

A SMALL-SCALE RESEARCH ABOUT SKYPE AS A SYNCHRONOUS SOCIAL MEDIUM AND ITS USE AND WRITING PRACTICES AS AN EDUCATIONAL TOOL

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Abstract: In this small-scale survey quantitative and qualitative research about skype, I am trying to collect data with the help of a questionnaire with 20 structured questions and record the self reports of the respondents, who are students of the University of Macedonia in Thessaloniki, University in Ioannina and others, in anonymity, for the use of skype and its writing practices as an educational tool. The exploration and edit of the responses of the representative sample using data analysis methods with descriptive statistics and pair-wise comparisons lead to some significant findings about the use of skype as a synchronous social medium for educational purposes. A web survey via e-mail used which has the advantage of having each respondent's answers automatically entered into a data file and saving on data entry time. Spreadsheet (excel), database, graphics and statistical analysis software were also available for this step. The demographic characteristics of the representative sample of the entire group for this type of comparison include gender, educational level (status), age, etc. The final discussion about these findings reveals the protagonist role of the new educational technology in the age of digital literacy.

Keywords: data analysis methods, descriptive statistics, digital literacy, questionnaire, representative sample, skype, small-scale survey, writing practices.

I. INTRODUCTION

Skype is a Voice-Over-Internet Protocol (VOIP) service and software application that allows users to communicate with others by voice, video, and instant messaging over the Internet. VOIP is synchronous computer mediated communication (CMC) that appeared in about 2004. There is not yet much research on VOIP in teaching and learning, especially not in primary or secondary education. Phone calls may be placed to recipients on the traditional telephone networks. Calls to other users within the Skype service are free of charge, while calls to landline telephones and mobile phones are charged via a debit-based user account system. Skype has also become popular for its additional features, including file transfer, and videoconferencing. (Wikipedia: Skype)

Skype in particular provides teachers with a suitable platform to enhance students' language abilities and it is ideal for role-playing based learning activities. Role-playing via a structured synchronous CMC discussion has been proved to be effective English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching tool. (Yang & Chang, 2013).

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) is often promoted as an exciting new educational medium that will be attractive to students. As it is commonly assumed that contemporary youth are as comfortable in virtual worlds as in face-to-face contexts, one might expect that a social presence naturally emerges within online educational environments that automatically generates student involvement and increasingly motivates them to actively participate in the ongoing online conversation. (Dawn Grimes-MacLellan, 2015, pp.227).

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Human communication consists of more than sounds, graphemes, words, and sentences. It also expresses emotions. But playing with punctuation and typography are not the only tools available for expressing emotion when writing online. Beginning in 1982, a new form of expression markers, known as emoticons, began to emerge. These markers were explicitly created with the goal of clarifying the emotion that an online writer was intending to convey in his or her message. (N. Baron, 2009).

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research objective: the use of skype and its writing practices as an educational tool

The researcher used data analysis methods with descriptive statistics and pair-wise comparisons. The target population (group) was 14 individuals that used skype and selected incidentally from a data base of 64 responses to a questionnaire with 20 questions. This standard set of structured questionnaire was used to gather pertinent information concerning the variables in the survey. The questionnaire were individually distributed to the respondents who were students of the University of Macedonia in Thessaloniki, University in Ioannina and others, within e-mails to be filled and returned. An introductory letter was attached with the questionnaire which guided the respondents on how to appropriately answer the questions. (Pauwels, A. Tsokalidou, R. Wong, L., 1995),

Skype – Questionnaire

Questions

1. Are you male or female?

Male

Female

2. What is your age?

18 to 24

25 to 34

35 to 44

45 to 54

55 to 64

3. How long have been using Skype?

1-12 months

More than 1 year

More than 2 years

3-5 years

4. How easy was for you the use of Skype?

No problems

Some difficulties

Major problems

5. Educational level

High School

Secondary

University

Post-graduate

6. How familiar are you with new technology skills and computers?**(digital literacy)**No knowledge Basic Intermediate Very good knowledge **7. How often do you use skype?**Once a month Once a week Every day **8. Do you use skype for...**Personal communication Bussiness communication Other purpose **9. What language do you use for skype?**Greek English Greeklish Other **10. Which of skype features do you usually use?**Calling Video Messaging Sharing Other Skype features **11. Which equipment do you usually use during a Skype session?**Web-camera Head-phones Microphone Others **12. How important do you think is Skype for your communication?**Great importance Medium importance No importance **13. Have you ever paid to Skype for additional features?**Yes No

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14. On what device do you use Skype?

- PC
- Lap-top
- Tablet
- Smart-phone

15. Do you also use emoticons or other symbols at your text messages?

- Yes
- No

16. Would you start a language or any other educational course via skype?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

17. What do you consider as the main weaknesses of Skype learning?

(You may choose more than one answer)

- Certain types of exercises may require additional expensive software.
- Possible technical problems with the Internet connection, microphone, webcam, computer, etc.
- Some people find face-to-face lessons more convenient and nicer
- Skype is not the best learning tool for children
- Lessons without a webcam, it is impossible to see the actions of the person you talk to
- Additional time spent at the screen may have a negative impact on his/her health.
- Something else

18. What do you consider as the main strengths of Skype learning?

(You may choose more than one answer)

- Time efficiency
- Many kind of educational materials available (texts, tables, audio, video, presentations, etc)
- Lessons with a teacher from any part of the world
- It is not necessary to spend money on public transport and/or petrol.
- Extremely flexible schedule
- Ability to record and distribute the lessons
- Something else

19. Do you use Skype for Teacher-Student Session (TSS) or web-conference?

- Yes
- No

20. Would you recommend Skype to your friends and family?

- Definitely no
- Probably no
- Probably yes
- Definitely yes

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A web survey via e-mail used which has the advantage of having each respondent’s answers automatically entered into a data file and saving on data entry time.

The data collected was quantitative and qualitative and was measured using percentages, frequencies and mean. Spreadsheet (excel), database, graphics and statistical analysis software were also available to present findings.

The demographic characteristics of the representative sample of the entire group for this type of comparison include gender, educational level (status), age, etc.

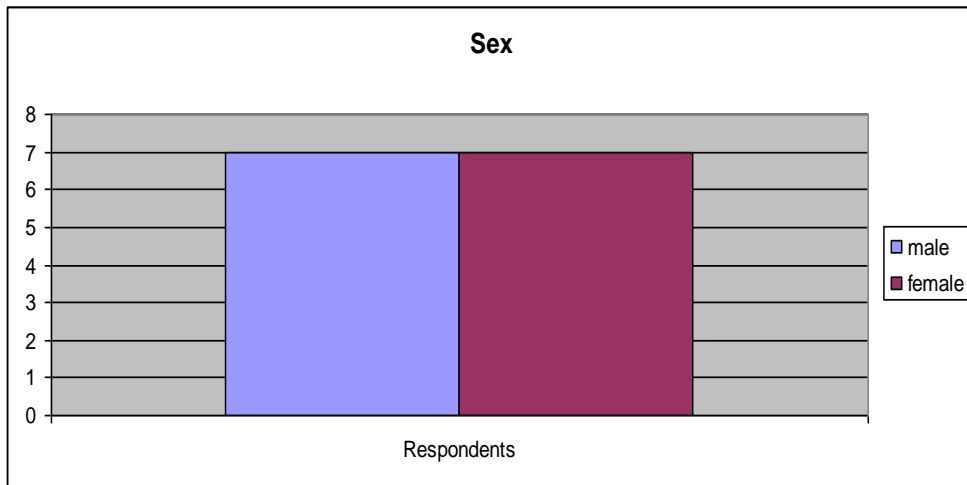
TABLE: A part of the spreadsheet (excel), as a database which used to select the answers of the respondents

