Promoting Basic Competences in EFL Instruction by Means of E-mail Tandem

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Abstract—This paper intends to show how e-mail tandem (Brammerts & Little, 1996; Gläsmann & Calvert, 2001; Stickler & Lewis, 2003) has been integrated in the English curriculum of a *Diversificación Curricular* Programme (3rd and 4th grade of Secondary Education) to promote linguistic, intercultural, learning to learn and digital competences (LOE, 2006). The first part will be devoted to explaining the main characteristics of e-mail tandem and its close relationship with the aforementioned four competences, as well as with the Common European Framework of Reference (2001) and the European Language Portfolio (ELP) (Little & Perclová, 2001; Cassany, 2006). The second part will deal with the main characteristics of the students involved and the instruments used to practise the linguistic, intercultural, learning to learn, and digital competences, i.e. e-mails written by the students, learning diaries (Nunan, 1992; Otto, 2003; Oxford, 1996) and reflections on the ELP (Palacios, 2006). Finally, examples of student performance will be presented, together with the main conclusions derived from their work, including some suggestions for further research.

Index Terms—key competences, e-mail tandem, ELP, learning diaries

I. INTRODUCTION

From the last decades of the 20th century, the Council of Europe and the European Parliament have been concerned with the promotion of lifelong language learning. Thus, Recommendation 2005(0021) was passed as a framework to promote eight key competences to favour this kind of learning, i.e. communication in the mother tongue, communication in foreign languages, mathematical competence, learning to learn, intercultural and social competences, entrepreneurship and cultural expression. Competences are defined as "a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to the context" (*Commission of the European Communities*, 2005: 13), being key competences those which all individuals need "for personal fulfilment and development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment" (2005: 13). Concurrently, the *Common European Framework of Reference* (CEFR) (2001) and the European Language Portfolio (ELP) were developed in order to make teachers, learners and teacher trainers aware of the importance not only of learning a language, but also of the cultural aspects implied in this learning (Byram, 1997), so that students can develop their inter/multicultural competence by establishing relationships between previously acquired grammatical structures and vocabulary. Similarly, the ELP is aimed at encouraging students to reflect on their own learning (Cassany, 2006; Little & Perclová, 2001), and, therefore, become more autonomous learners who progressively "take charge of their own learning" (Holec, 1981: 3).

This paper will focus on the way communication in the mother tongue, communication in a foreign language, intercultural, learning to learn and digital competences were integrated in the English curriculum within a *Diversificación Curricular* Programme (3rd and 4th Grade of Secondary Education) in a project based on e-mail-tandem (Brammerts & Little, 1996; Gläsmann & Calvert, 2001; Stickler & Lewis, 2003), following the guidelines provided by the Spanish Law of Education (2/2006, May 3)[1] and adapted to the context of *Principado de Asturias*, a region located in the north of Spain (*Decreto* 74/2007, June 14).[2]

Key Competences and E-mail Tandem

The introduction of basic competences in the curriculum, as stated in *Educación Secundaria Obligatoria: Decreto de ordenación y currículo* (2007: 45), aims, on the one hand, at integrating different kinds of learning to establish a relationship between the contents which are learnt in the different subjects students are taught in their formal instruction, and, on the other hand, to effectively use them in different contexts and situations.

E-mail tandem aims at making students with different mother tongues work together using different tasks, so that they can improve their linguistic competence in the foreign language, get to know their partner better, and benefit from their partner's knowledge and experience (Brammerts, 2003: 28-29). Key competence *communication in a foreign language* is closely related to this approach to language learning since it is based on the ability to understand, express

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[1] More information about this regulation is available at http://www.boe.es/aeboe/consultas/bases_datos/doc.php?id=BOE-A-2006-7899 (accessed 1/10/2011).

[2] More information about this regulation can be found at http://www.educastur.es/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=997&Itemid=152 (accessed 1/10/2011).

and interpret thoughts, feelings and facts in written form in the contexts of education and leisure (*Commission of the European Communities*, 2005: 14).

