy***

The information provided by the interviews indicates that the participants appreciated a notable improvement in their English oral skills as a consequence of their participation in the Tandem method sessions. This development was most evident in oral fluency and listening comprehension, self-confidence and reduced anxiety, as well as in specific linguistic aspects such as pronunciation and vocabulary acquisition.

A paramount benefit reported by the majority of students was the enhancement of their fluency and listening comprehension. The constant exposure to the natural pace, rhythm and varied accents of native speakers, pushed their aural Juan Carreras explicitly connected this to the method’s authenticity, stating:

*“I think that the way that they speak, the sound that they produce is really important for me because it’s different... when you are trying to speak with a native, they produce other sounds, so I think that’s the better way”* (Carreras, J., interviewed student, 2025).

Similarly, Sofía Andrade noted the impact on her fluency: “*my speaking fluency has improved a lot because I have had the opportunity of speaking with native speakers and they speak very quickly*” (Andrade, S, interviewed student, 2025). This immersion in authentic speech patterns, as opposed to the often slower and more articulated language of non-native foreign participants, was consistently stressed as a key factor in accelerating their ability to process and produce language in real-time. Fernanda Pantaja captured a crucial cognitive shift experienced by many: “*I have more fluency. I think less in Spanish to speak in English*” (Pantaja, F, interviewed student, 2025). It is therefore understood that this shift away from

mental translation in favor of more direct thinking in the foreign language being studied constitutes an essential aspect in achieving fluency, as supported by the theoretical emphasis on procedural memory and automated skills.

The reported improvement in fluency and listening comprehension is theoretically supported by the studies of Cruz (2023) and Nam (2023). Both agree in identifying the reciprocal interaction and authentic environment of the Tandem method as catalysts for the natural internalization of language and the development of oral spontaneity. Baxter (2024), for his part, provides an explanation from cognitive neuroscience, when argues that systematic oral practice activates neural networks linked to procedural memory and rapid decision-making. These are precisely the mechanisms that are exercised in the spontaneous conversations of the Tandem method.

Closely tied to the development of fluency was a marked increase in self-confidence and a reduction in speaking anxiety. The supportive, low-stakes environment of the Tandem sessions permitted the students to overcome the initial fear of making mistakes. Nicole Torres, for instance, articulated this transformation clearly by expressing: “*I feel more confident too when I’m talking... when I talked with them, I was not thinking in Spanish so that helped me improve my confidence to speak to a native speaker without fearing of mistaking*” (Torres, N, interviewed student, 2025).

This sentiment was a powerful echo across the interviews. Joseph Hernández offered simple yet profound advice to newcomers, encapsulating this finding: “*Don’t be afraid. Just... They need to be more value. So don’t be afraid. Is just another person that who tries to help you*” (Hernández, J., interviewed student, 2025). The progression from Pamela Tapa’s initial state of being “so scared and afraid” to the point where she could advise others “*you need to talk... you need to come down and talk*” (Tapa, O., interviewed student, 2025) underscores the effectiveness of the method in breaking the vicious cycle of initial anxiety and insufficient practice. The role of the native foreign participants in building this confidence was very important, as several interviewees affirmed. Their patience and their emphasis on communication over perfection, as noted by professor TY Trani, opened a safe space for experimentation.

The increased confidence and reduced anxiety when speaking, documented in these results, are an important empirical contribution that validates the proposals of Paredes (2024) and Al-Madani (2021). These authors argue that, unlike traditional methods, innovative approaches must create safe spaces that minimize the fear of making mistakes. In this way,

it is clear that the Tandem method, with its reciprocal and non-hierarchical dynamic, succeeds precisely in interrupting the “vicious cycle” where anxiety inhibits practice and lack of practice deepens insecurity.

With regard to specific linguistic aspects, pronunciation was systematically mentioned as the most visibly improved skill. Students were highly aware of the corrective feedback loop provided by listening and imitation. Víctor Hernández stated: “*I help in my pronunciation and maybe I help in some words to pronunciation.*” (Hernández, V., interviewed student, 2025). Mikaela Freire considered that thanks to the conversations she was able to correct her pronunciation errors. Exposure to different accents, from British to Nigerian, as mentioned by Thiago Maldonado and Fernanda Pantaja, also trained their listening and pronunciation skills.

