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E-Tutor Tandems in a COIL Course – Design, Implementation and Evaluation

Abstract

Research on digital collaboration scenarios in Higher Education (HE) is characterized by various approaches that often define the acquisition and development of global skills as learning goals. Virtual Collaborative Learning (VCL) in HE represents one approach to facilitating students' global skills. Depending on the use case, these learning arrangements can include case study-based group learning under e-tutorial supervision. This paper focuses on the perspective of e-tutors – specially qualified student assistants – and their competence development during the summer semester of 2022. Based on previous research findings, a tandem setting was chosen for their competence development. This paper mainly compares expectations and experiences regarding the competence improvement of e-tutors in a multinational tandem. These expectations and experiences were queried through two quantitative questionnaires utilizing 5-point Likert scales and one short follow-up questionnaire after the finalization of VCL. In general, the positive expectations of the e-tutors were fulfilled, but not to a similar extent for each competence category. Especially the development of social and pedagogical competencies was positive, whereas the development of intercultural competencies was challenging. Several recommendations for action were derived, which impact further e-tutor training.

K e y w o r d s: Global Skills, Virtual Exchange, Tandem, Virtual Collaborative Learning, Competence Development

Current research shows that various teaching and learning approaches have enriched the higher education (HE) landscape. Most approaches aim at students' competence-oriented and practical education (Clauss et al., 2019; Murillo-Zamorano et al., 2019). The need for training and development of global skills has attracted significant attention of HE to keep pace with the demands of the working world (Bourn, 2018). Especially the development of such global skills like knowledge work, teamwork and the use of technology has become increasingly essential for the modern workforce.

Also, the requirements of the 21st-century workplace and the goals of the EU's Bologna reform (European Commission, 2018) bring international virtual exchange and mobility projects into focus in HE teaching (O'Dowd, 2018). These requirements can be met with collaborative online international learning (COIL) approaches (Rubin & Guth, 2015), including Virtual Collaborative Learning (VCL) (Herrera-Pavo, 2021).

Through virtual collaboration and exchange, students from different HE institutions and cultural backgrounds develop a joint solution to a realistic case study within a set timeframe (Jödicke et al., 2014). E-tutors ensure a smooth process and close support of the student groups during their work phases (Jödicke & Teich, 2015). The trained learning facilitators are the first point of contact for the students and fulfill various tasks, e.g., motivation, feedback, and conflict resolution.

The qualification of e-tutors takes place either within a one-semester module or through a set of online workshops over a few weeks. Since e-tutors do not receive any further offers for competence development, additional instruments should be developed and implemented to address the improvement of competencies among e-tutors, thereby fulfilling the competence-oriented university mission. Competence-oriented learning opportunities are essential to "keep education aligned to the current job market, because we want to bridge the gap between study and career" (Chim & Dijk, 2022, p. 28).

Therefore, in the context of the multinational VCL in the summer semester of 2022 between a German University of Excellence, seven Albanian universities, and one Slovenian university, e-tutor tandems were introduced and evaluated. The concept of tandem learning was chosen as it is an established mutual learning method (Calvert, 2015).

A tandem approach can be a helpful tool to support and consequently learn from each other (Vassallo & Telles, 2006). Moreover, the e-tutors were obliged to fill out a tandem contract to establish their working basis. The main objective of the approach was to improve the competencies of the e-tutors. Thus, we pose the following research questions (RQs):

RQ 1: What do e-tutors expect of a tandem regarding competence improvement?
RQ 2: What do e-tutors expect of a tandem contract?
RQ 3: What are the e-tutors' experiences in tandems regarding competence improvement?

RQ 4: What are the e-tutors' experiences with the tandem contract?
RQ 5: How do the e-tutors rate the tandem in general?

To answer these RQs, comprehensive surveys with a Likert scale were presented to the e-tutors before and after the VCL. Additionally, a short follow-up questionnaire was handed out to the e-tutors a few weeks after the conclusion of the VCL.

1. Theoretical Background

This chapter lays the theoretical foundations concerning the concept of VCL, e-tutorial support, tandem setting and contract, and competencies. These explanations serve as a basis for comprehending the results and recommendations for action.

1.1. Virtual Collaborative Learning

The virtual exchange course, accompanied by the e-tutors in the summer semester of 2022, was called "Collaboration in the Virtual Classroom" and based on the VCL framework by Bukvova et al. (2006). Within this framework, the groups generally range from four to six people to encourage active collaboration among the participants. It is a formal educational setting that awards 5 ECTS points for performance. The average effort per individual is 150 hours, and the module's accreditation depends on regional examination rules. Four design dimensions comprise the VCL framework, guaranteeing the setting's quality (Schoop et al., 2019). They are explained in the following.

Realistic Task Design: The case study setup is patterned with a real-world scenario in which participants collaborate for several weeks in small groups to tackle challenging issues (Altmann & Clauss, 2020). The case study is didactically prepared and enriched with elements from a real-world business context. In the summer semester of 2022, the case study was focused on the participants creating a start-up that deals with ecotourism and is based in Albania. The goal was to convince a jury at the end of the project period with a professional pitch of the business idea and to win fictitious start-up capital.

Technical Platform: The module takes place via Microsoft Teams, which supports synchronous and asynchronous communication. Students can choose various collaboration and communication tools to enhance their working experiences. The platform provides options for group collaboration on documents and central group storage. Furthermore, appointment scheduling can be done intuitively with integrated tools (Clauss et al., 2019a).

