ISSN 1981-416X
https://doi.org/10.7213/1981-416X.26.090.DS07EN

Dossier

Revista Diálogo Educacional

periodicos.pucpr.br/dialogoeducacional

# Thinking about learning: metacognition, reflection, and autonomy in teletandem practices

*Pensar sobre aprender: metacognição, reflexão e autonomia em práticas de teletandem*

*Reflexiones sobre el aprendizaje: metacognición, reflexión y autonomía en las prácticas de teletándem*

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**How to cite:** SOUZA, M. G.; MCLEAN, M. M.; CAMPOS, B. S. Thinking about learning: metacognition, reflection, and autonomy in teletandem practices. *Revista Diálogo Educacional*, Curitiba, PUCPRESS, v. 26, n. 90, p. 1527-1542, 2026. https://doi.org/10.7213/1981-416X.26.090.DS07EN

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## Abstract

In teletandem practices, a modality of virtual exchange for language learning, metacognition plays a central role in integrating linguistic and strategic knowledge with communicative practice. This paper presents the results of an exploratory interpretive analysis of self-assessment forms completed by students participating in an institutional teletandem partnership between a Brazilian university, whose students were learning English and/or Spanish, and a North American university, whose students were learning Portuguese. Drawing on a literature review of works on metacognition in teletandem (Cavalari, 2009; Garcia; O'Connor; Cappellini, 2017; Campos, 2018; 2023), this study aims to contribute to research in this area by examining how this learning modality is configured as a participant-centered practice, in which learners recognize themselves as such and, throughout the entire partnership process, plan, monitor, regulate, and evaluate their own performance. As a result of the analysis, we argue that reflecting on their own learning processes enables learners to revisit what was accomplished, analyze the outcomes obtained, distinguish successes from limitations, and redefine goals for future sessions, thereby promoting a continuous integration between knowledge and the effective use of the language in authentic communicative situations.

Keywords: Teletandem. Language learning. Metacognition. Reflexivity. Autonomy.

## Resumo

*Em práticas de teletandem, modalidade de intercâmbio virtual para a aprendizagem de línguas, a metacognição ocupa um papel central na integração entre os saberes linguísticos, estratégicos e a prática comunicativa. O presente trabalho contempla os resultados de uma análise exploratória interpretativa de formulários de autoavaliação respondidos por estudantes participantes de uma parceria de teletandem institucional entre uma universidade brasileira, aprendizes de inglês e/ou espanhol, e uma universidade norte-americana, aprendizes de português. A partir de uma revisão bibliográfica de trabalhos sobre metacognição no teletandem (Cavalari, 2009; Garcia; O'Connor; Cappellini, 2017; Campos, 2018; 2023), buscamos contribuir para os estudos nesta área, tendo em vista como essa modalidade de aprendizagem se configura como uma prática centrada no participante, que se reconhece como aprendiz e, ao longo de todo o processo de parceria, planeja, monitora, regula e avalia o próprio desempenho. Como resultados da análise, consideramos que a reflexão sobre seus próprios processos de aprendizagem possibilita aos aprendizes revisitar suas experiências, analisar os resultados obtidos, distinguir êxitos e limitações e redefinir objetivos para encontros futuros, promovendo uma integração contínua entre o conhecimento e o uso efetivo da língua em situações comunicativas autênticas.*

*Keywords: Teletandem. Aprendizagem de línguas. Metacognição. Reflexividade. Autonomia.*

## Resumen

*En las prácticas de teletandem, una modalidad de intercambio virtual para el aprendizaje de lenguas, la metacognición desempeña un papel central en la integración de los conocimientos lingüísticos y estratégicos con la práctica comunicativa. Este trabajo presenta los resultados de un análisis exploratorio e interpretativo de formularios de autoevaluación respondidos por estudiantes participantes en una colaboración institucional de teletandem entre una universidad brasileña, cuyos estudiantes aprenden inglés y/o español, y una universidad estadounidense, cuyos estudiantes aprenden portugués. A partir de una revisión bibliográfica de estudios sobre metacognición en el teletandem (Cavalari, 2009; Garcia, O'Connor y Cappellini, 2017; Campos, 2018, 2023), buscamos contribuir a los estudios en este campo, considerando cómo esta modalidad de aprendizaje se configura como una práctica centrada en el participante, quien se reconoce como aprendiz y, a lo largo de todo el proceso de colaboración, planifica, monitorea, regula y evalúa su propio desempeño. Los resultados del análisis sugieren que la reflexión sobre los propios procesos de aprendizaje permite a los estudiantes revisar sus experiencias, analizar los resultados obtenidos, identificar logros y limitaciones y redefinir objetivos para futuros encuentros, promoviendo una integración continua entre el conocimiento lingüístico y el uso efectivo de la lengua en situaciones comunicativas auténticas.*

*Palabras clave: Teletandem. Aprendizaje de lenguas. Metacognición. Reflexividad. Autonomía.*

# 1. Introduction

In recent decades, several institutional teletandem partnerships have been established to provide opportunities for interaction among additional-language learners in different parts of the world and to promote the internationalization of institutional environments. By fostering synchronous meetings between speakers of different languages, grounded in the principles of reciprocity, equitable allocation of time for practicing each language, and autonomy (Brammerts, 1996; Telles; Vassallo, 2006), this form of distance collaborative learning, mediated by web-conferencing tools, supports the creation of a foreign-language learning environment that transcends the boundaries of the face-to-face classroom. By placing students actively at the center of their own learning processes, teletandem fosters the development of metacognition, insofar as learners are encouraged to reflect on their strategies for planning, monitoring, regulating, and evaluating L2 learning (Cavalari, 2009; Garcia; O'Connor; Cappellini, 2017; Campos, 2018; 2023).