In terms of vocabulary, students reported having acquired more colloquial and phrasal language. Fernanda Pantaja specified learning “*some phrasal verbs that are common or usual in English conversations,*” (Pantaja, F., interviewed student, 2025) which are often underrepresented in traditional textbooks. LO pointed out the advantage of learning “*how they make the sentences... it's different than when we are speaking Spanish,*” (O, L, interviewed student, 2025) which suggests a development of syntactic awareness.

As can be inferred from these ideas, the benefits of Tandem include the acquisition of colloquial vocabulary and improved pronunciation through direct exposure and imitation. Musa & Khazaei (2020) and Beshir (2024) emphasize that interaction with native speakers or more proficient peers in a comfortable environment facilitates the internalization of linguistic structures and authentic sound patterns, aspects that, according to Sato (2024), are usually undervalued in traditional teaching methods.

In this regard, it is worth noting that the improvement in grammatical accuracy was perceived to be less pronounced. Although some students, such as Nicole Torres, mentioned receiving corrections, they also expressed a desire for clearer grammatical explanations. Their words were: “*Probably talk more about the grammatical rules*” (Torres, N., interviewed student, 2025). This suggests that by focusing on fluent communication, the Tandem method does pay attention to grammatical accuracy, but does not make it the primary objective, in accordance with its principles of a communicative approach and student autonomy. This idea aligns with criticisms leveled against traditional methods, although it also highlights the importance of including supplementary instruction.

This point offers a valuable perspective for pedagogical debate. On the one side, it confirms Qing-xue & Jin-fang's (2007) critique of repetitional methods, and on the other, it

suggests, as same as Yassin et al. (2024), that an optimal approach could integrate the strengths of Tandem for fluency and confidence with complementary cases of form-focused feedback, which do not neglect the principles of autonomy and authentic communication.

In conclusion, the participants' impressions persistently demonstrate that the Tandem method fosters a holistic development of oral skills. It effectively enhances fluency and listening comprehension through a systematic practice, builds learner confidence by creating a secure interactive environment, as well as it enriches vocabulary and pronunciation through direct exposure and imitation. These findings directly address the research objectives and provide empirical support for the theoretical benefits attributed to the method.

#### **4.1.3. The Intercultural Dimension in Tandem Interactions**

The analysis of the interviews illustrates that the intercultural component of the Tandem method functioned both as a secondary benefit and as a highly valued central axis within the learning experience. This dimension was expressed, on the one hand, as a strong driver of motivation; on the other, as a practical challenge when facing linguistic diversity; and, furthermore, as an impetus for the development of greater intercultural competence.

The opportunity to interact on cultural topics contributed significantly to the motivation of both students and international participants. The students showed genuine enthusiasm for sharing aspects of Ecuadorian culture and learning from their peers' experiences. Professor Luis Bueño commented that it was very interesting to ask about the cultures of his interlocutors, while Valentina Quisnia noted that "*every culture is beautiful and interesting*" (Quisnia, V., interviewed student, 2025). The international participants also praised this aspect of the experience. One of them, TY Trani, highlighted that, by sharing, "*we can better understand each other's culture and way of life.*" (Trani, TY, interviewed teacher, 2025). References to gastronomy, traditions and daily life frequently emerged in conversations. Juan Carrera, for example, learned about a particular type of key used in another culture, and TM recalled a dialogue about the legal status of marijuana in another country.

For most of students, this transcended the conventional language class. As Gabriela Paguay profoundly expressed, the interaction highlighted a shared humanity: "*we are the same human beings and we're sharing experiences that help us to improve our presentations, even if we're in different countries*" (Paguay, G, interviewed student, 2025). This is coincident with the theoretical foundation that Tandem learning fosters direct contact with speakers from other backgrounds.

The central motivating role of the intercultural dimension fully corroborates the arguments of Paredes (2024) and Musa & Khazaei (2020). For them, Tandem is not merely a linguistic exchange, but rather a privileged space for the development of intercultural competencies. As Elo & Pörn (2021) point out, direct contact contributes to the formation of more aware and competent global citizens.

A significant and challenging aspect of this intercultural interaction was navigating different accents and communication styles. Students were exposed to a variety of English accents, including British, American, Nigerian and Australian. While this presented an initial obstacle, it was ultimately perceived as a valuable learning opportunity. SA pointed out the practical challenge and benefit: *“the native speaker used British English... it’s a little bit difficult to understand... but it’s important to understand and listen different accents in English”* (A.S, interviewed student, 2025). Fernanda Pantaja also identified accents as the most difficult part, which obligated her to develop a detailed hearing.