Professionalized Pedagogical Support: Teams working in virtual groups are assisted by qualified e-tutors, who receive special training, e.g., in providing organizational, social, and technological support (Jödicke & Teich, 2015). They have technical platform proficiency, conflict resolution, and computer-mediated communication skills. To ensure student support, the e-tutors work closely with the module supervisor (Schoop et al., 2019). The novelty in the summer semester of 2022 was the introduction of e-tutor tandems. Typically, groups are supervised by one e-tutor, but this time a group was assisted by a tandem of two to four e-tutors.

Learning Analytics: The framework is enhanced by learning analytics and information visualization about students' learning behavior and interaction patterns on the collaboration platform. Students are fully informed beforehand about how and why their data is processed (Clauss et al., 2019a).

The primary objective of the VCL is to develop and improve communicative, digital, professional, personal, and student-centered competencies (Clauss et al., 2019b). Working on the case study allows students to gain professional competencies. The organization of individual and group learning processes enhances self-competence. Collaboration on a technical platform ensures the development of social and digital skills. Working with people of different ethnicities improves intercultural competencies (Clauss et al., 2019a).

Groups are evaluated formatively and summatively to maximize learning outcomes on an individual and group level. For this evaluation, continuous observation by e-tutors is necessary to get insight into learning processes and respond quickly when issues arise (Tawileh, 2017). Thus, this setting focuses on developing global skills through a modern learning arrangement in HE.

1.2. E-Tutors

The term "e-tutor" is used in several different settings and has many synonyms, making it challenging to define distinctly. Online tutors, instructors for distance learning, or e-moderators are other names for e-tutors (Bawane & Spector, 2009; Vegliante & Sannicandro, 2020). de Metz & Bezuidenhout (2018) explain the term extensively and define an e-tutor as "the person most intimately involved in the assistance of distance students" (p. 29). Jödicke & Teich (2015) provide a more precise definition of e-tutors for our research setting. They define e-tutors as those who support students in achieving learning goals in modern e-learning environments.

This understanding of e-tutorial activities fits the extent of their support in a VCL. In this context, they observe, assist, and direct the learning processes rather than disseminating knowledge, as defined, for example, by Bawane & Spector (2009). E-tutors provide support with technological, organizational, content-related, and interpersonal challenges and operate as students' first points of contact

(Jödicke & Teich, 2015). Thus, this publication's working definition of e-tutors is that *e-tutors are student learning facilitators of virtual learning processes in a modern HE setting*.

1.3. Tandem Setting and Tandem Contract

Tandem learning originated in language teaching in the 1960s and is still often used as a medium for bilateral language learning, e.g., in e-tandem projects (Guanoluisa & Viera, 2021) or even in language teacher training (Aguilar et al., 2019). It is seen as an approach to facilitate autonomous or self-learning (Calvert, 2015). The two main principles of tandem learning are reciprocity and autonomy (Little & Brammerts, 1996). Reciprocity refers to the principle of mutual interdependence, stating that the partners must support each other and exchange information and skills for their mutual (but not necessarily equal) benefit. Autonomy means that both partners are responsible for their learning and choose what they want, when they want to learn, and how much assistance they need. Thus, neither learner is expected to be a teacher (Little & Brammerts, 1996).

However, these two principles can be applied to more settings than language teaching. In recent years, tandem learning has also become the focus of, e.g., knowledge management to transfer organizational knowledge between generations. An example of tandem work outside of language teaching can be found at Deutsche Bank (Fischer, 2007). The "know-how tandem" has been used since 2001 and pursues, among other things, the goals of increasing the quality of support, ensuring the transfer of knowledge, and creating a corporate culture (Fischer, 2007). In this example, tandem learning focuses on the transfer of tacit knowledge (Rimser, 2017).

Generally, tandems concentrate on the transfer of know-to-do-knowledge rather than know-what-knowledge (Hulme, 2014). A tandem can be implemented in many ways and used for different applications. This flexibility is a great advantage of the method (Vassallo & Telles, 2006). In the present case, one could also speak of e-tandems since the tandem work was done virtually by the e-tutors (Soledad et al., 2021).

A tandem contract was introduced to support the "forming" phase of the tandem (Tuckman, 1965). In a recent study, such group contracts were profitable for group collaboration (Brannen et al., 2021). According to Brannen et al. (2021), a contract helps to structure group dynamics and has a positive influence, e.g.,

- on the establishment of working relationships between group members,
- on students' perceptions and approaches towards communication,
- on students with academic anxiety.

The tandem setting in the VCL course was designed as follows:

A brief introduction to the tandem concept was given to create a shared understanding of tandems. Before the start of the supervision phase, tandems were

formed, usually consisting of two e-tutors from different countries, to stimulate intercultural exchange and, thus, the acquisition of intercultural competencies. After the beginning of the VCL, few student groups were dissolved or redistributed; therefore, few tandems consisted of more than two e-tutors.

For a common working basis, a template of the tandem contract was provided to the e-tutors and filled out jointly before the start of the supervision phase. The template was inspired by several authors (Centre for Teaching Excellence University of Waterloo, 2021; George Brown College, n.d.; Griffin Tate Template, 2002; Hesterman, 2016; Sutherland, 2021; University of Washington, n.d.; Warren, n.d.). Since most of the e-tutors met at a participating university before the start of the VCL as part of an ERASMUS+ project, the tandem contracts were discussed and filled out on-site.

1.4. Competencies

The concept of competencies has many connotations (Bergsmann et al., 2015). In this work, competencies are understood as an activity-based cluster of connected knowledge, attitudes, and abilities correlated with performance that may be improved by educational actions (Lowry & Flohr, 2005; Sisson & Adams, 2013). Like many other jobs, being an e-tutor requires special competencies. These requirements were extensively derived and evaluated in Langesee (2022). Ultimately, nine competence dimensions can be identified that e-tutors should cover. Although a primary qualification of e-tutors aims at an understanding of the tasks to be accomplished and a basic grounding in the required competencies, there is potential for improvement. The approach of tandem learning addresses this opportunity for competence development (Almazova et al., 2020).