E-mail tandem is based on two main principles: reciprocity and autonomy. Reciprocity means that "each partner brings certain skills and abilities which the other partner seeks to acquire and in which both partners support each other in their learning in such a way that both benefit as much as possible from their working together" (Brammerts, 2003: 29). Thus, it helps equality between both tandem partners because they must help each other in order to achieve the learning goals they have previously set. To achieve these goals, tandem partners should use both their native language and the target language in each message and the ideal situation is when they write half of the message in each language. Therefore, students should be able to express and interpret thoughts, feelings and facts in their mother tongue in order to interact with their tandem partners, so they are putting in practice their skills and abilities referring to another key competence, i.e. *communication in the mother tongue* (*Commission of the European Communities*, 2005: 13).

Using both languages also implies that this method has a lot to do with *learning from the partner's model*, which has five further implications. Firstly, *learning from a partner's clarifications, explanations and information* (Brammerts & Calvert, 2003: 52). Learning is also achieved by *dialogue*. The dialogue will benefit from the fact that both learners are interested in the language and culture of their partners, have previous knowledge of it and can learn from comparisons.

Secondly, *learning forms of utterance and behaviour from a partner*, which "involves […] productive [language] use by learners" (Brammerts & Calvert, 2003: 52). This process has a lot in common with intercultural learning because there is not only the need to be grammatically and phonologically competent in the L2, but also to know the context and the cultural connotations that may be implied in the words that are uttered or written. Thanks to this approach, students belonging to different societies and countries establish intercultural communication with their partners (Müller-Hartmann, 2006; O'Dowd, 2003, 2006; Stickler & Lewis, 2003). This idea of intercultural communication is quite remarkable and it was promoted within the *Common European Framework of Reference,* which understands foreign language learning as an active process in which learners should not only acquire the grammatical and phonological features of an L2, but should also be aware of the way people live and behave in the target language community. Therefore, e-mail tandem is supposed to raise an awareness of the intercultural and social competences, as it will be shown with students' work in the third section of this paper.

The third implication when learning from the partner is *learning from the partner's corrections*, as partners "must state clearly what should be corrected in what way and at what time, and if necessary, give hints to their partner" (Brammerts & Calvert, 2003: 53).

Learning from the partner's model also entails self-reflection and mutual collaboration between tandem partners. On the one hand, self-reflection implies reflection upon their own native language, mainly when learners have to answer their partners' questions or doubts, and upon the target language, whenever they have to use it as a means of communication. These two aspects are closely linked to the second principle of e-mail tandem: autonomy, which implies that both partners are responsible for their own learning, so they decide "*what* they want to learn, *how* and *when*, and what sort of help they need from their partner" (Brammerts & Calvert, 2003: 29). Thus, key competence *learning to learn* resembles this second principle, since

Individuals should be able to organise their own learning […] [This] competence includes awareness of one's own learning process and needs […] Learning to learn engages learners to build upon prior learning and life experiences in order to use and apply knowledge and skills in a variety of contexts. (*Commission of the European Communities*, 2005: 16).

Learning to learn is also related to the views some scholars have on autonomy in foreign language learning (Benson 1996, 2001; Little, 1991, 1999; Nunan, 1992), as they understand it as mutual collaboration among students with a view to improving their linguistic competence in the target language. These authors claim that learning is achieved when there is a strong relationship between the structures learned by the students and their use in connected speech.

On the other hand, tandem language learning has a lot to do with *collaborative language learning*. This type of learning takes place when two people share the idea of improving their communicative competence in the target language, and establish a *negotiation* to reach an agreement on how they will deal with the tasks they have to face together. Accordingly, learners need to reflect on their learning process as a previous step to becoming autonomous language learners (Little, 1991: 45). Otto suggested the introduction of learning diaries to promote this reflection on the learning process, since "a specific tandem diary could contain the ideas and comments of both learners concerning the reciprocity principle and the way they work together" (2003: 89). Furthermore, learning diaries are important introspective tools which help learners "gain confidence, make sense of difficult material, and generate original insights" (Nunan, 1992: 120), and they are also excellent sources for self-assessment since they are "excellent sources for the exploration of affective, social and cognitive variables" (Oxford *et al.*, 1996: 21).

E-mail becomes the means by which partners get in touch and exchange views and information. Through their partners' e-mails, students come closer to the language and culture of the target language community and this fact could make them aware of the similarities and differences between the native and the target language, so they could become reflective learners and, thus, more autonomous students. It is based on asynchronous communication as "the writing and the receipt of messages are separated in time" (Brammerts & Calvert, 2003: 49). This asynchronous communication helps students analyse the content of the message they receive and they can make any comments they consider relevant

to the tandem partner. This e-mail exchange promotes students' digital competence since computers are used to "retrieve, store, produce, present and exchange information, and to communicate and participate in collaborative networks via the Internet" (*Commission of the European Communities*, 2005: 16).