As a context of autonomous and collaborative learning in which each participant teaches their language of proficiency and learns the other's language (Telles, 2006; Telles; Vassallo, 2009), teletandem both requires and, at the same time, fosters the development of metacognition in its practice (Cavalari, 2009; Garcia; O'Connor; Cappellini, 2017). This reflexive awareness of one's own process constitutes the basis for building learner autonomy, since it is from this reflection that students can make more informed decisions, adjust their paths, select resources, and set study goals independently.

According to Garcia (2012, drawing on Telles, 2006, p. 23), autonomy and reflection inspired the creation of the Projeto Teletandem Brasil: Línguas Estrangeiras para Todos (Telles, 2006), which established the teletandem modality of language learning by adding the use of digital communication and interaction technologies (Brammerts, 1996) to the already established tandem learning modality. In this sense, the project was designed to promote collaborative interactions among speakers of different languages, in which each participant assumes an active role in managing their own learning, continuously reflecting on their goals, strategies, and outcomes. Thus, this modality fosters the principle of autonomy by design and encourages participants to reflect on the different dimensions of the collaborative learning process, enhancing their ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate their development through and from their partnership experiences; in other words, teletandem fosters metacognitive practice.

Metacognition has been explored in language teaching since the 1980s and 1990s. Among its scholars, John Flavell stands out as the researcher responsible for coining the term in the 1970s. For the author, metacognition concerns knowledge of when and how to employ learning strategies, as well as the learner's ability to plan, direct comprehension, and evaluate what has been learned (Ribeiro, 2003).

Ribeiro (2003), drawing on Brown (1987), states that metacognition involves two main aspects: knowledge about knowledge, which concerns learners' awareness of their own mental processes, such as knowing their abilities and limitations, the tasks they will have to perform, and the strategies they should employ to carry out such tasks. The second aspect is self-regulation, which refers to the learner's ability to plan, monitor, evaluate, and correct their learning. In this direction, metacognitive awareness can be understood as the individual's understanding of their own mental processes, enabling them to identify their strengths as a learner, the tasks they perform, and the strategies most appropriate for carrying them out. This type of awareness can be developed through educational practices that encourage reflection on ways of learning and solving problems.

Given this context, this study addresses the following research question: how do participants in an institutional teletandem partnership construct meanings about their language learning process in self-assessment records produced throughout the interactions? In line with this question, the general objective is to analyze these meaning constructions, with attention to manifestations of metacognitive awareness, strategies employed, difficulties identified, and processes of monitoring and self-regulation of learning. Accordingly, the data analyzed in this study derive from reflective records of learning experiences in teletandem, documented through asynchronous online forms.

Such instruments are intended to contribute to participants' progress in the learning process, similarly to diaries, journals, and logs.

## 2. Context and methodology

This is a qualitative, exploratory, and interpretive study based on the analysis of written self-assessment records produced by participants in an institutional teletandem partnership between a Brazilian university and a North American university, in which two of the authors of this paper serve as mediators. The qualitative approach is pertinent to the purpose of this investigation, given that the focus is not on measuring participants' language performance, but on understanding the meanings they construct regarding their own learning experiences. The exploratory nature derives from the interest in investigating manifestations of metacognitive processes through these records, while the interpretive perspective guides the analysis of the meanings participants attribute to their experiences, difficulties, strategies, and progress.

As methodological objectives, the study seeks to: (i) identify, in the self-assessment records, manifestations related to metacognitive awareness, such as planning, monitoring, evaluation, and self-regulation of learning; (ii) categorize these units according to recurring thematic dimensions; and (iii) interpret these categories in light of the theoretical framework on metacognition, autonomy, and reflection adopted in this study. To this end, participants' responses to the self-assessment forms used throughout the interactions were analyzed.

This institutional partnership is maintained by the teaching teams of both institutions. At the beginning of each academic semester, the mediating professors pair the learners, taking into account common interests and fields of study reported in an enrollment form. The interactions, generally in Portuguese–English or Portuguese–Spanish, take place over six consecutive weeks, lasting one hour each, through the *Zoom* platform. At the North American university, teletandem is integrated into the Portuguese-as-a-foreign-language curriculum and takes place during one of the weekly class periods. At the Brazilian university, teletandem is configured as an extension activity offered both to the internal and external communities, using the infrastructure of a language and teacher-development center, an extension-oriented environment responsible for publicizing the program, managing registration and partnerships, fostering research and training, and offering scholarships for mediators, thereby contributing to the consolidation of this international collaboration over time.

For the purposes of this study, the documentary material analyzed consists of a selection of responses to the self-assessment form[1] created by the professor-mediators who are authors of this paper, using *Google Forms*, to mediate the partnerships among participants from September to November 2025. To organize the volume of data generated in each semester of this institutional partnership, from that period onward a single self-assessment form was created, containing different sections, one for each stage of the partnership, with reflective questions answered by participants after each interaction or at the end of the entire process. Of a total of 54 learners (27 from the Brazilian institution and 27 from the North American institution), 44 responded to the form, and excerpts from 33 participants were selected for this study. Priority was given to excerpts that: (i) clearly expressed some metacognitive dimension (planning, monitoring, evaluation, or regulation); (ii) represented the diversity of participant profiles, including responses from learners at different proficiency levels[2] and from both institutions involved; and (iii) avoided repetition of content similar to that already represented by other selected excerpts, so as to ensure greater representativeness of the dataset. The form is a written instrument consisting of 16 open-ended questions, which vary across interactions.