Beyond pronunciation, differences in communication styles were also observed. Salvador Cadena offered a more nuanced perspective, explaining that it was about "how they think and how they use the language," that is, how native speakers organize their ideas and express their cultural characteristics. This exposure to diverse linguistic realities is seen as a contribution to preparing students for the global and authentic use of English. To this concern, AT expressed his satisfaction with learning new idioms and typical expressions from English-speaking countries.

The adoption and subsequent adaptation to different accents and communicative styles provides empirical evidence for the concept of “intercultural competence” which was discussed in the theoretical framework. According to Zhou (2023), the ability to interact effectively in authentic and diverse contexts is a key indicator of a greater willingness to communicate. As can be seen, this communicative willingness was strengthened in the participants (Yassin et al., 2024).

In any case, such interactions contributed to the development of intercultural competence by fostering qualities such as empathy, open-mindedness, and a more nuanced and flexible worldview. Students like Micaela Freire stated that learning about new cultures *“helps you to open your mind.”* (Freire, M, interviewed student, 2025). For her part, Sofía Andrade shared that she loved communicating her own culture, characterized by an Ecuadorian population she described as passive and friendly. The process of explaining their own cultural practices, such as the “Día de los Difuntos” mentioned by Bella Guaman,

required metalinguistic and metacultural skills. In this way, they deepened their own understanding of their heritage while making it accessible to an outsider.

Furthermore, encountering different perspectives sometimes led to moments of disagreement, which Sofía Andrade noted were the only challenge, yet navigating these moments is a critical part of intercultural learning. The reciprocal nature of Tandem, as emphasized by the foreign participants Luis Bueño, promote a relationship of mutual respect and curiosity. This environment is conducive to developing the “*empathy, tolerance, and adaptability*” (Bueño, L, interviewed teacher, 2025) associated to this method. As Salvador Cadena aptly advised, the key is to “*just be curious*”, in other words, to underscore that the intercultural dimension is driven by an active and engaged attitude from the learner.

So, according to the previous ideas, the Tandem method successfully integrated language learning with intercultural development. The exchange of cultural information was a source of motivation and personal improvement for participants. The challenges posed by different accents and communication styles were transformed into appreciated learning experiences that enhanced listening comprehension and prepared students for real-world interactions. Besides, the direct personal contact with individuals from diverse backgrounds fostered a greater intercultural awareness and competence, effectively cultivating the “*global citizens*”, thereby satisfying a core promise of the Tandem pedagogical approach.

#### ***4.1.4. Strengths and Limitations of the Tandem Method: A Participant Perspective***

The participants’ experiences provided a rich and nuanced evaluation of the Tandem method, in order to arrive to a clear identification of its perceived strengths and inherent limitations. This all-inclusive evaluation underscores the method’s value now that highlights critical areas for improvement to exploit its effectiveness within the institutional framework.

The strengths of the method were emphatically expressed in three areas: authenticity, reciprocity, and motivation. Students valued the opportunity to engage in genuine communication, a departure from their previous academic experiences. For Víctor Hernández, the greatest benefit of the exercise was that it allowed him to freely express his opinions on various topics. International participants highlighted reciprocity as an essential element that transformed the learning dynamic. To this respect TY Trani stated: “*students learn from you, and you also learn from them*” (Trani, TY, interviewed teacher, 2025), which generated a relationship of mutual collaboration that reduced the traditional hierarchy between teacher and student and favored a more relaxed environment.

This authenticity and reciprocity, in turn, served as a powerful motivational engine. As Gabriela Paguay urged fellow students, “*Try to speak even if you are afraid... it's the only way that you can improve*” (Paguay, G, interviewed student, 2025). Salvador Cadena identified “*curiosity*” as a key driver, implying that the method successfully taps into deep-seated human interests in connection and cultural exchange. These strengths directly connect with the pedagogical foundations of autonomy and collaborative pedagogy outlined in the theoretical framework, and also confirms the method’s success in creating a personally meaningful and engaging learning environment.

Rodríguez (2024) and Cortes et al. (2020) identify learner autonomy and positive interdependence as key to the success of the Tandem program, principles that were experienced and recognized by the participants. Therefore, the identification of autonomy, reciprocity, and intrinsic motivation as strengths reported by the interviewees offers direct empirical validation of the postulates of those authors.