While the language learning tandem is the best-known form of a tandem at universities, the benefits of the setting can also be transferred to other contexts. Through the intensive exchange in a tandem, which is the basis for a positive collaboration, the improvement of social, communicative, professional and, depending on the setting, intercultural competencies are targeted (Calvert, 2015; Chun, 2015; Pomino & Gil-Salom, 2016; Tardieu & Horgues, 2019). This is especially relevant in the context of emerging global skills that are critical for lifelong learning and success. Global skills' relevance is tied to global economic competition, technological breakthroughs, and increased diversity and mobility resulting from a connected world (Bourn, 2018; King et al., 2017).

Moreover, it is commonly acknowledged that global skills are required for people to prosper in HE, companies, and society. According to Oxford University Press (n.d.), global skills are classified into five major categories:

- communication and collaboration,
- creativity and critical thinking,

- intercultural competence and citizenship,
- emotional self-regulation and well-being,
- and digital literacy.

Especially communication and collaboration, intercultural competence, and digital literacy can be identified in the competence requirements for e-tutors (Langesee, 2022).

2. Methodology

The study was quantitative and included web-based questionnaires for data collection. Online surveys were chosen to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of the respondents and therefore increase candidates' willingness to provide authentic answers (Evans & Mathur, 2018). For this study, the items for two of the three developed online questionnaires were based on research by Langesee (2022), in which nine competence areas for e-tutors in COIL settings were identified. They were assessed through statements related to a specific competence. For example, a statement from the first questionnaire (Q1) that referred to communication competence was: *I expect to improve my communication moderation skills through an e-tutor tandem*.

The surveys were conducted with the help of Microsoft Forms, and responses were collected in three stages. The first stage was conducted before the start of the VCL, the second one after the VCL, and the third one four weeks after the previous one to allow some time for reflection.

The first two questionnaires were divided into one section, gathering socio-demographic data, and two thematic sections. In Q1, the thematic sections referred to the expectations (RQ 1 & RQ 2) of e-tutor competence development and the impact of an e-tutor tandem contract within the upcoming VCL. The same thematic sections in the second survey (Q2) focused on the e-tutor experiences (RQ 3 & RQ 4) gathered during the VCL.

Each questionnaire took approximately 15 minutes to complete. Most items were self-rated on a 5-point categorical Likert scale, which represents an ordinal psychometric measurement of attitudes, beliefs, and opinions. The response options ranged from total rejection ("strongly disagree") to total compliance ("strongly agree"), with a neutral option in the middle, presenting a symmetric Likert scale (Joshi et al., 2015). A few reversed items were constructed to prevent straight-line answering and reduce acquiescence bias (Pasek & Krosnick, 2010). A comment section for open questions was included in Q1 and Q2.

The third questionnaire (Q3) included a short section with socio-demographic data and one follow-up question referring to the overall impact of e-tutor tandems

on the competence development of e-tutors in a tandem (RQ 5). All three questionnaires (OA1-3) are available in the online appendix (OA)[1]. The survey intervals and numbers of participants (N=) are shown in Figure 1.

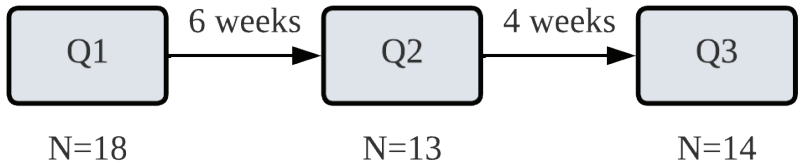

Figure 1. Timeframe of the Questionnaires and Number of Participants per Questionnaire

The surveys' validity and reliability were ensured during their design, and a pre-test was performed with experienced researchers (Taherdoost, 2016). The questionnaires were then analyzed descriptively using the integrated analysis functions of Microsoft Forms. There, the percentage share to the respective number of returns was calculated. The group of e-tutors was homogeneous in age, which is why they were considered and evaluated as one group.

3. Results

In the following section, the results for both questionnaires, Q1 (*expectations*) and Q2 (*experiences*), will be described jointly and nuanced to evaluate the contrasts. Then, the answers to the open-ended questions of both questionnaires will be presented. Additionally, the follow-up questionnaire (Q3) will be evaluated briefly.

3.1. Socio-Demographic Data and Background Information

Q1 was answered by 18, Q2 by 13, and Q3 by 14 e-tutors. The withdrawal of a few e-tutors can explain the discrepancy in the number of participants. The workload and high involvement exceeded the expectations initially set by their supervising university. The age distribution of the participants for Q1-Q3 is depicted in Figure 2.

[1] https://bit.ly/3P3ugs2

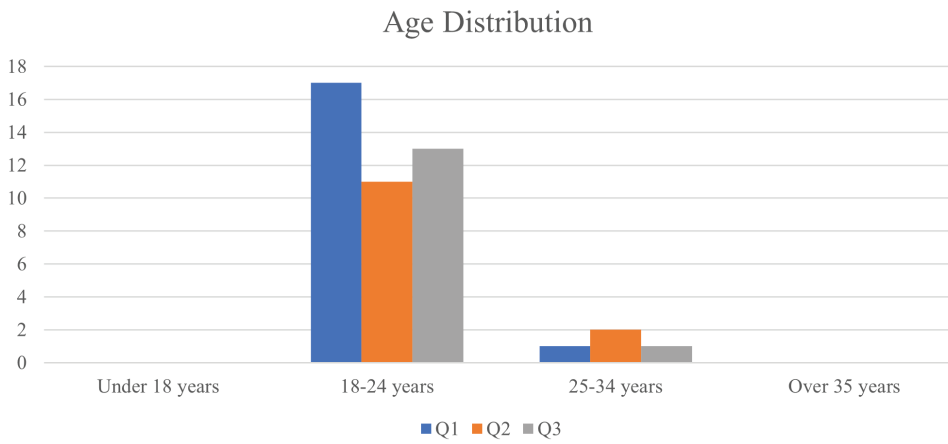

Figure 2. Age Distribution of Participants for Q1-Q3

The e-tutors belonged to the collaborating universities. The exact distribution of e-tutors is not discussed in detail here, as it is not the focus of the descriptive analysis. In Q1, the e-tutors were then asked how long they had been an e-tutor at the time of the survey. As depicted in Figure 3, six e-tutors had been e-tutors for less than six months, four for between six and eleven months, and eight for between one and two years.