[1] In the context of this partnership, throughout the sequence of semester interactions carried out, different mediation and self-assessment instruments are used. What we identify in this study as a self-assessment form may also be referred to as a mediation form or interaction diary, since these are used after each interaction, generating data for mediators to monitor the progress of the partnerships. After the last scheduled interaction, participants also complete a specific form for an overall self-assessment of the entire process. For the purposes of this study, we opted for the term "self-assessment form," as it emphasizes the individual reflective dimension that constitutes the focus of the analysis. It is also worth noting that these instruments are not fixed and may be modified according to the mediators' assessment of need.

[2] The identification of proficiency levels was based on participants' self-reported proficiency in the Teletandem enrollment form.

Throughout the partnership process, we observed that the self-assessment form proved effective in promoting participants' reflection on their learning experiences, since each participant could complete it individually and at their own pace, up to the date of the next session. The questions comprising the form are presented in the table below. Those whose responses were selected for analysis are highlighted in bold.

Table 1 - Self-Assessment Form Questions and Their Respective Interaction Weeks

| Interaction no. | Question |
|---|---|
| 1 | *1. Discuss what you learned today about your partner.* |
| 1 | ***2. How did you feel about your use of/communication in the language?*** |
| 1 | *3. What did you plan for the next interactions?* |
| 2 | *1. What was the predominant topic in the interaction? How was it addressed (perspectives, opinions, impressions, etc.)? Did any information or approach to the topic surprise you?* |
| 2 | ***2. What was the most challenging aspect of today's interaction? How did you deal with it, or what actions can you take for the next interactions?*** |
| 2 | ***3. What strategies did you use to communicate when you did not know a word or expression?*** |
| 3 | *1. What cultural aspects have been examined in your interactions?* |
| 3 | *2. How has the partnership contributed (or not) to your reflections on stereotypes related to ethnicity, race, class, gender, nationality, among others?* |
| 3 | *3. What have you learned about your partner's culture? How is it similar to or different from your own?* |
| 4 | *1. Write a free-form narrative below about your teletandem interaction this week. Highlight, for example, something that was important for your learning of linguistic and intercultural aspects.* |
| 5 | ***1. How do you assess your development in communicating in your target language (Portuguese or English) through teletandem so far?*** |
| 5 | *2. How do you assess your intercultural development through teletandem so far?* |
| 5 | ***3. How do you think teletandem contributes to your personal and academic growth?*** |
| 6 | *1. Looking back, what were the main things you learned throughout the interactions?* |
| 6 | ***2. What challenges did you overcome during the process? How did this affect your development?*** |
| 6 | *3. What was the most memorable moment (positive or negative) of these interactions?* |

Source: Authors (2026).

To constitute the corpus, the participants' responses produced throughout the interactions were first examined. Next, excerpts displaying greater reflective density were selected, operationalized by the presence of linguistic markers indicative of metacognitive processes—such as verbs of cognition and perception (e.g., “I realized,” “I learned,” “I noticed,” “I felt”)—as well as their relevance to the objective of this investigation. Particular priority was given to excerpts in which participants explicitly described perceptions about their learning, difficulties encountered,

strategies employed, assessment of their own performance, and actions planned for subsequent interactions. Based on this procedure, six questions from the self-assessment form proved most productive for extracting such excerpts and constituted the basis of the qualitative analysis.

Data analysis was conducted from a qualitative and interpretive perspective, through systematic reading of the selected excerpts and identification of semantic recurrences related to the metacognitive dimensions investigated, drawing on the analysis undertaken in Campos (2018), which identified keywords related to metacognition in a teletandem context. Initially, units of meaning present in the excerpts were identified, considering content related to self-perception as a learner, difficulties and challenges encountered, communication and learning strategies, performance monitoring, evaluation of results, and planning of future actions. Subsequently, the excerpts were grouped according to thematic similarities and interpreted in light of the theoretical assumptions about metacognition, autonomy, and reflection employed in this study.

From this process, six analytical categories emerged: affective awareness; self-assessment of performance; communication strategies; regulation of the learning process; linguistic awareness; and intercultural awareness and personal gains. The categorization made it possible to organize the data according to the main metacognitive manifestations identified in the records and to establish relationships between participants' reports and the concepts discussed in the theoretical framework. It should be noted that, during categorization, some excerpts could potentially fit into more than one category (such as descriptions of communicative strategies that simultaneously revealed features of linguistic awareness). Given these overlaps, each excerpt was classified according to the most salient metacognitive feature in the passage, a procedure that preserved the internal coherence of the categorical system. This criterion was applied systematically throughout the analysis, with successive revisions of the emerging categories as new excerpts were examined, allowing their consistency and stability to be consolidated. The inclusion of new data was discontinued when additional excerpts no longer contributed to the emergence of distinct categories, but only reinforced patterns already identified concerning the metacognitive dimensions investigated.