Despite these pronounced strengths, the analysis revealed several challenges related to logistical and pedagogical constraints. The most frequently cited limitation was the insufficiency of time and the large size of groups. Majority of students expressed frustration with the short duration of individual speaking time within sessions. Foreign participant Luis Bueño explicitly pointed out this issue. In his opinion, with five students in a 15-minute session, each one might get only three minutes of practice, so he recommended “*a minimum of 10 minutes per day per student*” (Bueño, L, interviewed teacher, 2025).

This sentiment was resonated by Farnanda Pantaja, who suggested “*more natives here because actually only one teacher is speaking with six or eight classmates*” (Pantaja, F, interviewed student, 2025), and Joseph Hernández, who wanted personal sessions to avoid the uneven levels within a group. Another challenge, this one noted by Salvador Cadena, was the grouping of students with mixed proficiency levels in the same session. He proposed that “*it would be better if everyone could talk to a specific teacher*” (Cadena, S, interviewed student, 2025), since sessions with mixed levels could be less productive and, in some cases, demotivating for beginners or unstimulating for advanced students. These logistical aspects show the tension between the ideal of personalized and autonomous learning and the practical limitations derived from the allocation of institutional resources.

These logistical limitations identified by the participants are consistent with the literature on the formal implementation of Tandem learning. In this regard, Batardière (2020)

warns of the tension between the rigid structures of formal education and the flexible and autonomous nature of Tandem learning.

Regarding options for overcoming the method's limitations, participants offered suggestions for improvement. The most common recommendation was to increase the frequency and duration of individual dialogues with native speakers. According to Pamela Tapa and Nicole Torres, this could be achieved by including more native speakers from other countries. Another suggestion was to create smaller, more specific groups for each level. Additionally, a more structured organization, tailored to each level, was requested.

Particularly interesting was Salvador Cadena's idea of assigning a native speaker or foreign participant to each student based on their proficiency level:

*“I, for example, felt that at times I wasn't making much progress because the foreign teacher spent too much time correcting my classmates who were struggling. However, another classmate told me that he was having a much harder time compared to those with more advanced language skills.”* (Cadena, S, interviewed student, 2025).

Nicole Torres suggested increasing the amount of feedback in areas such as grammar rules, without compromising the main focus on fluency. When asked about criticism of the method, almost all of those interviewed stated that there were more positive aspects than negative ones. The main observations were the lack of time to train oral skills and the proportion of students assigned to foreign participants. An opinion of particular interest was contributed by the two foreign participants. Both appreciated that there are notable differences between Ecuadorian students, some have a higher development than others, which is why it would be beneficial to organize work groups considering the degree of development of oral skills. According to them, this would allow progress to be made in a differentiated way, since otherwise a lot is demanded of some interlocutors, while others' potential is not exploited.

In this way, it can be interpreted that the participants' perspectives portray the image of a highly effective pedagogical tool, whose strengths are at times and in certain ways constrained by logistical support. The method is unanimously perceived as a superior alternative to traditional approaches for the development of oral competence and intercultural skills. However, attention must be given to optimizing session organization, ensuring adequate speaking time for each student, and considering more homogeneous groupings, so that its full potential may be realized within the South American Language

Center. These findings provide empirically grounded premises for the formulation of proposals, as will be presented in Chapter V.

## 4.2. Discussion

The current section presents a contextualized analysis of the results. First, it is exposed the situation of the research carried out in Ecuador's educational institutions, which helps to understand the state of the art and informs the main investigation lines that must be completed concerning the methodology of foreign languages teaching.

In recent years, academic production in Ecuador has shown a growing interest in exploring innovative methodologies for language teaching, which highlight the importance of developing oral competencies in foreign languages such as English. Despite these advances, there remains a need to continue research in this area to stimulate critical thinking, overcome identified limitations, and strengthen educational outcomes within Ecuadorian academic contexts (Ximena et al., 2022).

Some of the previous studies consulted inform that conventional methodologies, such as the Grammar-Translation Method, the Audiolingual Method and the Direct Method, continue to predominate in classrooms but present structural limitations that hinder the genuine development of oral communicative competence (González, 2023; Guillén, 2020). As noted by Calle et al. (2023), these limitations are reflected in practices that prioritize grammatical accuracy and textual translation over spontaneity and fluency in oral interaction, generating anxiety among students and resulting in insufficient learning for authentic communicative contexts.