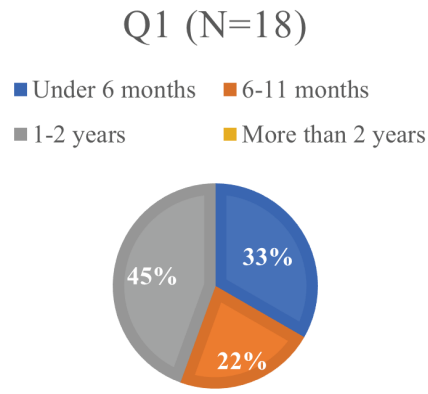

Figure 3. Duration of Employment as an E-Tutor

3.2. Comparison of Expectations and Experiences in Tandem Work

The questions in Q1 were formulated with a view to the future. A statement about the expectation of the development of social competence can serve as an example. It read*: I expect that an e-tutor tandem will improve my ability to interact socially.* In Q2, the participants' experiences were queried with the same

statement: *The e-tutor tandem improved my ability to interact socially.* Thus, the two questionnaires differed only in the tense of the statements. In the following, the results of the questionnaires concerning the competencies (*social, pedagogical, communication, media, organizational, individual, professional, evaluation*, and *intercultural*) are summed up and discussed.

Now, the most conspicuous results relevant to answering RQs 1-4 are discussed in the text and are tabulated in Table 1. To maintain clarity, the other statements from Q1 and Q2 are deposited as OA4. Generally, the percentage results of Q1 and Q2 and their differences are presented.

The statements (S) in the second column summarize the core content of the relevant statements from Q1 and Q2 and are clustered to their respective competence by the first column. The exact wording can be taken from the original questionnaires (OA1-2). The difference between Q1 and Q2 is shown in brackets and color-coded (*red* for a decrease, *green* for an increase). The numbers are derived from the results of each respective questionnaire. The percentage calculation was performed directly in Microsoft Forms, while the calculation of the differences was done manually. Afterward, the competencies are presented successively to guide through the evaluation.