To conclude the first section of this article, it could be maintained that e-mail tandem is closely linked to Vygotsky's (1978) constructivism and that it is also related to Freire's critical theory (1974), which emphasizes the importance of a critical view of language learning against its social and cultural background in order to help students achieve productive learning through deep reflection. This reflective view of language learning is closely related to the philosophy of the European Language Portfolio (ELP), since students are encouraged to reflect on their own learning in their Linguistic Biography using the descriptors available for each of the skills, i.e. reading, writing, listening, spoken production and spoken interaction (Cassany, 2006).

II. METHODOLOGY

A. Participants

The research reported on here was carried out during two academic years with thirteen students (eleven boys and two girls) at a Secondary school in Oviedo, North of Spain, which belonged to what in the Spanish educational system is called *Diversificación Curricular. Diversificación Curricular* groups are formed by students who have significant learning difficulties and/or a lack of motivation towards formal learning. Some of them might also have behavioural or psychological problems. For these reasons, the curriculum should be adapted to their needs, so that they can achieve the necessary goals and competences to achieve their GSCE. This programme is recommended to be developed over the last two years of Secondary Education, i.e. 3rd and 4th grade, though it is possible to include students during its second year of implementation.

In order to promote students' motivation, the methodology used implies two main aspects. On the one hand, they work in small groups which cannot be bigger than fifteen pupils in three main areas: Sociolinguistics (i.e. Spanish and History), Sciences and Technology (i.e. Maths, Biology and Chemistry) and foreign language (English). As far as the foreign language is concerned, it should be taught according to a communicative approach to help the students involved acquire the basic competences to use the L2 according to the oral, spoken and written skills suggested in CEFR and the ELP. Students are exposed to the target language for three hours during the first year of the programme and for two hours during the second year. The remaining subjects (i.e. Physical Education, Religion, Arts and Crafts and IT) are learnt with the rest of their classmates in groups which should not be bigger than thirty students.

To preserve the students' identities, we will refer to them with a number from 1-13 and a letter *s* preceding it. All the informants have a lack of motivation towards formal learning and particularly to foreign language learning, as, at the beginning of the programme, they all said that English was useless for them in their near future. Five of them (s1, s2, s3, s4 and s12) show significant learning difficulties regarding understanding and writing. There are also four pupils (s5, s6, s9 and s11) who had been out of school due to bad behaviour and, finally, three of them (s5, s9 and s11) have psychological problems which affect their interaction with schoolmates and teachers. S7, s8, s10 and s13 are unmotivated learners but they do not suffer any other behavioural or psychological problems.

B. Instruments

Taking into account the Recommendations given by the Commission of the European Communities (2005), the Spanish Law of Education (LOE, 2006) and the *Decreto de Organización y Curriculum* (2007), which were analysed in the first section of this paper, the current study aimed at promoting five key competences in the teaching of EFL at *Diversificación Curricular* (i.e. digital, communication in the mother tongue, and in a foreign language, learning to learn, and intercultural competences), using e-mail tandem as the basic methodology.

During the first year of the programme, we aimed at improving students' self-esteem (Pérez Gómez *et al.*, 2009: 11) by making them aware of the importance of learning a foreign language emphasizing the reflection on one's own learning to be conscious of their learning progress. At the same time, traditional classroom interaction was combined with a textbook appropriate to their language proficiency, which was no higher than A1/A1$^+$, and with individual and group work in the IT room to promote their digital competence (Pérez Gómez *et al.*, 2009: 12).

In line with the established curriculum, they had three teaching hours a week, divided in three one-hour sessions, one of which was devoted to the textbook to work on the four skills: listening, reading, writing and speaking. There was a session in the IT room in which the students performed activities where they had to revise learnt vocabulary or grammar from different websites provided by the teacher (e.g.: http://www.isabelperez.com; http://englisch-hilfen.de/en; http://ckicnlearn.net). From the second term onwards, they also looked for information, individually or in groups, about topics of interest to them (fashion, sports, music...) to complete projects and present them to the rest of the students. The aim of this exercise was to promote communication in a foreign language using ICT, which is, probably, the most important competence students should acquire, and to find information about the topic on the Internet and summarize it to present it to their classmates. Essays were revised before being presented to check grammatical and lexical mistakes. Besides, students had to prepare some questions to be answered by their classmates, which were later marked by the teacher and given back to them to see their progress throughout the course.