Timestamp	Male or Female	Age	How long have been using Skype	How easy is Skype for you	Current Educational Level	How familiar are you with technology skills and computers (digital lit)	How often do you use Skype	How you use Skype for	What language do you use in Skype	Which of Skype features do you usually use? (check all that apply)	Which equipment do you usually use during a Skype session (check all that apply)	How important do you think is Skype for your communication
10/17/2017 19:33:46 M	26 to 34	3 years or more	No problems	University	Very good knowledge	Rarely	Personal communication	Greek	Calling, Video	Web-camera, Microphone	Medium importance	
10/17/2017 20:48:40 M	26 to 34	3 years or more	No problems	University	Very good knowledge	Every day	Personal communication	English	Calling, Video, Messaging	Web-camera, Headphones	Great importance	
10/22/2017 19:08:40 F	26 to 34	3 years or more	No problems	University	Basic	Sometimes a year or even rarely	Personal communication	Greek	Video	Web-camera	Medium importance	
10/17/2017 21:39:26 M	18 to 34	1-2 years	Some difficulties	University	Intermediate	Sometimes a year or even rarely	Personal communication	Greek	Video	Web-camera, Headphones, Microphone	Great importance	
10/17/2017 22:09:16 M	26 to 34	1-12 months	Major problems	University	Intermediate	Sometimes a year or even rarely	Personal communication	Greek	Messaging	Headphones	No importance	
10/17/2017 22:29:19 M	26 to 34	3 years or more	Some difficulties	University	Intermediate	Sometimes a month	Personal communication	Greek	Video	Web-camera	Medium importance	
10/17/2017 22:29:19 M	26 to 34	1-2 years	No problems	University	Very good knowledge	Once a week	Personal communication	English	Calling, Video	Web-camera, Microphone	Medium importance	
10/17/2017 22:48:10 M	26 to 34	3 years or more	No problems	University	Intermediate	Sometimes a year or even rarely	Personal communication	Greek	Video	Web-camera, Microphone	Great importance	
10/17/2017 22:48:23 F	18 to 34	1-2 years	No problems	University	Very good knowledge	Sometimes a year or even rarely	Business communication	English	Video	Web-camera	No importance	
10/18/2017 14:13:37 M	26 to 34	1-2 years	Some difficulties	University	Intermediate	Sometimes a month	Personal communication	English	Calling, Messaging	Web-camera, Headphones, Microphone	Great importance	
10/18/2017 8:49:55 M	26 to 34	3 years or more	No problems	University	Very good knowledge	Once a week	Personal communication	Greek	Video, Messaging	Web-camera, Headphones, Microphone	Great importance	
10/18/2017 8:47:32 F	26 to 34	3 years or more	No problems	University	Basic	Sometimes a month	Personal communication	Greek	Video	Web-camera	Medium importance	
10/18/2017 8:41:18 F	18 to 34	3 years or more	No problems	University	Intermediate	Sometimes a year or even rarely	Personal communication	Greek	Calling, Video, Messaging	Web-camera	No importance	
10/18/2017 8:42:23 F	18 to 34	1-2 years	No problems	University	Intermediate	Every day	Personal communication	Greek	Video, Messaging	Headphones	Great importance	
10/18/2017 10:12:03 F	18 to 34	3 years or more	Some difficulties	University	Basic	Once a week	Personal communication	Greek	Video	Web-camera, Headphones, Microphone	Medium importance	
10/18/2017 10:15:57 M	18 to 34	3 years or more	No problems	University	Very good knowledge	Every day	Personal communication	Greek/ish	Calling, Video, Messaging	Web-camera, Headphones, Microphone	Great importance	
10/18/2017 10:48:10 M	18 to 34	3 years or more	Some difficulties	University	Very good knowledge	Sometimes a month	Personal communication	Greek	Calling, Video, Messaging	Headphones	Medium importance	
10/18/2017 11:39:25 M	18 to 34	3 years or more	No problems	University	Very good knowledge	Once a week	Personal communication	Greek	Calling, Video, Messaging	Web-camera, Headphones, Microphone	Medium importance	
10/18/2017 11:45:17 M	26 to 34	3 years or more	No problems	University	Very good knowledge	Once a week	Personal communication	English	Calling, Video, Messaging	Web-camera, Headphones, Microphone	Medium importance	
10/18/2017 12:05:36 M	18 to 34	3 years or more	Some difficulties	University	Basic	Once a week	Personal communication	English	Calling, Video	Web-camera, Headphones, Microphone	Great importance	
10/18/2017 12:22:46 M	18 to 34	3 years or more	Some difficulties	University	Very good knowledge	Sometimes a month	Personal communication	Greek/ish	Video, Messaging	Web-camera, Headphones, Microphone	Medium importance	
10/18/2017 14:06:24 M	18 to 34	1-2 years	No problems	University	Basic	Sometimes a year or even rarely	Personal communication	Greek	Video	Web-camera	Great importance	
10/18/2017 15:02:20 F	18 to 34	3 years or more	No problems	University	Intermediate	Sometimes a year or even rarely	Personal communication	English	Calling, Video, Messaging	Web-camera, Headphones	No importance	
10/18/2017 15:10:10 F	18 to 34	3 years or more	No problems	University	Very good knowledge	Sometimes a year or even rarely	Personal communication	English	Video, Messaging	Web-camera, Headphones, Microphone	No importance	
10/18/2017 15:26:10 M	18 to 34	3 years or more	No problems	University	Very good knowledge	Every day	Personal communication	English	Video	Web-camera, Headphones, Microphone	Great importance	
10/18/2017 17:42:31 F	18 to 34	3 years or more	Some difficulties	University	Intermediate	Sometimes a year or even rarely	Other purpose	Greek	Video	Web-camera, Microphone	Medium importance	
10/18/2017 17:42:36 M	18 to 34	3 years or more	Some difficulties	University	Very good knowledge	Once a week	Personal communication	Greek	Calling, Video, Messaging	Web-camera, Headphones, Microphone	Medium importance	
10/18/2017 18:27:27 F	18 to 34	3 years or more	No problems	University	Intermediate	Sometimes a month	Other purpose	Greek	Video	Web-camera, Microphone	Medium importance	
10/18/2017 22:59:24 F	18 to 34	3 years or more	No problems	University	Basic	Every day	Personal communication	Greek	Video	Web-camera	Great importance	
10/19/2017 10:49:47 F	18 to 34	3 years or more	No problems	University	Intermediate	Sometimes a year or even rarely	Personal communication	Greek	Calling, Video, Messaging	Web-camera, Headphones, Microphone	Medium importance	
10/19/2017 10:48:25 F	18 to 34	1-12 months	No problems	University	Very good knowledge	Sometimes a month	Personal communication	English	Video	Web-camera	Great importance	
10/19/2017 11:28:47 M	18 to 34	3 years or more	No problems	University	Intermediate	Sometimes a year or even rarely	Personal communication	Greek	Calling	Headphones	No importance	
10/19/2017 11:48:25 M	18 to 34	3 years or more	No problems	University	Intermediate	Every day	Personal communication	Greek	Calling	Headphones	Great importance	
10/19/2017 12:43:10 M	18 to 34	3 years or more	Some difficulties	University	Intermediate	Sometimes a year or even rarely	Personal communication	Greek	Calling, Messaging	Microphone	Medium importance	
10/19/2017 12:47:22 F	18 to 34	1-2 years	No problems	University	Very good knowledge	Sometimes a year or even rarely	Personal communication	Greek	Calling, Video	Web-camera, Headphones	Medium importance	
10/19/2017 14:04:40 M	18 to 34	3 years or more	No problems	University	Very good knowledge	Sometimes a month	Personal communication	Greek	Calling, Video	Web-camera, Headphones, Microphone	Great importance	
10/19/2017 14:44:44 F	18 to 34	1-12 months	No problems	University	Basic	Sometimes a year or even rarely	Personal communication	Greek	Video, Messaging	Headphones	Medium importance	
10/19/2017 18:54:41 M	18 to 34	3 years or more	No problems	University	Very good knowledge	Sometimes a month	Personal communication	Greek	Calling, Video, Messaging	Other Skype features	Web-camera, Headphones, Microphone	Great importance
10/19/2017 21:34:30 F	26 to 34	1-12 months	Some difficulties	University	Intermediate	Sometimes a year or even rarely	Personal communication	Greek	Calling, Video, Messaging	Web-camera, Headphones, Microphone	Medium importance	
10/19/2017 23:39:46 F	18 to 34	1-12 months	No problems	University	Very good knowledge	Every day	Personal communication	Greek	Video	Web-camera	Great importance	
10/20/2017 04:44:14 F	26 to 34	1-2 years	Some difficulties	University	Basic	Once a week	Personal communication	Greek	Video	Web-camera, Microphone	Great importance	
10/20/2017 11:06:26 M	18 to 34	3 years or more	No problems	University	Very good knowledge	Sometimes a year or even rarely	Personal communication	English	Calling, Video, Messaging	Web-camera, Headphones	No importance	
10/20/2017 11:22:12 F	18 to 34	1-2 years	No problems	University	Intermediate	Sometimes a year or even rarely	Personal communication	Greek	Video	Web-camera, Microphone	Medium importance	
10/20/2017 16:03:42 F	18 to 34	3 years or more	Some difficulties	University	Intermediate	Sometimes a year or even rarely	Personal communication	English	Video	Web-camera	Medium importance	
10/20/2017 19:20:25 F	18 to 34	3 years or more	No problems	University	Basic	Sometimes a year or even rarely	Personal communication	Greek	Video	Web-camera	Great importance	
10/20/2017 21:34:44 F	18 to 34	3 years or more	Some difficulties	University	Intermediate	Once a week	Personal communication	English	Calling, Video, Messaging	Web-camera, Headphones, Microphone	Medium importance	
10/20/2017 21:47:10 M	18 to 34	3 years or more	No problems	University	Intermediate	Sometimes a month	Personal communication	English	Video	Web-camera, Headphones, Microphone	Medium importance	
10/21/2017 11:19:47 M	26 to 34	3 years or more	No problems	University	Very good knowledge	Sometimes a month	Personal communication	English	Video, Messaging	Web-camera	Great importance	
10/22/2017 3:11:18 F	18 to 34	1-12 months	Some difficulties	University	Intermediate	Once a week	Personal communication	English	Video	Web-camera	Medium importance	
10/22/2017 12:21:18 F	18 to 34	1-2 years	No problems	University	Intermediate	Every day	Personal communication	Greek	Video	Web-camera	Great importance	
10/22/2017 17:28:48 F	18 to 34	3 years or more	No problems	University	Very good knowledge	Sometimes a year or even rarely	Personal communication	Greek	Calling, Video	Web-camera, Headphones, Microphone	Medium importance	
10/22/2017 17:53:34 M	18 to 34	3 years or more	No problems	University	Intermediate	Sometimes a month	Personal communication	Greek	Calling, Messaging	Web-camera, Microphone	Medium importance	
10/22/2017 21:09:28 F	26 to 34	1-2 years	Some difficulties	University	Intermediate	Sometimes a month	Personal communication	English	Video, Messaging	Web-camera	Medium importance	
10/22/2017 21:10:29 F	26 to 34	1-2 years	No problems	University	Intermediate	Sometimes a month	Business communication	English	Video, Messaging	Web-camera, Headphones, Microphone	Medium importance	
10/23/2017 18:57:34 M	26 to 34	3 years or more	No problems	University	Intermediate	Sometimes a month	Personal communication	Greek	Calling, Video	Web-camera, Headphones, Microphone	Great importance	
10/24/2017 15:38:10 M	26 to 34	3 years or more	No problems	University	Very good knowledge	Once a week	Personal communication	Greek	Calling, Video	Web-camera, Headphones, Microphone	Medium importance	
10/25/2017 17:54:54 F	18 to 34	3 years or more	Some difficulties	University	Intermediate	Sometimes a year or even rarely	Personal communication	Greek	Video, Messaging	Web-camera, Headphones	Medium importance	
10/27/2017 13:11:51 F	26 to 34	1-2 years	No problems	University	Very good knowledge	Sometimes a year or even rarely	Business communication	Greek	Messaging	Web-camera	Medium importance	
10/30/2017 21:48:19 F	18 to 34	3 years or more	No problems	Secondary	Basic	Sometimes a year or even rarely	Personal communication	Greek	Video	Web-camera	Medium importance	
10/31/2017 21:25:23 F	18 to 34	3 years or more	No problems	University	Very good knowledge	Once a week	Personal communication	Greek	Video	Web-camera, Headphones, Microphone	Medium importance	
11/1/2017 19:28:28 F	18 to 34	3 years or more	Some difficulties	University	Basic	Sometimes a month	Personal communication	Greek	Calling, Video, Messaging	Web-camera, Headphones, Microphone	No importance	
11/3/2017 22:15:34 F	18 to 34	3 years or more	No problems	University	Basic	Sometimes a year or even rarely	Personal communication	Greek	Calling, Video	Web-camera, Headphones, Microphone	Medium importance	
11/6/2017 21:46:39 F	18 to 34	1-2 years	No problems	University	Basic	Once a week	Personal communication	Greek	Video	Web-camera	Medium importance	
11/12/2017 21:16:22 M	18 to 34	3 years or more	No problems	University	Very good knowledge	Sometimes a month	Personal communication	Greek	Calling, Video	Web-camera, Headphones, Microphone	Medium importance	