Table 1
E- Tutor Tandem - Comparison Between Q1 and Q2

Competence	Statement (S)	Expectation → Experience (Difference) in %				
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Social	S2: Building social relationships	–	–	0.0 → 23.1 (23.1)	77.8 → 30.8 (47.0)	22.2 → 46.2 (24.0)
	S3: Building and maintaining a good relationship with the tandem partner	–	–	5.6 → 23.1 (17.5)	77.8 → 23.1 (54.7)	16.7 → 53.8 (37.1)
	S5: Identification of student problems	–	–	22.2 → 7.7 (14.5)	55.6 → 53.8 (1.8)	22.2 → 38.5 (16.3)
	S6: Resolving student problems	–	–	22.2 → 7.7 (14.5)	50.0 → 46.2 (3.8)	28.0 → 46.2 (18.2)
	S7: Learning from partner's social skills	–	–	11.1 → 23.1 (12.0)	72.2 → 38.5 (33.7)	16.7 → 38.5 (21.8)
	S8: Building a more personal relationship with the partner	–	–	38.9 → 30.8 (8.1)	55.6 → 30.8 (24.8)	5.6 → 38.5 (32.9)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Pedagogical	S10: Teaching/ Pedagogical skills	–	–	5.6 → 7.7 (2.1)	77.8 → 46.2 (31.6)	16.7 → 46.2 (29.5)
	S12: Feedback skills	–	–	0.0 → 7.7 (7.7)	77.8 → 46.2 (31.6)	22.2 → 46.2 (24.0)
	S13: Learning from partner's pedagogical skills	–	–	5.6 → 0.0 (5.6)	72.2 → 46.2 (26.0)	22.2 → 53.8 (31.6)
Communi-cation	S14: Communication skills	–	0.0 → 7.7 (7.7)	5.6 → 0.0 (5.6)	61.1 → 46.2 (14.9)	33.3 → 46.2 (12.9)
	S16: Communication moderation skills	–	0.0 → 7.7 (7.7)	0.0 → 0.0 (0.0)	83.3 → 46.2 (37.1)	16.7 → 46.2 (29.5)
	S18: Foreign language skills	–	0.0 → 7.7 (7.7)	11.1 → 0.0 (11.1)	44.4 → 61.5 (17.1)	44.4 → 30.8 (13.6)
	S19: Learning from partner's communication skills	–	–	0.0 → 15.4 (15.4)	72.2 → 53.8 (18.4)	27.8 → 30.8 (3.0)
Media	S21: Repertoire of collaboration tools	–	–	16.7 → 15.4 (1.3)	66.7 → 61.5 (5.2)	16.7 → 23.1 (6.4)
	S22: Learning from partner's media skills	–	5.6 → 0.0 (5.6)	5.6 → 30.8 (25.2)	66.7 → 46.2 (20.5)	22.2 → 46.2 (24.0)
Organiza-tional	S23: Organizational and planning skills	–	–	–	72.2 → 61.5 (10.7)	27.8 → 38.5 (10.7)
	S24: Knowledge of group management	–	–	5.6 → 0.0 (5.6)	61.1 → 69.2 (8.1)	33.3 → 30.8 (2.5)
	S25: Learning from partner's organizational skills	–	–	5.6 → 15.4 (9.8)	66.7 → 61.5 (5.2)	27.8 → 23.1 (4.7)
Individual	S26: Creativity	–	–	5.6 → 15.4 (9.8)	66.7 → 38.5 (28.2)	27.8 → 46.2 (18.4)
	S28: Empathy	–	0.0 → 7.7 (7.7)	22.2 → 15.4 (6.8)	72.2 → 53.8 (18.4)	5.6 → 23.1 (17.5)
	S29: Tolerance	–	0.0 → 7.7 (7.7)	11.1 → 30.8 (19.7)	55.6 → 46.2 (9.4)	33.3 → 15.4 (17.9)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Individual	S31: Learning from partner's individual traits and character	–	–	0.0 → 15.4 (15.4)	77.8 → 61.5 (16.3)	22.2 → 23.1 (0.9)
Professional	S34: Learning from partner's professional skills	–	–	5.6 → 7.7 (2.1)	55.6 → 69.2 (13.6)	38.9 → 23.1 (15.8)
	S35: Interdisciplinary collaboration skills	–	–	5.6 → 0.0 (5.6)	66.7 → 76.9 (10.2)	27.8 → 23.1 (4.7)
	S36: Reduction of workload and maintaining of high-quality work	–	–	16.7 → 0.0 (16.7)	55.6 → 84.6 (29.0)	27.8 → 15.4 (12.4)
Evaluation	S37: Assessment skills	–	–	0.0 → 7.7 (7.7)	88.9 → 69.2 (19.7)	11.1 → 23.1 (12.0)
	S38: Data analysis and interpretation skills	–	–	5.6 → 0.0 (5.6)	77.8 → 76.9 (0.9)	16.7 → 23.1 (6.4)
	S39: Learning from partner's evaluation / assessment skills	–	–	0.0 → 15.4 (15.4)	77.8 → 61.5 (16.3)	22.2 → 23.1 (0.9)
Intercultural	S40: Intercultural skills	–	–	0.0 → 30.8 (30.8)	44.4 → 38.5 (5.9)	55.6 → 30.8 (24.8)
	S44: Enrichment of worldview	0.0 → 7.7 (7.7)	0.0 → 7.7 (7.7)	0.0 → 7.7 (7.7)	72.2 → 46.2 (26.0)	27.8 → 30.8 (3.0)
	S45: Learning from partner's intercultural skills	–	0.0 → 7.7 (7.7)	0.0 → 7.7 (7.7)	66.7 → 46.2 (20.5)	33.3 → 38.5 (5.2)

Social Competence (S2-8)

Forming and maintaining a social relationship with the tandem partner exceeded the expectations of the e-tutors. Both statements (S2/3) showed a significant increase in Q2. The relationship with the tandem partner is essential to build trust, which is a foundation of a beneficial partnership (Choi & Cho, 2019). The statement that an e-tutor tandem helps to establish a more personal relationship with the tandem partner (S8) also received a significant increase in agreement in Q2. Identifying supervised students' problems (S5) exceeded the expectations from Q1. This development concurs with S6, which deals with resolving supervised students' problems. This experience was also perceived positively by the e-tutors. Additionally, the tandem supported the e-tutors in learning from the social skills of the tandem partner (S7).

Pedagogical Competence (S10-13)

The successful experience regarding S10 and S13 can be combined, as the positive development of one's pedagogical skills (S10) goes along with learning from the pedagogical skills of the tandem partner (S13). Increasing one's feedback skills (S12) improved significantly from Q1 to Q2. Especially the ability to provide helpful feedback to the tutored student group is essential for an e-tutor in a VCL-like setting.

Communication Competence (S14-19)

Communication skills displayed a mixed picture. Although the experience of improving communication skills (S14) developed positively for some e-tutors, a few felt the opposite. A similar, though more positive picture emerged in S16. The ability to manage or moderate communication improved significantly, and only some indicated the contrary. As described in chapter 2, the origins of tandem learning lie in language teaching. In some cases, foreign language skills (S18) could be improved in the tandem. Generally, the e-tutors learned from the communication skills of the tandem partner (S19), though not to a huge extent.

Media Competence (S21-22)

The tandem positively influenced the repertoire of collaboration tools known to the e-tutors (S21). Largely, the e-tutors learned from the media skills of the tandem partner (S22). Since this statement has a similar increase in the neutral position and strong agreement, this suggests that a tandem partner benefited more from the partner's existing media skills than the other way around.

Organizational Competence (S23-25)

The development of the organizational and planning skills (S23) of the e-tutors exceeded their expectations from Q1. Knowledge of group management (S24) could also record a slightly positive trend. However, learning from the organizational skills of the tandem partner (S25) was less helpful than anticipated.

Individual Competence (S26-31)

Creativity (S26) improved significantly. Empathy (S28) also advanced considerably for some e-tutors, although a small percentage disagreed with this development. Surprisingly, tolerance development (S29) was expected to be more positive than displayed in the results. This result may be due to various reasons, including inadequate communication within the tandem. Generally, a weak positive tendency to learn from the individual traits and characteristics of the tandem partner (S31) could be observed.

Professional Competence (S34-36)

A slightly positive development could be identified in interdisciplinary collaboration skills (S35). A reduced workload and the resulting maintenance of a high level of quality in work (S36) could also be noticed. Learning from the tandem partner's professional skills (S34) was generally positive.