## 3. Between diaries, journals, logs, and forms: self-reflective records of learning in teletandem

Despite their different names and distinctive characteristics, all these terms are related and refer to possibilities for recording self-assessments of learning in different pedagogical contexts. Bailey (1990) states that diary records consist of regular and candid entries in a personal diary, subsequently analyzed by learners in search of relevant patterns or events. In this sense, they function as instruments for systematic reflection on one's own learning, through which learners plan, monitor, regulate, and evaluate their actions, making metacognitive processes explicit when they report what they tried to do, what worked, and what they need to modify.

In the teletandem context, this process of individual writing can be considered an instrument of (self-)assessment at the end of each interaction, when participants are expected to devote themselves to reflecting on and analyzing specific aspects of the session and their own performance, or at the end of a partial or complete cycle of interactions (Campos, 2018). In this study, by choosing the term “self-assessment form,” we understand that, like diaries, this instrument encourages a reflective task undertaken by participants after each teletandem session, with the purpose of recording their perceptions and experiences and of informing and guiding the mediation actions carried out by the mediators and teachers involved.

As Del Monte (2021) points out, diaries have become valuable instruments for understanding personal variables in the language teaching and learning process. They frequently take different forms, with or without guiding questions, and may rely on different media and tools. Furthermore, according to the author, terms such as journal, log, reflective diary, or learning diary are used to designate written instruments aimed at reflecting on and recording events experienced in the classroom by students and/or teachers. Likewise, according to Cavalari and Del Monte (2021), in

the teletandem context, diary writing promotes learners' reflection on different stages of their learning process, including identifying gaps, planning, describing practice, selecting resources, monitoring, and evaluating their own learning and interactions. It is a moment when participants revisit what was not understood during the session and assess what they still need to learn, recalling situations in which they were unable to express themselves adequately and which strategies proved effective for overcoming difficulties. By bringing these elements together in diary form, a continuous record of experiences lived in teletandem is constituted, documenting both the learning trajectory and the conditions under which the interactions occurred.

A positive aspect arising from the pedagogical use of reflective records is the promotion of agency and critical autonomy. According to Garcia (2012, p. 32), "telecollaboration has proved very important because, in addition to enriching classroom work, it enables learners to develop autonomous and reflective attitudes, becoming active participants and responsible for the construction of knowledge"(our translation). When invited to reflect at the end of each teletandem interaction, students have the opportunity to make explicit what they learned, what they wish to improve, what challenges they encountered, and how they dealt with them, considering linguistic, relational, and intercultural aspects emerging from the telecollaborative experience. In this sense, self-assessment forms, as well as other instruments used in teletandem to foster reflection, can be configured as structured tools that enable learners to engage in metacognitive analysis and develop their self-regulation capacities in the learning process.

Self-assessment forms are therefore instruments that facilitate the generation of research data, since they gather relevant information that can be interpreted in studies on language learning, students' attitudes and beliefs, as well as (inter)cultural aspects. These data contribute to mapping participants' learning, perceptions, achievements, and difficulties, enabling the production of scientific studies on different topics. In addition, they provide access to the assessment of learning strategies adopted, insofar as participants report the resources mobilized in response to difficulties of different kinds. Teachers and mediators also benefit greatly from these records, as they gain access to students' perceptions of the interactions, enabling them to guide the mediation process.

## 4. Autonomy, reflection, and metacognition: some considerations

Dickinson (1994) states that an autonomous learner is one who takes responsibility for their own learning. Similarly, as Holec (1981) explains, assuming control of one's own learning means taking responsibility for all decisions concerning the different aspects of this process. For the author, this involves defining objectives, content, and methods; monitoring the pace, time, and context in which study takes place; and evaluating what has actually been learned.

In agreement with Dickinson (1994) and Holec (1981), Little (1991) argues that autonomy in language learning is related to the development and practice of skills such as detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action. In the same direction, Garcia (2012) states that autonomy confers on learners responsibility for their own learning, understanding it not as a natural and spontaneous characteristic, but as a capacity that develops and becomes consolidated throughout the educational process. For the scholar, an autonomous learner is one who demonstrates, independently and consciously, the ability to make decisions concerning the learning process in which they are or intend to be involved, guiding their choices based on progressively more refined knowledge of themselves and their needs.

We understand that autonomy, as a structuring principle of teletandem practices, encourages learners to employ metacognitive strategies, making the learning process more efficient and meaningful. Studies by Oxford (1990), O'Malley and Chamot (1990), and Cohen (2012) indicate that metacognitive strategies go beyond the act of learning, including the ability to consciously manage and control the use of learning strategies appropriate to different contexts. Moreover, according to these researchers, such strategies are manifested when learners monitor their own production or comprehension of the target language, correct possible errors, and evaluate their performance after completing an activity. From this perspective, teletandem can be understood as a context particularly conducive to the development

of reflective processes and the management of one's own learning, in light of the metacognitive strategies of awareness, self-regulation, and autopoiesis proposed by Sánchez, Suengas, and Marqués (1995).