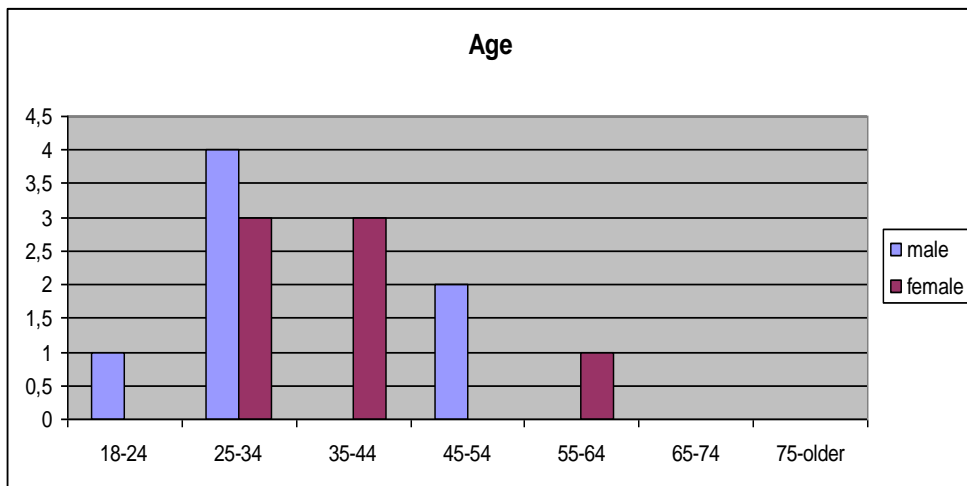
III. RESULTS

The collection of the results and data of the questionnaire of this survey have shown the following findings: (you may see the questionnaire simultaneously)

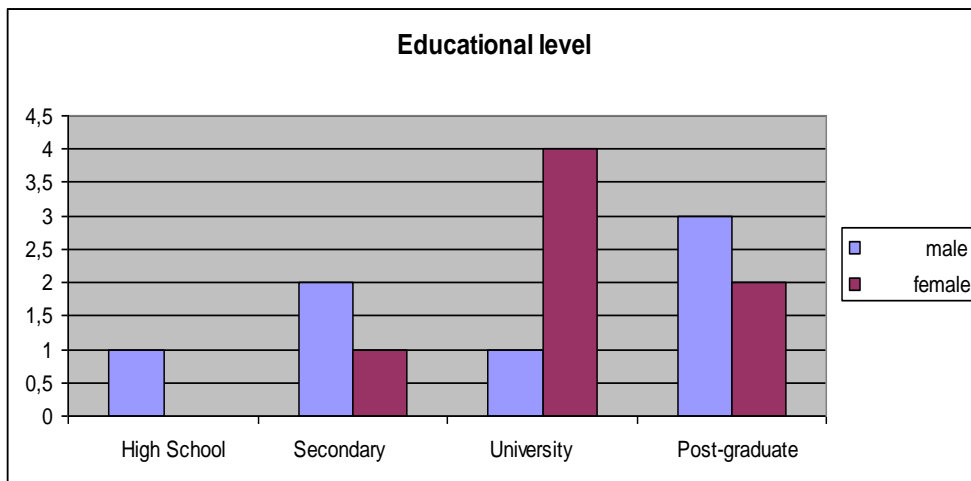
a) According to the demographic-statistic questions (No 1, 2 and 5) the respondents of this small scale survey were 14 individuals with the following sex, age and educational level. (Graphics 1, 2, 3a and 3b)