Evaluation/Assessment Competence (S37-39)

The development of the e-tutors' assessment skills (S37) vastly exceeded their expectations. This could coincide with the positive development of feedback skills (S12). Data analysis and interpretation skills (S38) also increased. The trend in S39, learning from the evaluation skills of the tandem partner, was largely neutral but also slightly positive.

Intercultural Competence (S40-45)

The comparison between expectations and experiences of improving intercultural skills (S40) was surprisingly less positive. Although there are no negative assessments of S40, the positive assessments decrease in favor of the neutral position. Especially the enrichment of the worldview (S44) has strongly differing trends. While there is an increase in Q2's strong agreement with the statement, the disapproval ratings of the statement also increase. In general, the e-tutors stated that they had learned from the tandem partner's intercultural skills (S45), though partly opposing developments can be observed.

3.3. Tandem Contract

As Table 2 illustrates, the tandem contract proved to be a meaningful basis for cooperation (S48) and was able to meet the majority's expectations (s. OA5). Complying with the content of the tandem contract (S49) was also considered positive. This is also expressed in the adherence to learning goals and sticking to them (S51). Here, negative expectations could be transformed into neutral or strongly positive experiences. In Q1, the e-tutors were also asked whether they considered a tandem contract necessary (S52). The majority answered affirmatively.

Table 2
E-Tutor Contract - Comparison Between Q1 and Q2

Statement (S)	Expectation → Experience (Difference) in %				
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
S48: Meaningful basis for collaboration	–	–	22.2 → 7.7 (14.5)	61.1 → 76.9 (15.8)	16.7 → 15.4 (1.3)
S49: Complying with the contract's content	–	–	16.7 → 15.4 (1.3)	77.8 → 76.9 (0.9)	5.6 → 7.7 (2.1)
S51: Recording learning goals and sticking to them	–	5.6 → 0.0 (5.6)	11.1 → 15.4 (4.3)	66.7 → 53.8 (12.9)	16.7 → 30.8 (14.1)
S52: No contract necessary	11.1	33.3	38.9	16.7	–

3.4. General Questions and Comments

In Q1, the e-tutors also had the opportunity to specify the content they wanted a tandem contract to cover. Most frequently mentioned was that the tandem contract should include the expectations of the tandem. The e-tutors also rated the commitments of each tandem member, the inclusion of individual agreements, and participation rules as vital. Rules for communication and decision-making are also considered necessary. General guidelines for working methods and conflict resolution rules are also expected in a tandem contract. Although these requests could not be considered in the tandem contract provided in this VCL, they overlapped with its contents to a great extent. However, this information will help to cover essential aspects of a tandem contract in future iterations.

In Q2, e-tutors could answer open-ended questions. When asked why they would like to work in an e-tutor tandem again, nine e-tutors left a response. For example, one e-tutor wrote that collaborating and consulting about problems was helpful. Another comment mentioned competence improvements and the opportunity for intercultural exchange as motivational factors. The general work in a team was also perceived as positive. When questioned about what they would change about the tandem setup, one response suggested that dealing with the inactivity of the tandem partner should be considered.

One e-tutor stated that the work and activity of e-tutors should be better regulated to avoid an uneven distribution of workload and thus to improve the tandem setting for future e-tutors. In addition, e-tutors need more guidelines about relevant procedures in a tandem setting. Information about frequently occurring problems in tandems should also be provided in advance to prepare the e-tutors. When asked how they would rate their experience with the e-tutor tandem, seven e-tutors answered with “very positive”, and six e-tutors responded with “positive”. In addition, eleven e-tutors stated that they would work in an e-tutor tandem again, one person was unsure, and one answered negatively.

Now, to answer RQ1, it can be stated that the e-tutors expected the tandem setting to improve their competencies but to different extents. The experiences often exceeded expectations and were largely positive regarding competence improvement, which answers RQ3. Regarding Q2, it can be observed that the e-tutors expected the tandem contract to be helpful. Like in RQ3, their experience with the tandem contract positively surpassed their expectations, which answers RQ4.

3.5. Follow-Up Questionnaire (Q3)

Q3 was distributed to the e-tutors four weeks after concluding the VCL as a follow-up (OA3). Thereby, the e-tutors had ample time to reflect on the tandem. Q3 included one main question concerning the fit of the tandem setting for

competence improvement. Fourteen e-tutors answered it. Thirteen respondents indicated that e-tutor tandems helped develop further e-tutor and, thus, work competencies, whereas one e-tutor remained neutral (s. Figure 4). Thus, RQ 5 can be answered affirmatively.

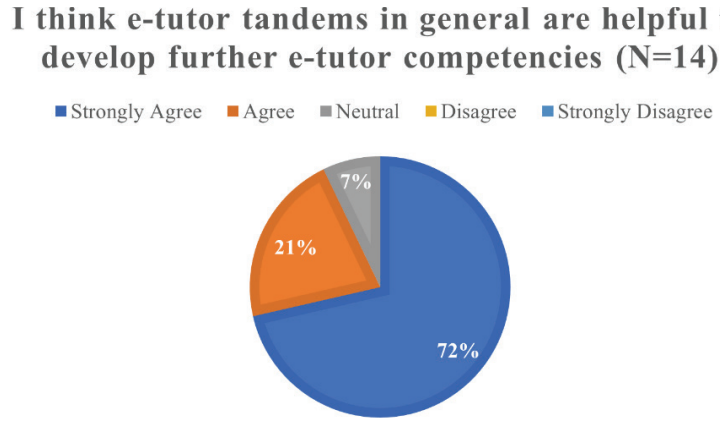

Figure 4. Benefit of Tandem for Competence Development

4. Discussion

Overall, the e-tutors had high expectations of competence improvement through tandem work before the VCL. These expectations were met or even exceeded in many competence areas. This includes, for example, social competence, which could be increased more through the tandem than initially expected by the e-tutors. Pedagogical competence was also developed more than expected. The evaluation competence exceeded expectations and might be related to the highly positive development of pedagogical competence.