In response to this scenario, academic research has increasingly focused on methodologies that foster learner autonomy, reciprocity, and authentic contextualization of learning, with particular emphasis on the Tandem method. At institutions such as the South American Language Center, studies have been conducted examining the impact of this approach on strengthening the oral skills of B1 level students, reporting notable improvements in fluency, confidence, and intercultural competence (2021). The alternating tutor-student dynamic fosters active learning, intrinsic motivation, and a sense of ownership over the educational process.

Without in any way diminishing the validity of previous research, it is clear that certain gaps remain that require attention in future investigations. One of these is that most

studies are based on small samples and qualitative or mixed approaches, making it impossible to generalize their results to the Ecuadorian education system. Another gap concerns the fact that the long-term impact of the Tandem method and its application in diverse disciplines and contexts remains insufficiently documented.

Other areas for exploration relate to technological infrastructure and teacher training, both essential for the effective implementation of these methodologies, particularly in virtual or hybrid modalities that gained relevance after the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent researches emphasize the need for strong institutional support to ensure adequate resources, continuous teacher growth and the monitoring of mechanisms that maximize the benefits of these pedagogical advances (Vera, 2020).

From the pedagogical perspective, the assessment of oral skills also requires much more development and adaptation to context singularities. According to Durruthy et al., (2024) and Sorial (2024), the use of rubrics, self-evaluation and peer-to-peer evaluation, enhance the integral diagnosis, now that promote a metacognitive reflexing. However, its systematic application is still limited, that's why the articulation of evaluation strategies in Tandem method remains as an unexplored field, at least not enough explored.

Now, the findings of this study provide a broad contextualized understanding of the impact of the Tandem method on the development of oral skills among B1-level English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, while at the same time revealing a complex interplay of affective, linguistic, and intercultural factors. The results largely confirm the theoretical and empirical foundations presented in the specialized literature, while also offering perspectives specifically adjusted to the Ecuadorian context of the South American Language Center.

A principal finding of this research is the profound effectiveness of the method in mitigating Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA) and fostering students' self-confidence. At this point, the arguments presented by AL-Madani (2021) and Rahmadani & Etfita (2022) are supported.

Since the participants' journey from initial apprehension to a greater willingness to communicate bring to the light the importance of a secure environment, there is a direct contact to Baxter's (2024), postulation about the neurocognitive perspective concerning the fluent linguistic processing.

According to the criteria of both students and foreign participants, the reciprocal and non-hierarchical nature of Tandem interactions create a much more comfortable scenario for bidirectional communication, as it is stayed by Paredes (2024) and by AL-Madani (2021).

The development of self-confidence reported by the students results in a direct benefit but mostly, a fundamental condition that enables the activation of learners' existing linguistic knowledge, at the time is facilitates more spontaneous oral production, which is coincident to Şan et al.'s (2020) and González's (2015) works.

Concerning linguistic progress, the perceived improvement in fluency, pronunciation, and listening comprehension strongly supports the claims made by defenders of the method such as Cruz (2023) and Nam (2023). In addition, the changes noted by students, moving from mental translation to more direct thinking in English, is related to Baxter's (2024) notion of procedural memory and the automation of skills through continuous practice. Likewise, the importance that learners placed on exposure to authentic speech patterns, which includes different accents and spontaneous conversations, highlights a key limitation of traditional methods, which, as Sato (2024) refers, often rest on artificial and monologic activities.

However, the lesser attention to grammatical accuracy in participants' perceptions provides an interesting point of discussion. This finding validates the Tandem method's focus on communicative efficacy over precision, thereby responding to critiques of methods such as Grammar-Translation (Qing-xue & Jin-fang, 2007). At the same time, while the Tandem method is particularly effective in developing fluency and confidence, it may show some weakness in developing literacy skills.

The intercultural dimension emerged as a cornerstone of the Tandem experience, a finding that powerfully echoes the theoretical framework. The participants' interest for cultural exchange and their development of intercultural skills such as empathy and adaptability directly reflect the principles outlined by Paredes (2024) and the benefits documented by Musa & Khazaei (2020). This study provides empirical evidence that the method achieves its goal of fostering not just linguistic ability but also intercultural capability, thereby it contributes to the formation of more globally aware citizens (Elo & Pörn, 2021).