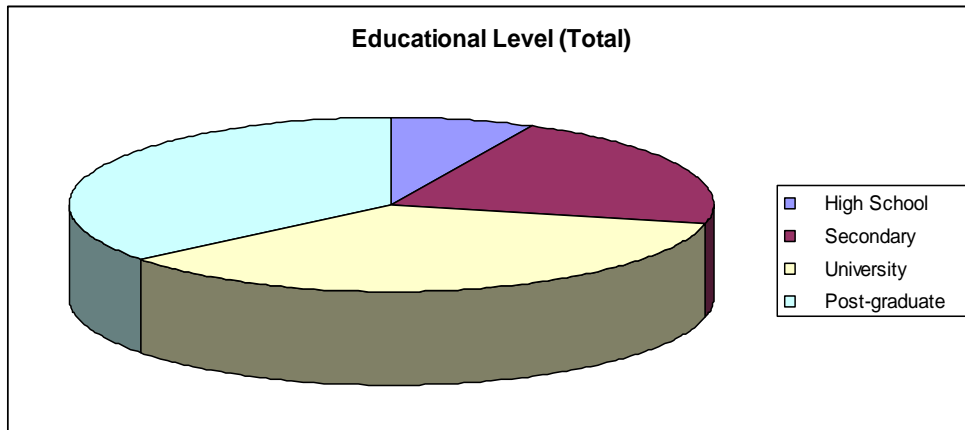
Graphic 1



Graphic 2

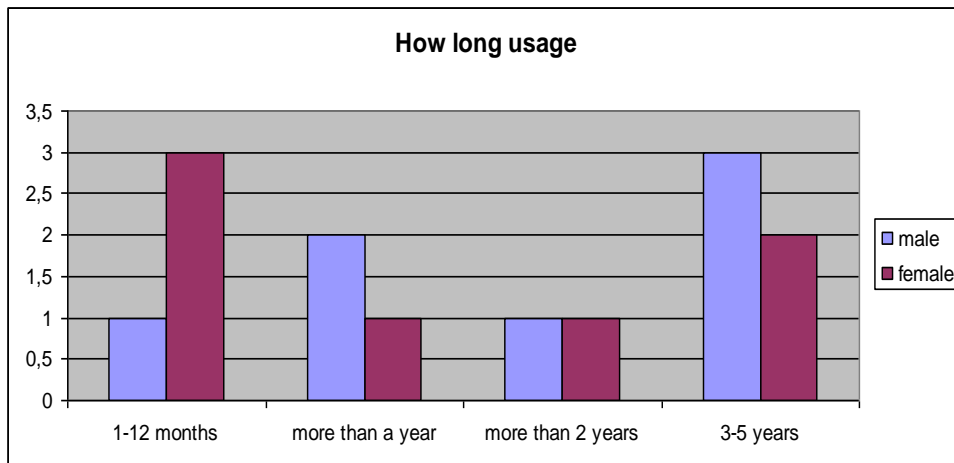


Graphic 3a

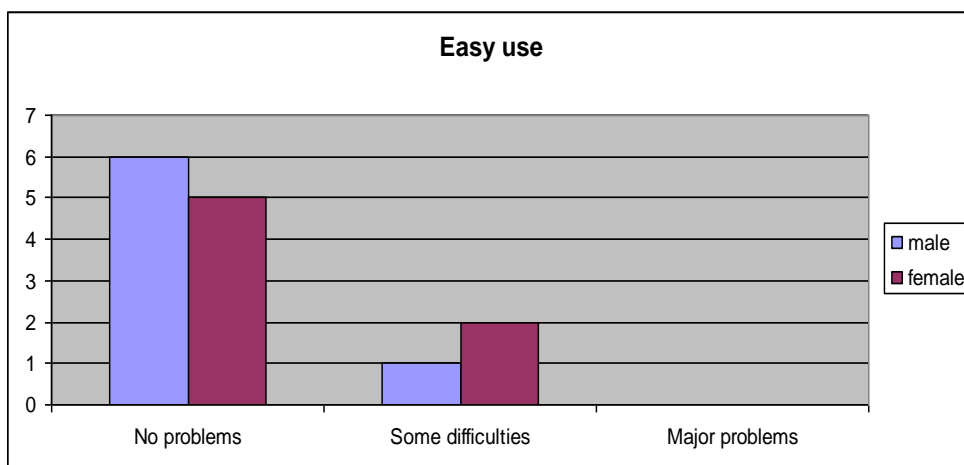


Graphic 3b

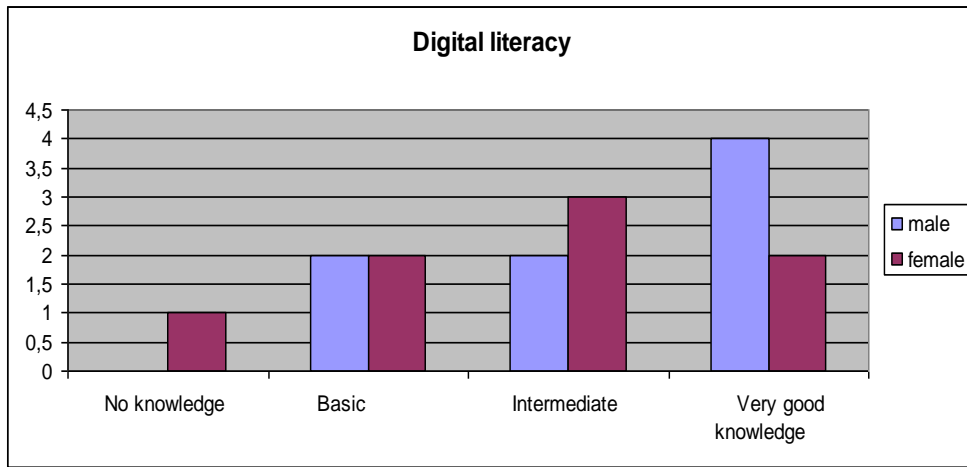
a) The digital literacy of the respondents is recorded with the questions (No 3, 4, 6, 7 and 8) about the time, the difficulty, the skills of technology, the frequency and the purpose of use of skype. (graphics 4, 5, 6a, 6b, 7 and 8)