In awareness, the learner recognizes and becomes conscious of their own cognitive processes; that is, they know what they know, what they do not know, and how they learn. Self-regulation is revealed as the ability to monitor, plan, and control cognitive processes while performing a task. Finally, autopoiesis refers to the self-constructive capacity through which the learner reorganizes their understanding and produces something new based on this reflection. When these concepts are brought into the analysis of self-assessment forms administered after teletandem interactions, it becomes evident that the instrument functions not only as a reflective record, but also as a space for metacognitive construction in which learners become aware of their practice, regulate their strategies, and progressively reconstruct their relationship with their own learning. The authors argue that awareness is manifested when learners, by engaging in authentic interactions with their language partners, identify difficulties in comprehension and production, as well as their preferences and ways of learning, especially when these perceptions are made explicit in diaries or other reflective records. Self-regulation, in turn, is mobilized as participants plan goals for sessions, select strategies and resources, monitor their own performance during the interaction, and subsequently evaluate the effectiveness of their choices, adjusting them for future meetings. Finally, the dimension of autopoiesis can be observed in the way learners, throughout successive teletandem experiences, (re)organize and (re)signify their language-learning system, continually reconstructing their way of learning.

In teletandem, the distinction between the concepts of reflection and metacognition becomes even more noticeable. Leone, Aranha, and Cavalari (2023) report that some studies on the use of diaries in educational contexts have revealed that reflection and metacognition are two important aspects of diary writing. Moon (2004, as cited in Leone; Aranha; Cavalari, 2023) states that, in formal education, reflection should go beyond a common-sense approach. In everyday matters, reflection is associated with thinking aimed at organizing unusual events and relatively complicated, poorly structured ideas for which there is no obvious solution and which already involve additional processing of the knowledge and understanding we possess. In the academic context, by contrast, reflection should be more tangible and directed, constituting a profound process related to a stated outcome, such as reflective writing (Moon, 2004 as cited in Leone; Aranha; Cavalari, 2023). Therefore, reflection can be understood as the process of revisiting and analyzing lived experience, in which the participant reports what occurred during the interaction, examining elements such as linguistic difficulties, cultural clashes, or the content of the conversation.

Metacognition, in turn, emerges when the learner directs attention not to the experience itself, but to their own learning process, evaluating strategies, identifying which stimuli supported the development of fluency, or recognizing in which respects their performance fell short of expectations. According to Cotterall and Murray (2009), metacognitive knowledge encompasses what learners know about themselves, the tasks they perform, and their learning strategies—dimensions considered fundamental to the development of learner autonomy. In other words, while reflection asks what happened, metacognition asks how I learn and what I can regulate.

## 5. Data analysis

In this section, we present the data analysis, seeking not only to identify thematic recurrences in the self-assessment records, but also to understand how participants construct meanings about their own learning and how these meanings are articulated with the dimensions of metacognitive awareness, reflection, self-regulation, and autonomy discussed in this study. We therefore start from the understanding that the excerpts are not simple comments of lived experiences, but records in which learners interpret what happened, assign meaning to their own difficulties, evaluate strategies, and, in some cases, project actions for future interactions.

In this regard, the study by Cavalari and Buschieri (2026) on levels of reflection identified in learners' diaries in teletandem is noteworthy. According to the authors, although research demonstrates the contribution of writing in

this genre to promoting reflection (Leone; Aranha; Cavalari, 2023), their study found a predominance of descriptive productions, with fewer instances of more in-depth reflections, or Level 2 reflections, described by them as those that "in addition to presenting an assessment of learning accompanied by other metacognitive processes, focus on recognizing the particular elements of the teletandem context in relation to one's own metacognitive processes" (Cavalari; Bushieri, 2026, p. 2). In light of these findings, we consider that levels of reflection may vary due to different factors, such as the nature of the questions formulated in the forms and the contextual specificities of each learner. Table 2 presents the distribution of the 65 selected excerpts across the analytical categories. It is important to emphasize that the occurrences correspond to the excerpts analyzed, and not necessarily to the number of participants, since the same participant may present manifestations related to more than one metacognitive dimension.

Table 2- Categorization of the metacognitive areas identified

| Category | Occurrences in the self-assessment form |
|---|---|
| Affective awareness | 14 |
| Self-assessment of performance | 11 |
| Communication strategies | 11 |
| Regulation of the learning process | 9 |
| Linguistic awareness | 10 |
| Intercultural awareness and personal gains | 10 |
| **Total** | 65 |

Source: Authors (2026).

The distribution presented in the table allows an initial problematization of the data. Although the categories were organized separately for analytical purposes, the responses reveal that the metacognitive dimensions are strongly interrelated, as already demonstrated by several studies supporting this work (Campos, 2018; 2023; Ribeiro, 2003, among others). The same excerpt, for example, may articulate the perception of a linguistic difficulty, an affective reaction to that difficulty, the selection of a strategy to overcome it, and the planning of a future action. Thus, rather than being discrete categories, the data suggest the existence of an integrated functioning of metacognitive activity, in which knowing oneself as a learner, monitoring one's own performance, mobilizing strategies, and evaluating outcomes constitute movements within the same process.

## 5.1 Awareness as a learner: learners' strategy planning

A thematic analysis of the participants' excerpts reveals reflections on linguistic progress, in which they openly identify their strengths and weaknesses, particularly with regard to listening comprehension, speaking, writing, and grammatical skills. The data also show attempts at planning related both to content (definition of topics, preparation of an agenda) and to linguistic focus (vocabulary related to holidays, food, films, verb tenses, and numbers) for future sessions. These reflections can be understood in light of Ribeiro's (2003) discussion, according to which when learners recognize what they do not know or master and the conditions in which they experience greater difficulty, they produce knowledge about themselves, which can guide their learning process.

