

Language and Culture Exchange: Tandem Language Learning for University Students

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Abstract : Tandem language learning, a language exchange process based on the principles of autonomy and reciprocity, provides opportunities for interlocutors to learn each other's language by communicating online or face-to-face. While much attention has been paid to the process and outcomes of tandem learning via email, little has been discussed about the effectiveness of face-to-face tandem learning on language and culture exchange for university students. The LACTS (Language and Culture Tandem Scheme), an 8-week project, was set up to study students' perceptions of conducting tandem learning to assist their language and culture exchange. Students of both post-graduate and undergraduate programmes (N=103) from a Hong Kong SAR university were put in groups of 4 to 6 according to their availability and language preferences and met for an hour a week. While sample task sheets on a range of topics were provided to assist the language exchange, all groups were encouraged to take charge of their meeting format and choose their own topics. At the end of the project, a 19-item questionnaire, which included both open-and closed-ended questions investigating students' perceptions of reciprocal teaching and cultural exchange, was administered. Thirty-minute individual interviews were conducted to elicit students' views and experiences in the LACTS activities. Quantitative and qualitative data analysis showed that most students agreed that the project had enhanced their cultural awareness and helped create an inclusive and participatory learning environment. Significant differences were found in students' confidence in speaking their targeted language after joining the scheme. The interviews also provided rich data on the variety of formats and leadership patterns in student-led meetings, which could shed light on student autonomy and future tandem language learning projects.

Keywords : autonomy, reciprocity, tandem language learning, university students

Conference Title : ICEPS 2024 : International Conference on Education, Psychology and Sociology

Conference Location : Tokyo, Japan

Conference Dates : May 23-24, 2024