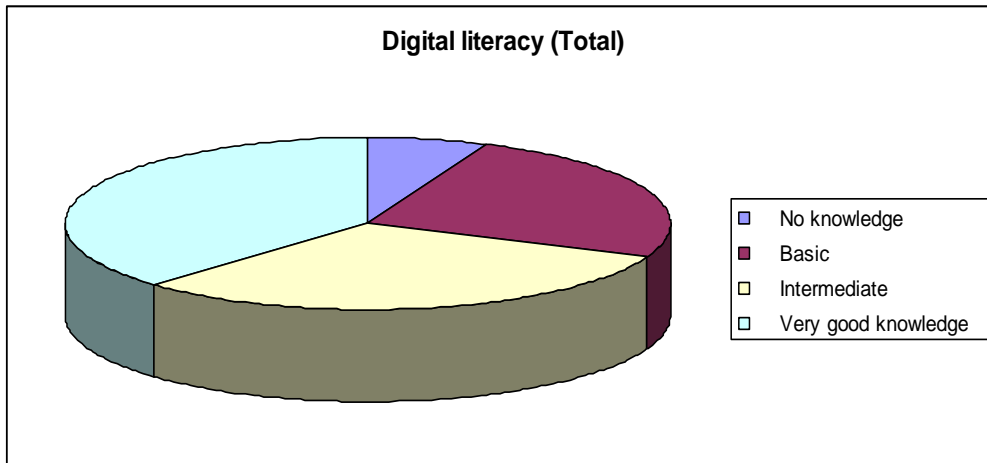
Graphic 4



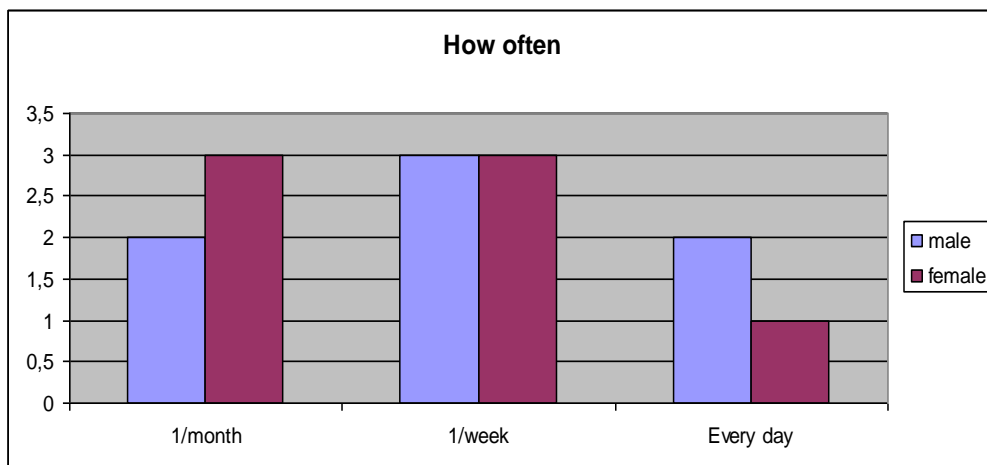
Graphic 5



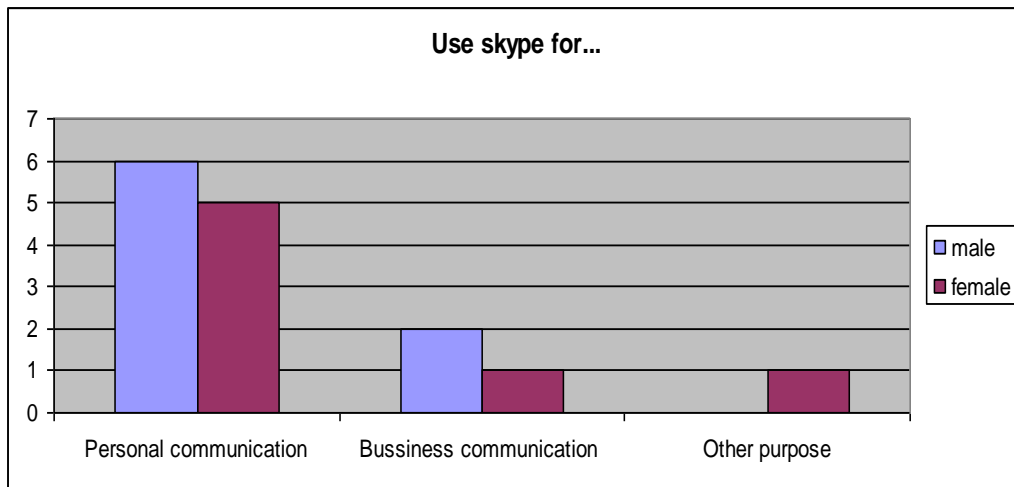
Graphic 6a



Graphic 6b

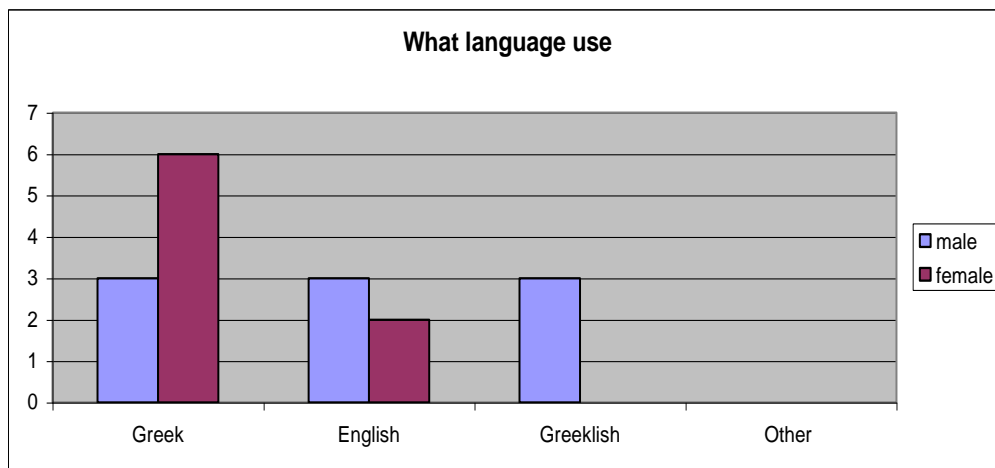


Graphic 7

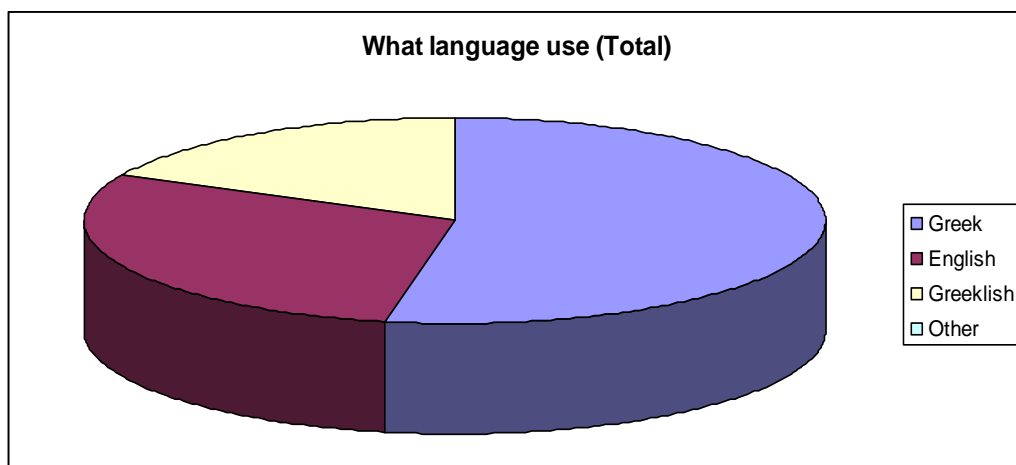


Graphic 8

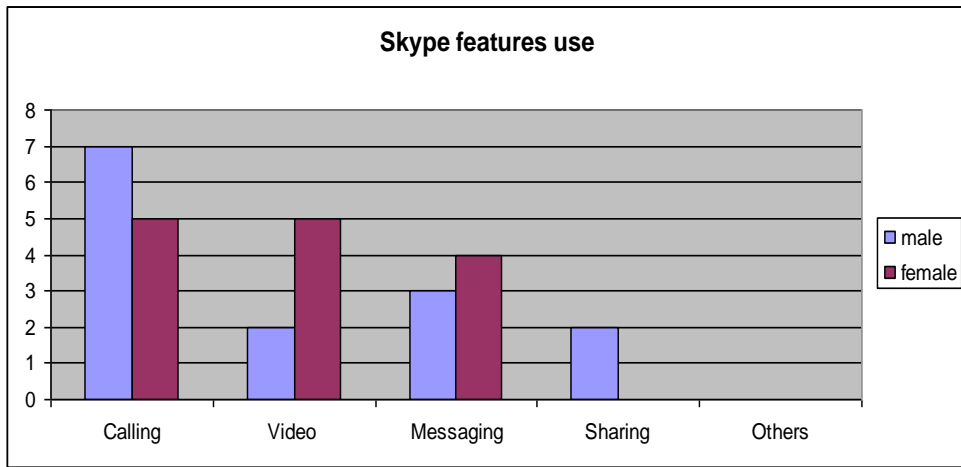
c) The writing practices (language, text messaging, emoticons, e.t.c) of the individuals examine the questions (No 9, 10 and 15) of the questionnaire. (Graphics 9a, 9b, 10, 11a and 11b)