Among the examples of planning explicitly stated by students are utterances such as: "I will study more vocabulary (P30)" (before the next interaction), "let's define an email agenda (P7)," and "it is useful to have some topics

prepared in advance" (P28). From a cognitive perspective, analysis of these excerpts indicates that participants transform a perception constructed in a previous interaction into a hypothesis for action in a future interaction. The strategy-planning stage highlights learner autonomy and awareness, particularly because it involves actions aimed at selecting resources that minimize the impact of linguistic gaps during teletandem interactions.

The analysis of responses on the self-assessment form indicates that several participants mentioned resorting to lexical compensation strategies at moments when they were unable to express themselves as they wished. The recurrence of several teletandem sessions with the same partner thus enables a continuous metacognitive cycle: perform an action → evaluate the results → adjust performance → make a new attempt. This movement approaches the conception of metacognition as a self-regulatory process and helps explain why continuity of the partnership is pedagogically important. The learner has new opportunities to verify whether previously selected strategies were, for example, sufficient, appropriate, or inappropriate in the communicative situations that arise during teletandem interaction sessions.

## 5.2 Students' decisions and adjustments: monitoring and self-regulation

Regarding the main limitations perceived by learners, one aspect repeatedly mentioned in the reflections concerns initial linguistic insecurity when speaking in the target language. In this dimension, participants recognize emotional states and demonstrate awareness of their performance, both linguistic and affective, as in statements such as "I was nervous speaking Portuguese" (P2), "I felt embarrassed at first because I hadn't spoken English for two years" (P34), "it was super easy" (P35), "I felt very good and confident" (P40), and "I was really surprised that I understood so much" (P3). Some reported beginning teletandem feeling "stuck" (P5, P13, P21), "shy" (P1, P4, P23, P43), or "embarrassed" (P4, P23, P43) about speaking with a native or more proficient speaker. Although formulated in different ways, references to fear of making mistakes, the feeling of being unable to remember words considered simple while speaking, and anxiety generated by the session are frequent.

Another dimension related to social and relational aspects is the development of confidence resulting from the teletandem interactional situation. Some participants report that their partner "corrected me" (P5, P24, P34, P36), "supported me" (P16, P24), and "reassured me" (P5, P41) in moments of doubt and insecurity. The possibility of asking the partner for help, who was often described as "patient" (P2, P9, P12, P40, P43), "understanding" (P23), "kind" (P12, P25), and "welcoming" (P1), appears to play a central role in building greater confidence in language use. As the sessions progressed, some students reported becoming more comfortable making mistakes and asking for corrections; others emphasized that the sequence of interactions with the same person fostered the establishment of a friendship, which helped reduce anxiety and enabled deeper discussions, including about more sensitive topics. From this perspective, increased confidence in interacting in the target language emerges as one of the consequences of the teletandem experience, co-constructed through linguistic, affective, and relational strategies.

Some participants report beginning contact with their peers feeling embarrassed, fearing mistakes, or perceiving limitations in the communicative competence needed to interact with native or more proficient speakers. As the interactions progressed, however, they described a gradual release in oral expression and increased confidence to take risks, both linguistically and discursively. One example is the response of a participant who described a significant improvement in oral fluency: "I definitely became much less inhibited. I hadn't practiced English for a while. My communication was very rusty in the sporadic attempts I had to use it in my undergraduate studies and personal life. Then, with teletandem, certain communication gaps were filled and my train of thought became more fluid" (P14). Other excerpts reveal comparisons between languages, mainly Portuguese and Spanish, evidencing individuals capable of observing, judging, and comparing their own performance — the core of metacognitive activity. One participant, for example, reflects that "I think distinguishing Spanish and Portuguese will always be difficult, but learning to separate the two, especially when exploring new linguistic territories, is always a good challenge" (P11), while also

acknowledging that “I used Portunhol, but I want to avoid it as much as possible to ensure learning” (P11). In these cases, the participant identifies what they consider to be their difficulties and formulates concrete goals and actions to overcome them.

In the selected excerpts, several students report using communicative strategies such as paraphrases and synonyms (“explain the word itself to my partner, who tried to understand and help me with it” (P5), “explain the context” (P23, P27), or “I try to find a [word] that expresses the same meaning” (P1)); occasional use of the mother tongue or a third language (e.g., “Portunhol,” English) to elicit the correct form; descriptions of context or examples until the partner infers the word being sought; technological resources (online translators, virtual dictionaries, written chat); and direct requests for help (“how do you say…?”, “does that make sense?”) (P12, P13, P23, P33), so that the partner can help fill the communicative gap. These strategies reappear implicitly in different formulations, such as “when I didn't know a word, I tried to pause and ask for the English translation; if she didn't know it, I quickly searched on Google” (P5), “I tried to explain what the word meant or tried speaking in Portuguese to see if she could associate the pronunciation with something she knew” (P44), and “I tried using Spanish first, since the word is similar, or, when that didn't work, English. I also tried translating whenever possible” (P35). Rather than being interpreted as a sign of failure, such practices are reframed as part of the legitimate repertoire of a speaker in the process of learning. This movement indicates a level of metacognitive monitoring in which the student anticipates the possibility of a communicative blockage and, in advance, selects certain resources to sustain the speaking turn and negotiate meanings.