These tasks were intended for the students to practise all the skills, as they read and chose the information they needed (reading comprehension), wrote an essay about their topic (writing) and finally made a speech to their classmates (spoken production and interaction) as well as listening, as they had to answer questions provided by the classmates who had done the project. The third session was devoted to the ELP, as will be shown when referring to learning to learn.

In the second year, the students were exposed to the target language for two hours a week. One of them was devoted to the textbook and the second session to activities based on e-mail tandem. They were encouraged to reflect on their learning process either in their learning diaries or by means of the ELP. Thus, an e-mail tandem exchange was established with students from a private boarding school located in West Sussex (UK). As was mentioned in the introduction to this paper, tandem partners should use their native and target language in each of the messages to follow the reciprocity principle (Brammerts, 2003:29). E-mail tandem, as will be shown in the next section, helps students be aware of two key competences: communication in the mother tongue and in the foreign language, being the ideal situation when half of the message is written in each of the languages (Brammerts, 2003; Gläsmann & Calvert, 2001). At the same time, intercultural communication is established (Byram, 1997; O'Dowd, 2003, 2006; Stickler & Lewis, 2003: 97-98) since students who belong to different countries interact with each other by means of the e-mails they write. However, as O'Dowd (2003) points out, not all the communication established between members of two different cultures by means of e-mail leads necessarily to intercultural learning. For this reason, Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence will be taken into account when analysing if the communication carried out by the Spanish students can be considered intercultural. Bearing in mind the characteristics of the students involved, we will focus on two aspects of his model:

• Attitudes of curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own.

• Skills of discovery and interaction: ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction. (Byram, 1997: 50, 61)

According to this model, students were given five topics (personal information, free time, school, Christmas, and my town) to be developed both in the mother tongue and the target language, as was mentioned above, and they also had to pay attention to their partners' mistakes in order to correct them. They were paired up with English students who had an equivalent level of Spanish, but there were also some pairs made up of two Spanish students and an English tandem partner due to the difficulties some of the Spanish students had to write in English. The goal of the latter pairings was that the one with the best command could help the less skilled and both could benefit from the English student's writing.

As far as learning to learn is concerned, students were encouraged to reflect on their own learning. Thus, from the introductory sections to the course objectives in the first year of the programme, the main components of the ELP (i.e. *language passport*, *language biography* and *dossier*) were presented in the classroom. As will be shown in the next section, participants were asked to fill in different parts of their language biography. Thus, learners filled in the section *Mis Lenguas* to help them reflect on the languages they could speak at home, at school or elsewhere. Afterwards, they produced their *abanicos lingüísticos*, in which they pointed out the languages they knew and when they used them. Finally, they were asked to reflect on their learning process by reading the descriptors provided in their language biographies and ticking the boxes which showed their competence in the foreign language according to the six levels of reference (A1-C2). At the end of each term, they had to choose their best activities to be included in their dossiers.

Learning to learn was also promoted by means of learning diaries. Participants had to write a diary (Otto, 2003; Oxford *et al.*, 1996) about their learning experience, in which they were asked to reflect critically on the importance of the tasks done in class and in the IT room for their learning progress. Learning strategies were also discussed in the classroom by working with the tasks suggested by Palacios (2006: 129-170), as well as the ones at the end of the language biography in the ELP. Besides, all the students had to fill in a questionnaire at the end of every term where, on the one hand, they were asked to reflect on their previous performance and, on the other, to set goals for the following term.

III. RESULTS

Regarding digital competence, all the students, despite their learning difficulties, were able, from the first year of the programme, to surf the Internet to find information on topics of interest to them, summarize it, and present it to their classmates. Communication in the target language was also promoted by means of these activities, since students had to prepare some questions which could be answered by the rest of their peers.