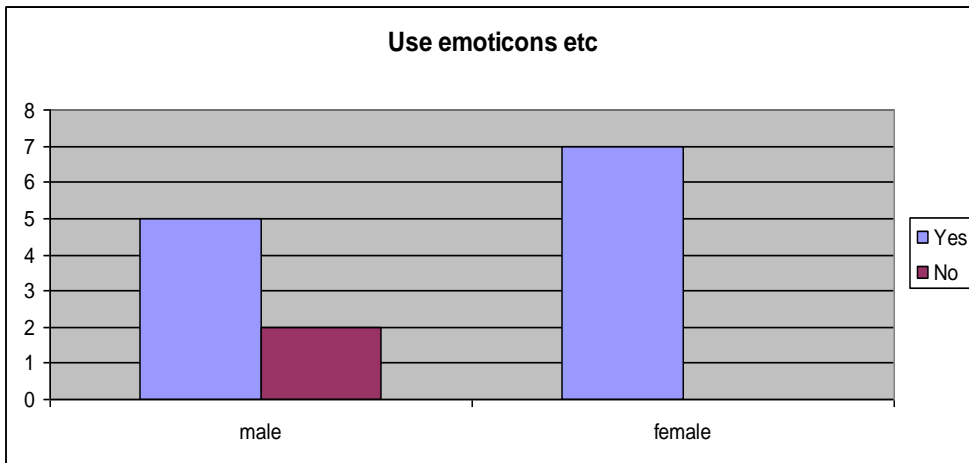
Graphic 9a



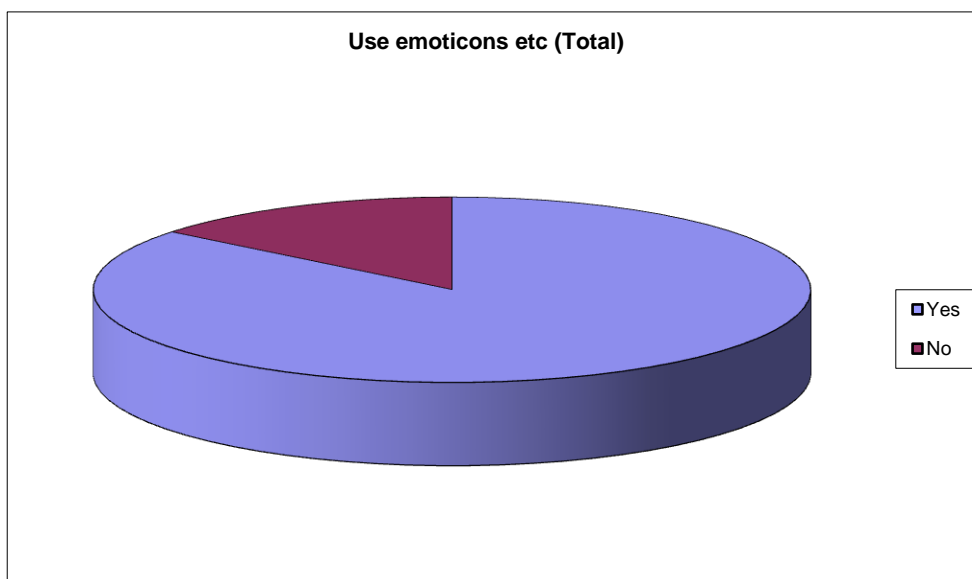
Graphic 9b



Graphic 10

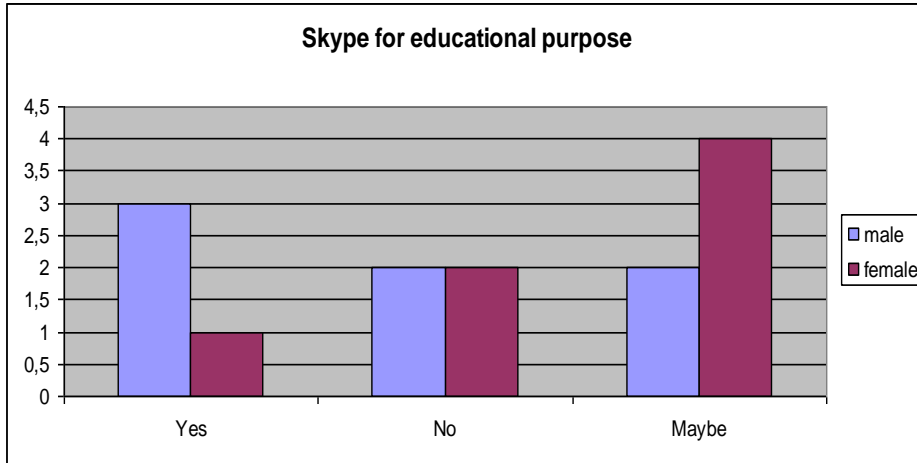


Graphic 11a

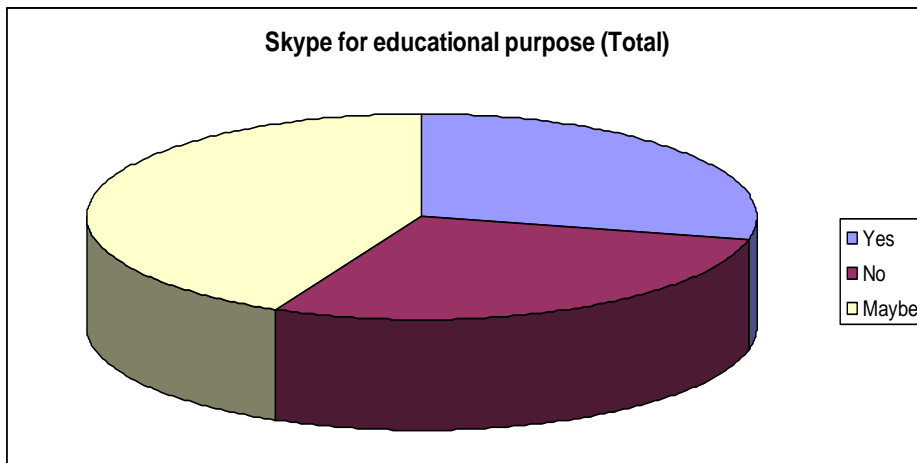


Graphic 11b

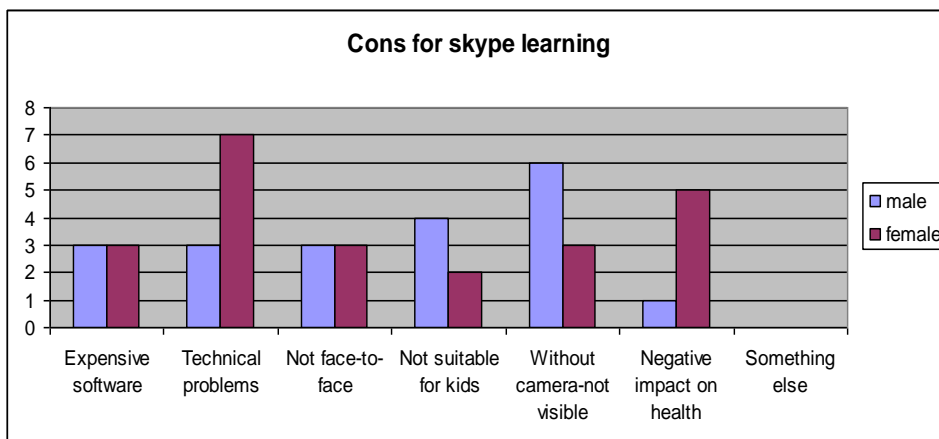
d) The skype as an educational tool, the disadvantages (cons) and advantages (pros) of its use is the purpose of the following questions (No 16, 17, 18 and 19) that reveal the answers (Graphics 12a, 12b, 13a, 13b, 14a, 14b, 15a and 15b)