Participants' responses indicate that a large part of the challenges faced during the sessions is associated with lexical limitations and difficulties in producing utterances of greater syntactic and discursive complexity. This pattern is particularly evident in conversations about social and psychological topics, contexts in which participants reported difficulty expressing complex ideas in the target language, including opinions, positions, and personal testimonies. Some selected excerpts illustrate participants' perceptions of their challenges, such as “I found it somewhat difficult to talk about politics; I lacked some vocabulary” (P2), “it was difficult to talk about legal matters — I don't know those words” (P39), “talking about our society or personal matters is still challenging, especially in another language; the feeling is that some words do not seem sufficient when we want to say something specific” (P27), and “the most challenging point was the complex vocabulary for describing food and films, but my partner helped me find the missing words” (P19). In this context, self-regulation emerges as a central component of metacognition, insofar as it constitutes the mechanism capable of converting awareness into guided pedagogical action and, therefore, supporting the learning process.

The analysis and explicit articulation of learning-regulation mechanisms may enable learners to employ strategies intentionally, learning from their own experience and continuously revising their ways of studying and interacting, as observed in statements such as: “in the next [interactions] I can try to calm down more; I speak very quickly and freeze up because of nervousness” (P24) and “I don't want to create a script and make the interaction seem artificial, so I think I'll study more vocabulary next time” (P8). In contexts such as teletandem, this movement is particularly relevant because learners must manage, in real time, both emotions such as nervousness and shyness and the communicative demands of the interaction. When self-assessing in relation to language use, participants stated, for example, “I realized that I feel much more comfortable speaking Portuguese and making mistakes” (P28) and that “I was able to further develop my oral ability on more delicate and specific topics and speak with greater confidence” (P27).

It should be noted, however, that the manifestation of self-regulation strategies in the forms does not always imply their actual application in subsequent interactions. The data analyzed here record learners' stated intentions and perceptions, which does not guarantee a direct correspondence with observable changes in their oral performance. This tension between what is reported and what is actually done relates to the discussions raised by Cavalari (2009) concerning the validity and reliability of self-assessment as an instrument for measuring learning, which

remains an open issue in language assessment studies. This caveat reinforces the importance of considering the forms as windows into learners' reflective processes, rather than as conclusive evidence of behavioral or linguistic change.

## 5.3 Challenges and learning: evaluating one's own learning

The excerpts analyzed in this section concern participants who report continuously evaluating their achievements and challenges. More than that, these statements show how learners reflect on their possible difficulties and progress throughout the language-learning trajectory. Phrases such as “this interaction was much better than last week's in terms of fluency” (P11), “I noticed that words from this area are still very difficult,” and “I realized that my partner understands me even when I make mistakes” are recurring indicators of self-assessment in their speech. These reports provide evidence that participants monitor their linguistic performance and communicative development. This movement is significant because, by comparing the current interaction with the previous one, learners evaluate their learning process in line with the conception of metacognition as the ability to assess one's own performance and use the results of that assessment to guide future actions.

Formulations such as “I understand well, but I freeze when it is time to speak” (P45), “I have vocabulary, but I make many grammar mistakes” (P14), and “it had been a long time since I had practiced speaking, and this made me insecure” (P23) indicate that learners distinguish their communicative abilities by differentiating between oral comprehension and production. They also associate these abilities with their learning history, as in “I have studied for X years only in a formal context” (P43) and “I use it little outside class” (P25), while identifying elements they associate with weaknesses and gaps (pronunciation, confidence, vocabulary on specific topics) that affect oral communication in teletandem dialogue.

One participant, for example, reports that at the beginning they “were very embarrassed to speak English” (P24) and frequently relied on a translator; other reports that, despite understanding the target language well, “it had been a long time since I had practiced speaking” (P5), which generated insecurity and excessive pauses. Overall, the excerpts reveal a perceived discrepancy between knowledge acquired in the classroom and the ability to mobilize it in spontaneous interaction situations, as in comments such as “I felt shy/nervous about speaking and leading the conversation” (P13). These perceptions are connected with the initial self-assessment of oral ability, as many participants classify themselves at intermediate or low proficiency levels even after years of formal study. This mismatch reinforces the importance of real opportunities to use the language. In this regard, some participants emphasize that “I feel that Teletandem complements what I learn in class by providing real and continuous practice” (P11) and that “[the practice] allowed me to practice long and spontaneous conversations and not just classroom exercises” (P13).

The way many participants connect the gains obtained through the interactions with broader personal and academic dimensions is noteworthy. Several report that teletandem broadened their worldview by providing contact with different cultural realities; strengthened their self-image as learners capable of establishing meaningful relationships in another language; and sparked interest in future opportunities for academic or professional mobility and internationalization.

When describing how teletandem contributed to oral fluency, many participants use metaphors of movement and release, such as “unlocking speech” (P6, P12, P14), being “more at ease with the language” (P24), “letting myself go” (P5, P41), “gaining confidence to speak” (P1, P21, P24, P34, P45), and “I can communicate orally with greater ease and naturalness” (P26). One student comments that they were not accustomed to speaking English and that teletandem provided “the opportunity to practice a part of the language that I believed I could only practice if I traveled outside Brazil” (P40). This dimension reinforces the need to understand metacognition in conjunction with the affective and relational dimensions of learning. If learners recognize that anxiety interferes with their oral production and later

perceive themselves as more confident about speaking and making mistakes, then self-assessment of performance also involves an assessment of the subjective conditions that make that performance possible.