The e-mail tandem exchange also promoted the development of the digital competence, since participants could exchange information on the topics mentioned in the previous section to communicate and participate in collaborative networks via e-mail using the native language and the target language. As is shown in the example below, taken from s3's and s4's introductory e-mail, they make mistakes when using the target language but the message they write can be perfectly understood by their partner as she only corrected a couple of mistakes, which are highlighted in bold just below their e-mail:

Dear Mary[3]

Hi!

How are you? We very good

I am s3. I am sixteen years old. My birthday is twentieth September. I am tall and my eyes are brown. I am Spanish and I live in Oviedo. I live with my mother and my sister. She is twenty-three years old.

Yo no tengo mascotas, pero me gustará tener un bulldog inglés. Tampoco toco ningún instrumento, pero me gusta mucho la música y bailar. En mi tiempo libre estoy con mi familia y mis amigos. Me gusta mucho el baloncesto.

Hi I am s4 I am seventeen years old. My birthday is ninth March. I am tall and black long hair. I live in Oviedo with my parents.

Yo no tengo perros pero si toco un instrumento, la guitarra. Los fines de semana me gusta salir con mis amigos. Kisses

CORRECTIONS:

We ARE very good.

Your English is very good- well done! My Spanish is very bad- I'm sorry!

The e-mail tandem exchange is also a positive experience for the participants regarding reflection on one's own learning to become aware of the importance of learning to learn by means of learning diaries. Diaries were introduced during the first year of the programme to reflect on the activities done in the classroom, mainly in the IT room. Spanish was the language in which they wrote their reflections. Thus, twelve of the participants wrote everything in their mother tongue because they felt more comfortable and the teacher decided not to force them to do it in English due to their particular characteristics, since the main goal of the task was not to improve target language command, but to make them aware of the importance of reflection as a lifelong learning process. Diaries proved to be useful tools for reflection since, as the project developed, ten students (76.92%) were able to support their arguments as opposed to the beginning of the first year, when they simply described the websites they visited. This argument is illustrated in the following examples taken from s8's and s4's diaries at the beginning and at the end of the programme:

s8

Estuve en la página de clicknlearn de 3 °de la ESO de nivel fácil (de los colores, los números y de ropa).

Hoy es el último día de clase de ingles. Durante dos años hemos trabajado ingles tanto en los ordenadores como en la clase.

También compartimos con otros alumnos de otro colegio de Inglaterra nos mandábamos cartas de cómo era nuestro colegio y más cosas cotidianas que vivimos.

Yo creo que me ha servido bastante todo lo que hemos hecho estos dos años he aprendido muchas cosas. Y lo mejor que hemos hecho es que lo hemos comparado y hemos visto las mejoras desde que empezamos hace dos años.

s4

Hoy he estado haciendo ejercicios de verbos, tanto en afirmativo como en negativo, también he estado haciendo ejercicios de pronombres, y sobre todo de partes del cuerpo porque es lo que más me cuesta.

En estos dos años, en inglés he afianzado conocimientos, de todo lo elemental que habíamos dado cursos anteriores: Present Simple, Past continuous, Superlativos y comparativos. En este último curso me he notado con más seguridad a la hora de escribir, y leer. También me ha resultado mucho mas fácil estos dos años que el resto de cursos, gracias a que el ritmo de avance, se ha amoldado a mi ritmo.

Entre estos dos últimos curso, hemos hecho dos trabajos, de Michael Jordan y Dani Pedrosa, se ha notado la mejora de todo este tiempo, en cuestión de vocabulario y gramática.

En el porfolio nos hemos autoevaluado, y nos damos cuenta de lo que hemos avanzado y mejorado a lo largo de estos últimos dos años.

Las cartas nos han servido para aprender algo de vocabulario, porque se practica de dos maneras; una, a la hora de escribir, ya que hay que buscar palabras en el diccionario, y por otra, al leer las cartas. Y creo que no solo se aprende vocabulario, también se aprenden costumbres y formas de expresión.

Eight students (61.54%) also included a copy of the e-mails they had sent and received during the e-mail tandem exchange, to analyse what had been learnt from their partners' e-mails, as is shown in the following examples taken from s3 and s12:

s3

La verdad es que creo que ha sido una experiencia muy positiva en la que creo que he aprendido un montón de cosas más y sobre todo a expresarme un poco mejor. Hemos tenido algún que otro fallo que nos ha corregido, pero la verdad es que pensé que tendríamos muchos más.

s12

En esta carta aprendí también mucho vocabulario pero también me he fijado de que él tiene más faltas que en la otra carta, no obstante la carta está bien y se entiende bien.