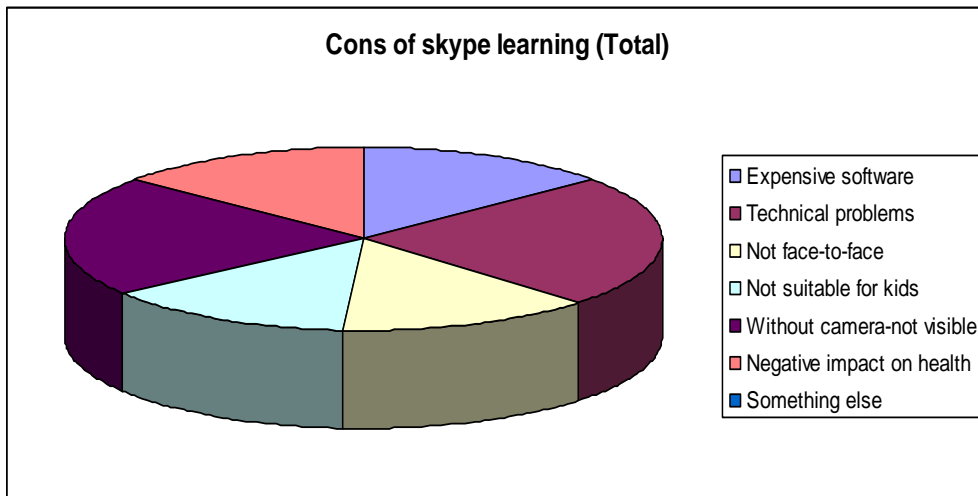
Graphic 12a



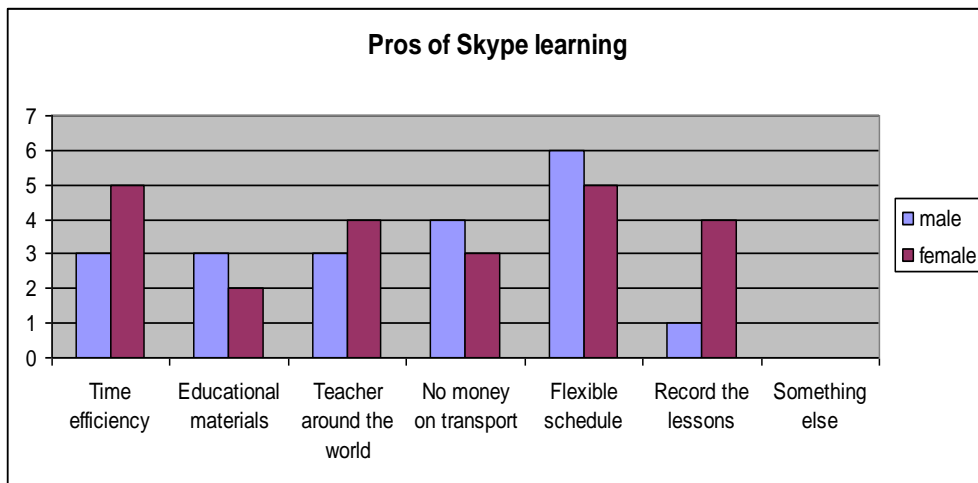
Graphic 12b



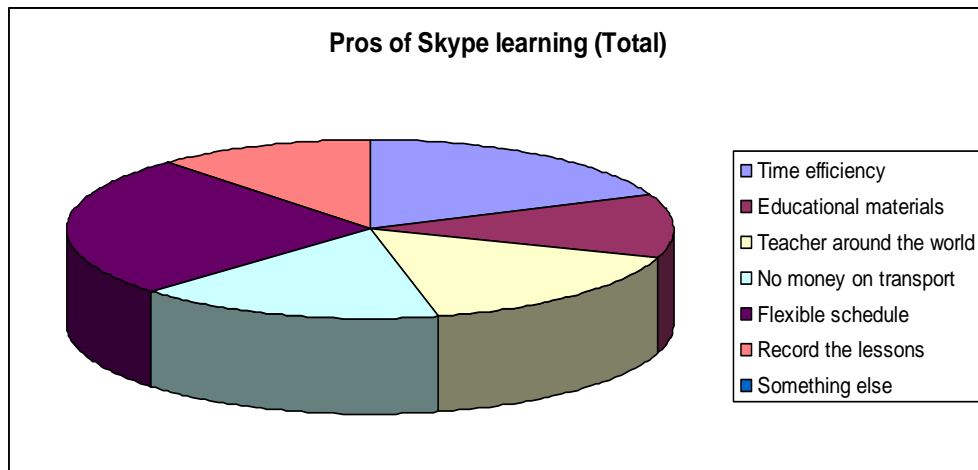
Graphic 13a



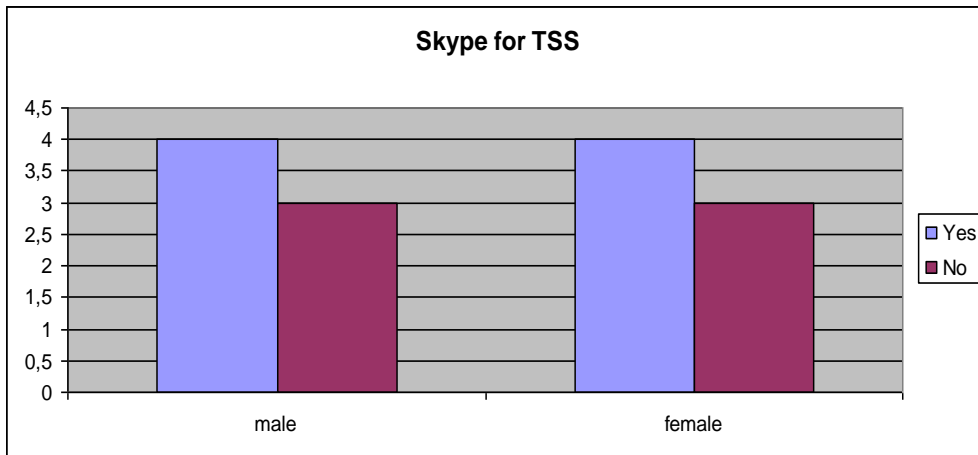
Graphic 13b



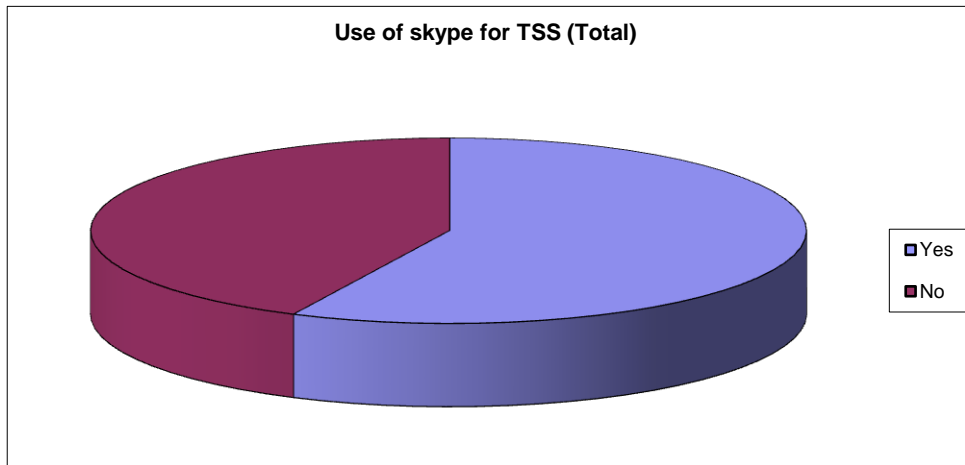
Graphic 14a



Graphic 14b

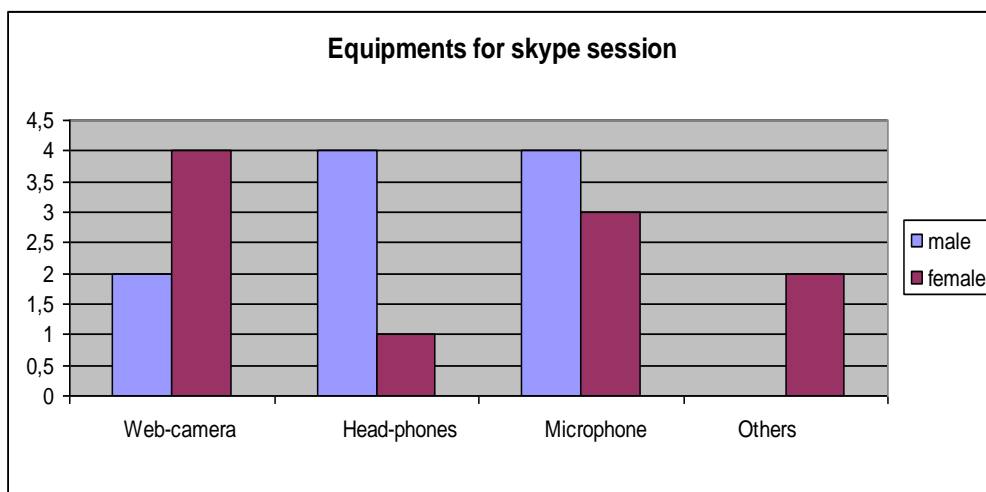


Graphic 15a

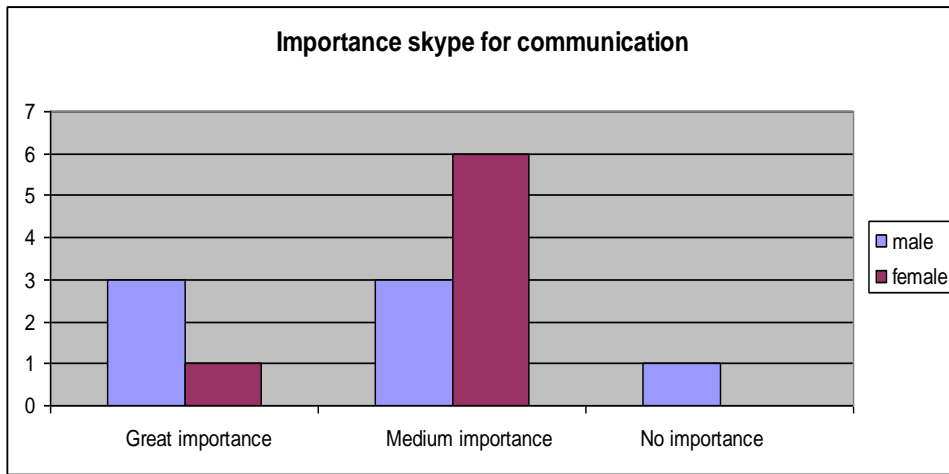


Graphic 15b

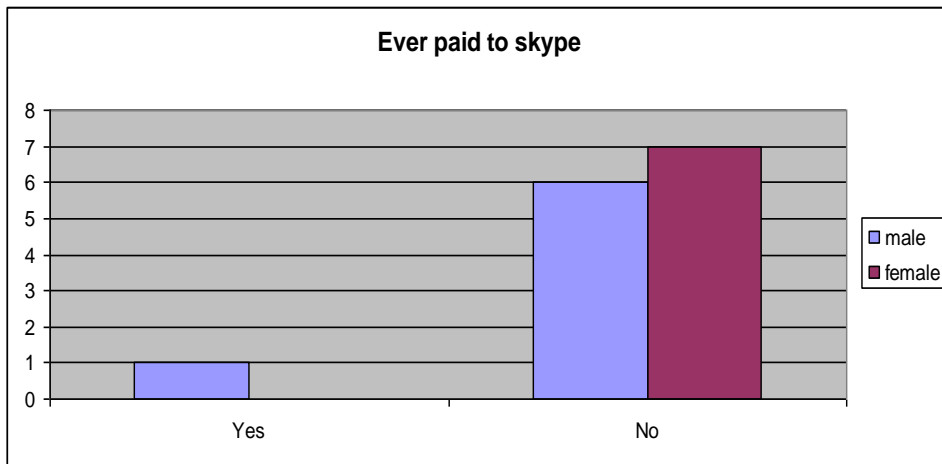
e) The last group of questions (No 11, 12, 13, 14 and 20) are questions for general information (equipments, importance, payment, devices, recommendation) about the use of skype (Graphics 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20)



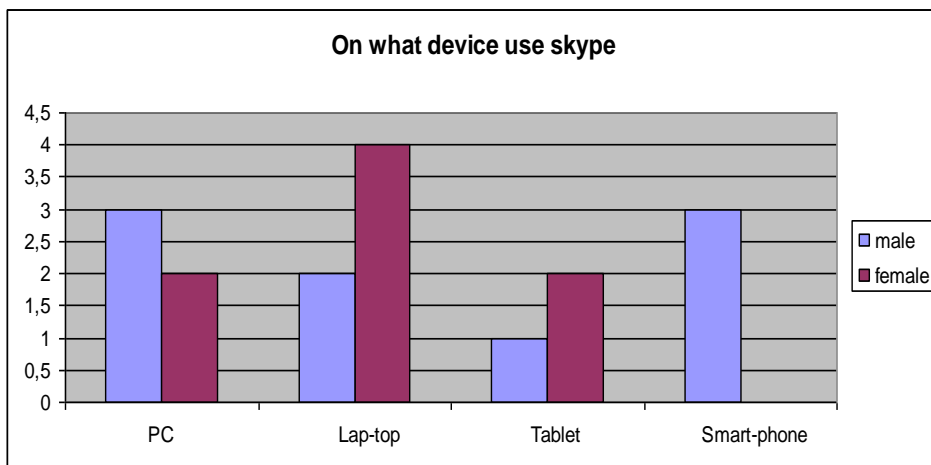
Graphic 16



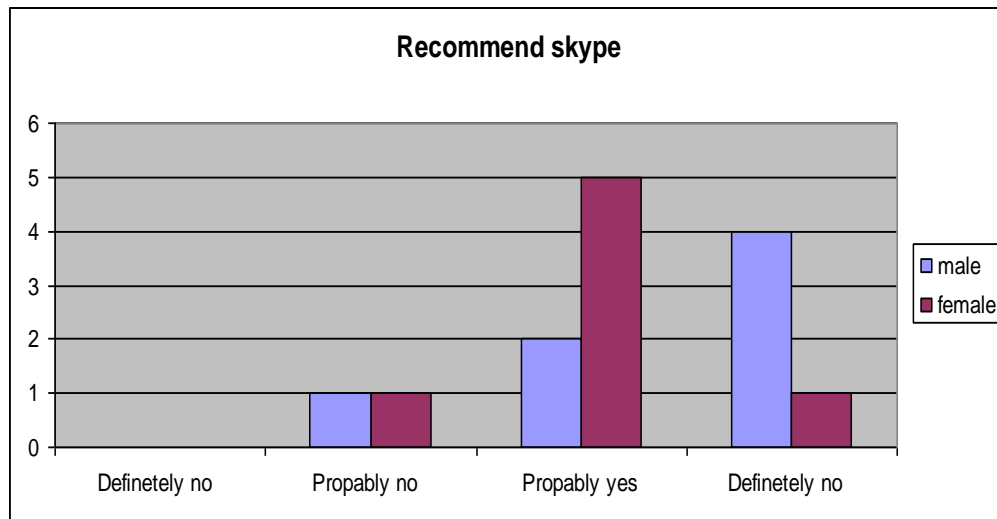
Graphic 17



Graphic 18



Graphic 19



Graphic 20

IV. DISCUSION AND FINDINGS

We firstly design the **frequency tables and percentage distributions or graphics** and then we can begin **to analyze the data and results**. We must focus on some specific areas of the collected data which may include: Comparison within a survey – Response patterns for certain questions may stand out from the others and may indicate an area for improvement. Comparison across subgroups - Breaking out questionnaire responses by specific characteristics helps teams determine whether certain groups have different experiences. Analysis of group differences depends on the types of attributes captured in the survey, for example, gender, educational status, digital literacy.

The discussion about the results **in relation with the parameters (variables) of gender, age, digital literacy or technology use habits**, reveals the following **statistically significant data about writing practices and use of skype as an educational tool**:

- **Males use skype longer time** than females (average: > 3 years)
- **Males have got higher level of digital literacy** than females (average: > intermediate)
