



UniTandem - Nationwide Online Tandem Learning Network for Students in Finnish Universities within KiVAKO Project

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Abstract

In Finland, the narrow selection languages that university students learn is an ever-growing problem. Typically, students know English and their mother tongue at a functional level. To widen the language selection, particularly in smaller universities, nine language centers of research universities and 18 universities of applied sciences joined in the KiVAKO project (2018-2021) [1], funded by the Finnish Ministry of Education. The project aims to create online course material for 12 less often studied languages on Digicampus.fi, the shared learning platform of Finnish universities [2]. Once finished, the materials cover a consistent learning path from the beginner's level to A2 level in Italian, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Estonian, Japanese, Portuguese, and Finnish sign language, and up to level B1/B2 in German, Russian, Spanish and French. Another aim of the project is to create a permanent co-operation agreement between universities where these online language courses will be offered nationwide, and credits acknowledged by the student's home university. To make the language selection even wider through informal learning, the KiVAKO project decided to create UniTandem [3], a nationwide online tandem learning network. In tandem learning (also called Each One Teach One) two learners teach their mother tongues to each other in informal sessions, usually without formal instruction. The UniTandem section of KiVAKO-project involves three elements. First, a special partner-searching application was created to enable the students to easily find a native speaker of their target language in any Finnish university. Second, to help the learners, activities on different topics were created on Digicampus.fi. The activities, written in English, are CEFR level -specific but not language-specific as there is no limit what language one can learn as long as a native speaker partner is available. The students can choose the topics they find interesting. As proof of learning, each activity includes one portfolio task that is submitted. Third, a support, instruction and credit awarding system for UniTandem learners was created. Piloting the UniTandem system was started in spring 2020. Almost half of the activities are ready, and the first student pairs have completed their first tandem experience and earned 1-3 ECTS credits. Similarly to other elements of KiVAKO, the aim is to make UniTandem a permanent system. In this presentation, the entire KiVAKO-project is shortly introduced as the framework of UniTandem. After that, the UniTandem system is introduced in more detail, with examples of activities and student feedback from the first pilot.

Keywords: higher education, tandem learning, each one teach one, e-learning.

References:

- [1] KiVAKO project. Homepage. Available at: <http://www.kivako.fi/>
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- [3] UniTandem. Homepage. Available at: <https://www.unitandem.fi/>