The reflection students made in the Language Biography of their ELPs confirms that twelve of them acquired the learning to learn competence, since they were able to tick the boxes which showed their competence in the foreign

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[3] The names of the English students used in this paper have been changed.

language according to the six levels of reference for each of the skills dealt with in the classroom and only one of them ticked boxes above A2, which did not correspond to his linguistic competence in English. Finally, the questionnaires the pupils filled in during the programme, together with the activities provided at the end of the Language Biography, can be considered as useful instruments to promote learning to learn since they enabled students to evaluate the work done during the term and set goals for the following, and, at the end of the second year, they were able to come to a general conclusion about their learning progress, as can be seen in the examples taken from s4 and s8..

As far as intercultural competence is concerned, the e-mail tandem exchange is intended to promote intercultural communication, since students from different language communities get in touch to deal with topics concerning their native countries (e.g. School or Christmas). However, as was mentioned in the previous section of this paper, not all the communication established between members of two different cultures by means of e-mail leads necessarily to intercultural learning if participants do not show attitudes of curiosity and openness towards other cultures and belief about one's own ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction. With regard to our study, students showed attitudes of curiosity and openness towards their tandem partners, since they were really excited when they got a new e-mail, but twelve of them were unable to establish any relationships between cultural aspects concerning any of the topics dealt with. Regarding schools in England and in Spain, none of them asked their partner how subjects and classrooms were organised and they simply concentrated on the facilities both schools had and the subjects they studied. Talking about Christmas, they focused on shopping, gifts and New Year's Eve more than on the way Christmas is celebrated in both countries by pointing out similarities and differences between them. However, eight of them emphasized the importance of learning new vocabulary about these topics (61.54%), and only s4 referred to culture when she reflected on the e-mails in her diary:

Los emails nos han servido para aprender algo de vocabulario, porque se practica de dos maneras; una, a la hora de escribir, ya que hay que buscar palabras en el diccionario, y por otra, al leer las cartas. Y creo que no solo se aprende vocabulario, también se aprenden costumbres y formas de expresión.

IV. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study show that most of the students involved, despite their learning difficulties, were able to develop and acquire four of the five key competences included in the curriculum (i.e. communication in the mother and in the foreign language, learning to learn and digital competence) using e-mail tandem as the basic approach.

The e-mails they sent and received, together with the individual and group work activities students carried out during the first year of the programme, enabled them to use their native and target language to communicate with their tandem partners, as well as to become acquainted ICT (digital competence), since they not only retrieved, stored, produced, presented and exchanged information, but also communicated and participated in collaborative networks via e-mail.

Learning to learn was also acquired since most of the participants were able to reflect on their learning, either through e-mail tandem or classroom activities, in their learning diaries, showing a greater degree of reflection at the end of the study as compared to their first diary entries. The ELP was also a useful instrument to deepen on this self-reflection process, since students evaluated their learning progress by means of the descriptors provided in the Language Biography, being their evaluation no higher than $A1^{+}/A2$, which corresponded to their competence in English.

According to Byram's (1997) model, intercultural competence was partially acquired, since participants showed attitudes of curiosity and openness, readiness to learn more things about their tandem partners, but only s4 was able to associate her tandem experience with some kind of intercultural communication which enabled her to learn more about customs in the UK. Thus, most of the students did not show readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own in order to be capable of acquiring new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices. This finding coincides with O'Dowd's (2003) views on intercultural learning, since not all virtual communication between students belonging to two different countries leads to intercultural communication, and, thus, to the acquisition of intercultural competence.

As a conclusion, e-mail tandem proves to be a useful method to promote communication in the mother and foreign language, learning to learn and digital competences in the EFL classroom with a group of students with learning difficulties. However, the implementation of this approach to language learning with this group of students does not seem to imply that intercultural competence can be acquired. Therefore, further research should be carried out with a larger group of students with and without learning difficulties with a double-fold objective: to test if the development of intercultural competence has to do with learning abilities, and to determine if their performance is similar on the rest of the key competences analysed in this paper or whether students without learning difficulties outperform those belonging to *Diversificación Curricular*.

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