The challenges associated with steering different accents and communication styles were transformed into valuable learning opportunities, highlighting the method's capacity to prepare students for the genuine diversity of global English use. This makes straight to Zhou's (2023) findings on the increased willingness to communicate in authentic, intercultural contexts, which moves beyond the homogenized materials often critiqued in traditional approaches (Yassin et al., 2024).

In other point, the evaluation of the method's strengths and limitations provides important insights for its sustainable implementation. The identified strengths are coincident with the core tenets of collaborative autonomous learning, as stayed by Rodríguez (2024) and Cortes et al. (2020). However, the substantial challenges related to time constraints, group size, and mixed proficiency levels indicate a breach between the ideal implementation of Tandem and its practical application within institutional restrictions. Such logistical hurdles, if unaddressed, can potentially undermine the very autonomy and individual engagement the method seeks to promote.

According to that, the participants' suggestions for more time and level-specific grouping are simultaneously practical requests and essential recommendations to align the institutional practice with the pedagogical philosophy of the method. This reflects the ongoing tension noted by Batardière (2020) between formal education structures and the flexible nature of Tandem learning. It underlines the need for careful institutional support and design to ensure the method's long-term efficacy and scalability.

It should be noted that the results obtained come from the exploration of English language students, so these results are not generalizable to the study of other languages. Although the bibliography refers in general terms to the teaching of foreign languages, it would be very productive to explore the experiences in teaching languages that are usually less familiar to Spanish speakers, such as Chinese, Indian and different dialects.

From what has been presented so far, it is reaffirmed that this study demonstrates that the Tandem method is an effective pedagogical strategy, qualitatively superior to traditional language teaching models. One of its most important merits is the integration of affective, linguistic, and intercultural factors. Despite its inherent limitations, since no method is perfect, the predominantly positive results confirm a favorable assessment of its transformative value in the field of English as a foreign language (EFL).

## CHAPTER V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMENDATIONS

### 5.1. Conclusions

Based on the analysis and interpretation of the data obtained, a set of conclusions is formulated in correspondence with the objectives of this research:

1. The principles and processes of the Tandem method, characterized by reciprocity, learner autonomy, and Intercultural interaction, were identified. The mutual learning between native speakers and students, and the focus on cultural exchange, created a pedagogical dynamic distinct from traditional methods.
2. The experiences and perceptions of students and foreign participants indicate that the Tandem method contributes to the development of oral skills. The main notable contributions are increased students' self-confidence and reduced speaking anxiety, along with improvements in listening comprehension, oral fluency, and a highly motivating intercultural exchange.
3. The interpretation of the bibliographic review and the experiences of students and teachers indicates that the Tandem method is based on principles such as reciprocity, learner autonomy, and intercultural interaction, which guide its oral practice processes. These processes mainly contribute to the development of fluency and confidence in speaking; however, its communicative focus requires complementary strategies to strengthen grammatical accuracy, particularly in contexts with time limitations and mixed proficiency levels.

## 5.2. Recommendations

Connected to the previous conclusions and findings of this research, the following recommendations are presented:

1. It is recommended that educators integrate the Tandem method into oral language teaching as an alternative to traditional approaches, emphasizing reciprocal interaction, learner autonomy, and cultural exchange to enrich authentic communicative practice.
2. It is recommended to consider students' and teachers' perceptions of the Tandem method to improve its implementation, thereby enhancing confidence, motivation, and intercultural interaction during oral activities.
3. Oral activities based on the principles and processes of the Tandem method can be designed to promote fluency, confidence, and intercultural interaction, while incorporating complementary strategies to strengthen grammatical accuracy in contexts with limited time and mixed proficiency levels.

### **I. For future research:**

- a) Promote the carrying out of similar studies that explore the particularities of the Tandem method in various languages, including indigenous languages such as Kichwa, Shuar, and native languages from other countries (e.g., Quechua, Aymara, Guaraní, Nahuatl, Mapudungun), in order to identify common and divergent aspects related to English teaching and to contribute to the preservation of these languages through their active use in educational contexts.

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## ANNEXES

### Appendix 1

#### Semi-structured interview guide – Tandem method study

**Objective:** To explore how students experienced the structure of the sessions with the Tandem method and their comfort levels.