- There is a **correlation between the variable of digital literacy and the educational status (level)**.
- **Greeklisch** as a translanguaging practice of writing (Tsokalidou, R. 2016) **is used more frequently by males** than females.
- **Males and females use skype for calling and messaging** mainly.
- **Females use more emoticons and other symbols** in their writing practices than males.
- **Skype as an educational tool is more popular to males** than females.
- **Females record technical problems and negative impact in health** as main disadvantages of skype, hierarchically. On the other hand, **males respond to this question the absence of camera and the fact that the skype is not available for kids**.
- The total representative sample highlights as **main advantage of the skype the flexible schedule and the time efficiency too**. Then, the females make the choice of the availability of the teacher around the world and the possibility to record the lessons. The males prefer it because no money or transport is necessary.
- **The majority of the respondents prefers to use skype for Teacher-Student Sessions (TSS)**.
- The vast majority of **the participants in this survey were people 20-45 years old**.

IV. CONCLUSION

“Structurally, **computer-mediated communication (CMC)** can be defined in terms of **two basic parameters**. The first is **synchronicity**. In synchronous CMC, transmission is essentially instantaneous, and interlocutors are assumed to be physically present to read and respond to messages, whereas in asynchronous CMC, neither of these assumptions holds. The second parameter is whether the communication is **one-to-one** (i.e., between two people) or **many-to-many** (i.e., multiple participants’ messages being broadcast to multiple potential interlocutors)”. (Baron, 2010)

This is the great advantage of communication via skype which is established as a new and widely popular tool of new educational technology, especially to young people.

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