In contrast, intercultural competence was developed less than expected. This may be due to an insufficient engagement with the different cultural backgrounds of the e-tutors. Professional competence also failed to meet the expectations. The expectations toward developing individual competence were higher than the experiences. These competencies include skills that are usually time-intensive to develop. Nonetheless, there were also successes, e.g., in increasing creativity and empathy.

However, the tandem is suitable for addressing and developing numerous competencies. This finding is also supported by the result from Q3, in which 72% of the e-tutors rated the tandem as helpful for competence development. The covered competencies also contain global skills that can be improved and

sustainably benefit the student e-tutors. Adjustments to the tandem setting are required to address the competence areas that did not meet expectations.

4.1. Recommendations for Action

In this part, we list design recommendations that we could derive from monitoring the VCL and evaluating the questionnaires. These suggestions are intended to support other module supervisors in avoiding potential obstacles when taking advantage of the opportunities offered by e-tutor tandems.

- *Initial Information About Tandem*

Although the e-tutors received a short introduction to tandem work before the start of the VCL, this needed to be more comprehensive for some e-tutors. Therefore, informing the e-tutors about basic principles, opportunities, and challenges is recommended before working in tandem. This additional knowledge transfer should provide an equal understanding of tandem work.

- *Implementing Intercultural Guidelines*

The development of intercultural competencies could be realized partly. To further support the intercultural exchange between the tandem partners, the e-tutors should include guidelines in their contract, enabling them to learn about the other culture. They could create a short presentation or quiz about their cultural background.

- *Reflection on One's Progress*

To document their learning progress, e-tutors can create learning diaries. Additionally, e-tutors should meet regularly to reflect on their learning progress and discuss challenges to support each other adequately. Firstly, the intention is to become aware of one's competencies. Secondly, the e-tutors should come to terms with their learning and development goals and reflect on achieving these objectives.

- *Goal Setting and Tracking*

Educators can provide tips and assistance to facilitate the formulation of personal goals. E-tutors should then understand how to set goals, such as improved social competence, and then follow through and track them.

- *Head of E-tutors*

To reduce the hurdle of asking supervisors for support in tracking competence development, the role of the "Head of E-tutors" can be introduced. An experienced e-tutor should fill this role. They should see it as their task to support and guide other e-tutors in their competence development. Through experience in e-tutoring, the Head of E-tutors knows where the potential for competence development exists. This e-tutor can also offer support in reflecting on the learning processes. They can intensively accompany the goal-setting process and the reflection before, during and after the VCL.

- *Tandem Contract*

To counteract time problems when filling out the tandem contract, the e-tutors should send them to the module supervisors in advance. Thereupon, e-tutors can be assigned to tandems based on their self-identified strengths and weaknesses to maximize learning potential. To further simplify tracking the set guidelines and goals, the tandem contract can be divided into three phases (before, during, and after the VCL).

- *Self-Evaluation Tool*

The identification of the competence levels can be realized, e.g., with the help of a self-evaluation tool. Such a web-based tool can allow e-tutors to get information about their competence levels before and after a VCL and thus provide an additional way to monitor their learning progress.

- *Common Understanding*

In general, the tandem work should enable e-tutors to further develop their competencies in different areas. However, before the e-tutors set their goals, a concise understanding of competencies should be created. For this, a detailed description of competencies regarding the e-tutors' activities in Langesee (2023) can be provided to e-tutors to facilitate goal formulation and tracking. It should be ensured that the competence descriptions are consistent with the explanations in the self-evaluation tool.

- *Transparency of Cooperation Partners*

There must be an equal understanding of the tandem between the e-tutors, supervising university staff, and cooperating universities. These institutions lay the foundation for collaboration. This includes, e.g., the crediting of the e-tutors' activities at the respective university and precise information for the e-tutors about the time resources required for this activity.

5. Conclusion

This research aimed to investigate the fit of tandem work in a VCL environment to enhance and develop competencies. The study subjects were e-tutors who virtually mentored student groups in tandems for several weeks. To evaluate the tandem work, three questionnaires were distributed to the e-tutors before, during, and after the VCL.

Their expectations and experiences within the e-tutor tandem, contract, and perceived competence development were recorded. Based on these results, recommendations for action for interested educators were derived, which impact further training strategies for e-tutors. Although the study subjects were e-tutors in

a VCL, the recommendations are transferable to similar educational environments with tutors, virtual language tandems or even company-internal training.

First, it can be noted that the e-tutors had positive expectations towards the tandem work and contract. For most participants, these expectations were exceeded by the experiences made. However, apparent differences between the nine competence areas could also be identified. For example, the positive development in intercultural competencies was lower than expected.

In contrast, the pedagogical and social competencies benefited most from the tandems. The tandem contract was also perceived as beneficial. A third survey, which took place several weeks after the VCL, underlined the positive experiences. Most e-tutors would also want to participate in a tandem in the future. This evaluation shows that global skills, integrated into different competence areas, can be improved through tandems within a virtual collaboration.

The limitations of the present research refer mainly to the small number of e-tutors. Due to the dropouts of e-tutors, the sample size was considerably reduced. Nevertheless, several tandems could be formed and researched, which allowed numerous conclusions to be drawn. Besides, in Table 1, rounding errors of 0.1% occurred in a few cases, which was not relevant to the trend but is still mentioned for completeness. Lastly, qualitative data should supplement Likert-scale questionnaires to overcome numerical data's inherent limitations. This was done in the present case with free-text questions and comment options. A mixed methods approach may be suitable for future studies.