#### Introduction

- **Empathy establishment**
- **Contextual overview:** This study arises from the need to obtain an updated perspective on the contribution of the Tandem method in English language teaching. To this end, a review of the specialized literature on the subject is conducted, followed by the implementation of the present interview with students who have participated in the application of this teaching method. The opinions and insights gathered from the interviewees will serve as a starting point for future research, with the aim of strengthening the development of oral proficiency in foreign language learning.
- Ensure informed consent and remind participants that there are no right or wrong answers — only their honest experiences and opinions matter.
- To ask for permission to record the interview
- The interviewer explains the further use of the information (sign the informed consent)

#### Personal data

Age\_\_\_\_\_ Field of study\_\_\_\_\_ Country\_\_\_\_\_ Gender\_\_\_\_\_ Level\_\_\_\_\_

Please, describe your current socioeconomic incomes?

Low income  Lower-middle income  Middle income  
 Upper-middle income  High income

#### Icebreaker question

What is your favorite food?

What motivated you to study a foreign language?

#### Focus questions

##### Cat. 1: Experiences with Tandem

1. How was your experience speaking with foreign people?
2. What were your expectations before starting speaking classes with native teachers?
3. Please describe your overall experience participating in conversations with native speakers.

### **Cat. 2: Perception of the development of oral skills**

4. How much do you perceive your speaking fluency has improved since you started talking with native English-speaker person?
5. Can you, please, give an example of a moment when you observed this change while speaking with native teachers?
6. What specific aspects of the conversations with native speakers aided you improve your speaking?

### **Cat. 3: Intercultural interaction and collaboration**

7. How comfortable did you feel during the speaking activities with native teachers?
8. Please, mention anything about your partner's culture that you think influenced the way you used the language while speaking with them?
9. How would you describe your interaction with a partner from a different cultural or linguistic background?
10. How did cultural differences affect communication styles or strategies during the sessions with foreign people?

### **Cat. 4: Strengths and limitations of the method**

11. What difficulties did you find while talking with foreign persons, related to language, technology, organization or cultural aspects?
12. What would you change or improve in the sessions with foreign people, if possible?

### **Closing question:**

Is there anything else about your experience talking with foreign people that you think is important to share but hasn't been covered?

What would you say to a student who is just starting to use the Tandem method?

Acknowledgments and goodbye

## Appendix 2

### INSTRUMENTO PARA LA VALIDACIÓN POR EXPERTOS

#### Entrevista Semi Estructurada sobre impacto del método Tandem

Estimado(a) experto(a):

La presente investigación se denomina “*Analysis of the use of Tandem method and its impact on speaking skill*” y tiene como objetivo describir cómo el método de referencia contribuye al desarrollo de habilidades orales en el nivel de inglés B1 en los estudiantes del Centro Suramericano de Idioma, de la ciudad de Riobamba, en la provincia Chimborazo. Le solicitamos amablemente evaluar la siguiente guía de entrevista, diseñada para explorar las experiencias y percepciones de estudiantes y docentes al respecto (ver anexo). Su criterio especializado es esencial para garantizar la claridad, pertinencia, coherencia y validez de este instrumento.

#### Datos del experto(a)

Nombre:

Área de especialización: \_\_\_\_\_ Años de experiencia: \_\_\_\_\_

Categoría docente:

Calificación de posgrado: \_\_Magister\_\_ PhD

#### Instrucciones de evaluación

Por favor, evalúe cada aspecto según la siguiente escala:

1: Inadecuado

2: Poco adecuado

3: Adecuado

4: Muy adecuado

Marque con una “X” en la casilla correspondiente y agregue sus observaciones en la columna de comentarios.

CRITERIO	EVALUACIÓN	COMENTARIOS / SUGERENCIAS
<b>1. Claridad y redacción de las preguntas</b>	1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/>	_____

<b>2. Pertinencia con los objetivos de la investigación</b>	1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/>	_____
<b>3. Coherencia con las categorías de análisis</b>	1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/>	_____
<b>4. Secuencia lógica de las preguntas</b>	1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/>	_____
<b>5. Suficiencia para recoger información relevante</b>	1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/>	_____
<b>6. Adecuación al contexto educativo local</b>	1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/>	_____
<b>7. Potencial para generar respuestas profundas</b>	1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/>	_____
<b>8. Viabilidad de aplicación</b>	1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/>	_____

**Evaluación por categorías de la entrevista**

<b>CATEGORÍAS</b>	<b>EVALUACIÓN</b>	<b>COMENTARIOS / SUGERENCIAS</b>
<b>Categoría 1: Experiencia con el método Tandem</b>	4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/>	_____
<b>Categoría 2: Percepción del desarrollo de habilidades orales</b>	4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/>	_____
<b>Categoría 3: Interacción intercultural y colaboración</b>	4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/>	_____
<b>Categoría 4: Fortalezas y limitaciones del método</b>	4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/>	_____

¿Hay alguna observación general o consideración que usted estime podría mejorar el instrumento?