Based on these excerpts, we also understand that offering language learning through teletandem constitutes a concrete strategy for internationalization at home (Salomão, 2020), by promoting direct contact among students from different countries, integrating real language use into the curriculum, and developing linguistic and intercultural competencies in an authentic context. In addition, teletandem contributes to strengthening the international academic partnerships of the institutions involved.

One student reported that the partnership contributed to expanding their lexical repertoire, enabling them to "feel more confident talking about sensitive and specific topics" (P27), and that, thanks to the interactions, "I broadened my understanding of sensitive issues in another cultural context" (P27). From this perspective, the autonomy fostered by the process appears to be linked to a broader sense of self-efficacy: by perceiving themselves as capable of interacting with a foreign partner, negotiating meanings, and sustaining conversations about complex topics, participants also tend to recognize themselves as more autonomous individuals, capable of navigating international contexts and taking on new academic challenges.

Part of the responses provided highlights aspects relevant to participants' personal and academic growth. On a personal level, participants highlighted benefits related to building affective bonds, broadening their worldview, and developing interpersonal skills. Some personal aspects developed through the reflections include that the project "helped me create and nurture friendships with people from other countries" (P4), "helped broaden my worldview through conversations about social, political, and cultural topics" (P33), "helped me develop patience, active listening, and empathy with the interlocutor" (P2), and "the development of a genuine friendship, with meaningful personal exchanges" (P13).

On the academic level, participants mentioned linguistic and communicative progress, greater motivation to study the language, and contact with authentic uses of the language. In this regard, one participant revealed that teletandem "has been a very enriching experience; my partner is fun and our conversations always flow naturally, which makes learning enjoyable" (P1). This perception is corroborated by other statements, indicating that the experience "increased my motivation to study the language outside class and exposed me to real uses of the language" (P7), "improved my oral conversation, which may be useful in my undergraduate studies, research, and future opportunities" (P33), "made me realize that effort and consistent practice make it possible to progress in a foreign language" (P35), "strengthened my ability to discuss complex topics in another language" (P28), and "provided a safe space to experiment, make mistakes, reflect, and improve, fostering both personal and academic growth" (P28). These perceptions indicate the development of a metacognitive stance, insofar as participants demonstrate the ability to reflect on their own learning process, identify what they learned, and understand how this learning occurred.

## 6. Final considerations

This study aimed to analyze how participants in an institutional teletandem partnership construct meanings about their language learning process based on self-assessment records, with attention to manifestations of metacognitive awareness, strategies employed, difficulties identified, and processes of monitoring and self-regulation of learning. The results indicate that these participants not only report experiences lived during the interactions, but also repeatedly demonstrate the ability to observe, evaluate, and re-signify their own learning trajectory, articulating cognitive, linguistic, affective, and intercultural dimensions within the same reflective movement.

The data analysis indicates that the teletandem experience fosters both linguistic and intercultural development and metacognition, insofar as it is configured as a learner-centered practice: a subject who, throughout

the entire partnership process, recognizes themselves as an agent of their own learning and continuously plans, monitors, regulates, and evaluates their own performance. In this process of self-reflection, establishing goals and strategies makes it possible to identify which approaches are most effective and adjust those that do not produce the expected results. In addition, this practice constitutes a central element both for improving the planning and structure of the sessions and for educating learners who are more aware of their own learning trajectory.

For the field of Education, the study contributes by highlighting the importance of pedagogical practices that move learners from a predominantly receptive role toward greater participation and responsibility for their educational process, integrating language-learning practices, reflection, and autonomy. At the level of pedagogical mediation, this contribution translates into recognizing and legitimizing lexical and discursive compensation strategies as an integral part of communicative competence, allowing mediators to explore, based on concrete situations experienced during the interactions, what worked and which forms of meaning negotiation students employed. Investment in activities addressing the management of anxiety and fear of making mistakes, as well as the construction of a climate of mutual support among partners, is equally relevant. In this sense, the study also contributes to the field by highlighting the affective and relational dimensions of metacognitive processes: feelings such as embarrassment and anxiety can interfere with participants' engagement, whereas relationships of trust tend to benefit it. Thus, this investigation suggests that metacognition in educational contexts should not be considered only in terms of cognitive and linguistic strategies, but also in terms of emotional and relational factors that permeate learning.

As limitations, we emphasize that the analyses presented here are based on self-assessments and written statements, rather than direct measures of oral performance. We believe that future studies may also combine self-reflective records with recordings of interactions, analyses of linguistic performance, and other learning-monitoring instruments, making it possible to establish more in-depth relationships between what learners perceive about their process and what they actually do during interactions. Longitudinal investigations may also follow the same participants over longer periods, seeking to understand how metacognitive awareness, autonomy, and learning strategies change across different teletandem experiences. By pointing to these possibilities, this study contributes to consolidating a research agenda on metacognition in teletandem contexts, continuing a tradition of studies already explored by other authors (Cavalari, 2009; Garcia; O'Connor; Cappellini, 2017; Campos, 2018; 2023). Despite its limitations, the study reinforces the finding that teletandem is a privileged space for observing and enhancing learners' linguistic development, autonomy, and metacognition, constituting a promising alternative for language-teaching and internationalization projects in university contexts.

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**Editor Responsável/Editor-in-Chief:** Alboni Marisa Dudeque Pianovski Vieira

**Recebido/Received:** 04.05.2026 / 05.04.2026

**Aprovado/Approved**: 15.08.2026 / 08.15.2026