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).
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 □
Business 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 □
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 □
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.

### 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)
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)
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)
**Skype features use**

- Calling
- Video
- Messaging
- Sharing
- Others

**Graphic 10**

**Use emoticons etc**

- Yes
- No

**Graphic 11a**

**Use emoticons etc (Total)**

- Yes
- No

**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)
Cons of Skype learning (Total)

- Expensive software
- Technical problems
- Not face-to-face
- Not suitable for kids
- Without camera-not visible
- Negative impact on health
- Something else

Pros of Skype learning

- Time efficiency
- Educational materials
- Teacher around the world
- No money on transport
- Flexible schedule
- Record the lessons
- Something else

Pros of Skype learning (Total)

- Time efficiency
- Educational materials
- Teacher around the world
- No money on transport
- Flexible schedule
- Record the lessons
- Something else
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).
Importance of Skype for communication

- Great importance
- Medium importance
- No importance

Gender distribution:
- Male
- Female

Ever paid for Skype

- Yes
- No

Gender distribution:
- Male
- Female

On what device use Skype

- PC
- Laptop
- Tablet
- Smartphone

Gender distribution:
- Male
- Female

Novelty Journals
IV. DISCUSSION 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).**
- **Greeklish** 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 emotions 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.

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES


[9] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kM4VgS0U1P0