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**Dictamen definitivo**

A partir de su percepción, considera que el instrumento es:

- Válido sin modificaciones**
- Válido con modificaciones menores**
- Válido con importantes modificaciones**
- No válido**

Fecha de la evaluación:

## Appendix 3

### Interview guide for foreign participants

**Objective:** To explore the perception and experience of foreign participants in Tandem method sessions

#### Introduction

The interviewer begins by establishing rapport and creating an empathetic environment. A short-term contextual explanation follows, at this point it is presented the purpose of this study: to gain a refreshed understanding of how the Tandem method contributes to English language instruction. This involves a review of relevant academic literature and the conduction of interviews with students who have experienced the method firsthand. The findings gathered from these participants are intended to augment teaching practices at the National University of Chimborazo and, potentially, at other general and specialized education institutions, with the main focus on improving oral proficiency in foreign language learning.

Before proceeding, the interviewer ensures that participants provide informed consent, emphasizing that there are no right or wrong answers—only their genuine experiences and perspectives are valued.

The interviewee requests authorization to record the conversation

#### Personal data

Age\_\_\_\_ Gender\_\_\_\_ Experience (years)\_\_\_\_

Have you any teaching qualification? No\_\_\_\_ Yes\_\_\_\_ Which one?\_\_\_\_\_

Have you any previous experience with the use of Tandem? No\_\_\_\_ Yes\_\_\_\_

#### Introductory question:

Can you tell me anything about your regular job?

I would like to know what motivated you to participate in academic activities using the Tandem method.

#### Focus questions

1. What did your preparation to participate in the Tandem method consist of?
2. What resources or materials did you use to prepare yourself?
3. To what extent did the use of the Tandem method allow you to share intercultural components?
4. How did you perceive the development of oral skills in Spanish-speaking students?
5. Did you observe any recurring patterns in the interaction between students?

6. From your perspective, what aspects of oral expression did the Spanish-speaking students improve most notably?
7. How much do you think the Tandem method may have influenced the development of students' confidence and motivation?
8. From your experience, what do you consider to be the main strengths of the Tandem method for developing oral skills?
9. What limitations or difficulties did you identify during your participation in Tandem sessions?
10. What technological tools do you consider that can promote quality in the use of the Tandem method?
11. If you were to participate in the method again, what would you change or reinforce?

**Closing:**

Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience with the Tandem method that we haven't covered?

What would you recommend to other participants who are just starting out with Tandem method activities?

Acknowledgments and goodbye

## Appendix 4.

### Informed consent

#### INFORMED CONSENT FOR STUDY PARTICIPANTS

**Study Title:** *Analysis of the use of Tandem method and its impact on speaking skill*

**Principal Investigator:** Name: *Franklin Elias Cabay Yuquilema*

**Institution:** *Universidad Nacional de Chimborazo*

**Email:** / **Phone:** / /

#### 1. Purpose of the study

The aim of this research is to describe how the Tandem method contributes on English Speaking Skills in B1 level students at the South American Language Center in the city of Riobamba, Chimborazo Province, during the 2025 Academic Period

#### 2. Procedures

If you agree to participate:

- You will be asked to respond questions of an semi structured interview, which will last no more than 20 minutes. Your participation would be both remote or face to face, depending on particular conditions.

#### 3. Risks and benefits

• **Potential risks:** There are no risk conceived

• **Expected benefits:** You will not receive any material profit. The results of this research will serve to improve the quality of foreign language teaching

#### 4. Confidentiality

All collected information will be treated as strictly confidential and used only for research purposes. Data will be coded and securely stored to prevent participant identification. No real names will be used in reports or publications.

#### 5. Voluntary participation and right to withdraw

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw at any time without penalty or negative consequences, and without needing to provide a reason.

#### 6. Consent statement

I declare that:

- I have read and understood the information provided above.
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have received satisfactory answers.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time.

**Participant's Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Full Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

**Investigator's Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_