In the future, the recommendations will be evaluated in other e-tutor tandems. A self-evaluation tool is also planned to make it easier for the e-tutors to compare their competence levels before and after a VCL. Additionally, such a tool can support them in tracking their learning goals.

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Lisa-Marie Langesee, Nelli Ukhova

Tandemy e-tutorów w kursie COIL – projekt, wdrożenie i ocena

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Badania nad scenariuszami współpracy cyfrowej w szkolnictwie wyższym (HE) charakteryzują się różnymi podejściami, które jako cele nauczania często wskazują nabycie i rozwój umiejętności globalnych. Wirtualne uczenie się przez współpracę (VCL) w szkolnictwie wyższym jest jednym z podejść ułatwiającym studentom nabywanie globalnych umiejętności. W zależności od sytuacji te rozwiązania edukacyjne mogą obejmować grupowe uczenie się oparte na studiach przypadków pod nadzorem e-tutorów. Niniejszy artykuł koncentruje się na perspektywie e-tutorów – specjalnie wykwalifikowanych asystentów studentów – i ich rozwoju kompetencji podczas letniego semestru w 2022 roku. Uwzględniając wyniki poprzednich badań, celem pracy w tandemie tutorskim był rozwój kompetencji. W artykule porównano przede wszystkim oczekiwania i doświadczenia dotyczące rozwoju kompetencji e-tutorów w międzynarodowym tandemie. Oczekiwania i doświadczenia, o których mowa, zostały zbadane za pomocą dwóch kwestionariuszy ilościowych wykorzystujących 5-punktowe skale Likerta. Zastosowano także jeden krótki kwestionariusz kontrolny po zakończeniu VCL. W rezultacie badań stwierdzono, że oczekiwania e-tutorów potwierdziły się, jednak w różnym stopniu dla każdej z badanych kompetencji. Zaobserwowano wyjątkowo pozytywny rozwój kompetencji społecznych i pedagogicznych, podczas gdy rozwój kompetencji międzykulturowych stanowił wyzwanie. Opracowano kilka zaleceń dotyczących działań, które mogą wpłynąć na doskonalenie pracy e-tutorów.

S ł o w a k l u c z o w e: umiejętności globalne, wymiana wirtualna, tandem/zespół, wirtualne uczenie się przez współpracę, rozwój kompetencji

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Тандемы преподавателей в электронном курсе COIL – разработка, внедрение и оценка Аннотация

Аннотация

Исследования сценариев цифрового сотрудничества в высшем образовании (ВО) характеризуются различными подходами, которые часто определяют приобретение и развитие глобальных навыков в качестве целей обучения. Виртуальное совместное обучение (VCL) в ВУЗе представляет собой один из подходов к развитию глобальных навыков студентов. В зависимости от конкретного случая, такие формы обучения могут включать групповое обучение на основе конкретных примеров под руководством преподавателей в электронной среде. Данная статья посвящена перспективам преподавания в электронном курсе (е-тьюторам). Студенты-ассистенты прошли специальное обучение с целью развития их компетенций в течение летнего семестра 2022 года. Основываясь на результатах предыдущих исследований, для развития компетенций была выбрана тандемная форма обучения. В данной работе в основном сравниваются ожидания и опыт в отношении повышения компетентности е-тьюторов в многонациональном тандеме. Эти ожидания и опыт были исследованы с помощью двух количественных анкет, использующих пятибалльную шкалу Лайкерта, и одной короткой анкеты после завершения VCL. В целом, позитивные ожидания преподавателей оправдались, но не в одинаковой степени для каждой категории компетенций. Особенно позитивным было развитие социальных и педагогических компетенций, в то время как развитие межкультурных компетенций было проблематичным. Было выработано несколько рекомендаций для действий, которые влияют на дальнейшее обучение е-тьюторов.

Ключевые слова: глобальные навыки, виртуальный обмен, тандем, виртуальное коллаборативное обучение, развитие компетенций

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Tándems E-Tutor en un curso COIL – Diseño, implementación y evaluación

Resumen

La investigación sobre escenarios de colaboración digital en la Educación Superior (ES) se caracteriza por diversos enfoques que a menudo definen la adquisición y el desarrollo de competencias globales como objetivos de aprendizaje. El Aprendizaje Colaborativo Virtual (ACV) en la ES representa un enfoque para facilitar las competencias globales de los estudiantes. Dependiendo del caso de uso, estos acuerdos de aprendizaje pueden incluir el aprendizaje en grupo basado en el estudio de casos bajo la supervisión de un e-tutor. Este artículo se centra en la perspectiva de los e-tutores (estudiantes ayudantes especialmente cualificados) y en el desarrollo de sus competencias durante el semestre de verano de 2022. Sobre la base de los resultados de investigaciones anteriores, se eligió un entorno en tándem para el desarrollo de sus competencias. Este artículo compara principalmente las expectativas y experiencias relativas a la mejora de las competencias de los e-tutores en un tándem multinacional. Estas expectativas y experiencias se consultaron mediante dos cuestionarios cuantitativos que utilizaban escalas Likert de 5 puntos y un breve cuestionario de seguimiento tras

la finalización del VCL. En general, las expectativas positivas de los e-tutores se cumplieron, pero no en la misma medida para cada categoría de competencia. Especialmente el desarrollo de las competencias sociales y pedagógicas fue positivo, mientras que el desarrollo de las competencias interculturales supuso un reto. Se derivaron varias recomendaciones para la acción, que repercuten en la futura formación de e-tutores.

P a l a b r a s c l a v e: Habilidades globales, intercambio virtual, tándem, aprendizaje colaborativo virtual, desarrollo de competencias