

Skype and Skype in the Classroom: Options for Language Teaching and Learning

May 2013 – Volume 17, Number 1

Title	Skype
URL	http://www.skype.com
Type of Product	A software application for voice and video communication among individuals and groups
Platform	Mac, Windows, Linux
Minimum System Requirements	Skype for Windows: Windows ® XP, Vista or, 7 (Both 32- and 64- bit operating systems) Skype for Mac: Mac OS X v10.5.8 (leopard) or newer Skype for Linux: 1 GHz processor or faster Internet connection
Registration	Required
Price	Free for basic service, but fees apply for premium accounts and service from Skype to landline and mobile telephones, group video calls, etc.
Online Help Center	https://support.skype.com

Title	Skype in the classroom
URL	https://education.skype.com
Type of Product	Information exchange website
Minimum System Requirements	Internet connection
Registration	Required
Price	Free
Online Help Center	https://education.skype.com/help

Introduction

The growth of the Internet has changed how people communicate and exchange information with one another. *Skype*, a software application for online communication, has been used in classes at various levels, providing many possibilities for teaching and learning (Blankenship, 2011; Foote, 2008; Messner, 2009, 2010). The appearance of *Skype in the classroom*, a website for learners worldwide to share information, has expanded the potential of using Skype for language teaching and learning. This article

provides a review of *Skype* and *Skype in the classroom* by using the ACTIONS model to evaluate their pedagogical value in language teaching and learning.

The ACTIONS model, proposed by Bates (1995), is a practical guide for educators and policymakers to select and evaluate the use of technologies for teaching and learning. The ACTIONS model involves the following criteria:

Access: How accessible is a particular technology for learners?

Costs: What is the cost structure of a particular technology?

Teaching and learning: How does a particular technology support teaching and learning?

Interactivity and user-friendliness: How does a particular technology facilitate interaction among learners? How easy is a particular technology to use?

Organizational issues: Are any class organizational changes needed?

Novelty: How new is this particular technology?

Speed: How quickly can courses be taught and learned via this particular technology?

With these criteria in mind, this review aims to provide those involved in language education—be they teachers or students—with a reference tool to help them consider whether using *Skype* and *Skype in the classroom* might be useful and appropriate for their learning situation.

An Overview of Skype and Skype in the classroom

Skype

Skype is a software application that uses voice over Internet protocol (VoIP) technology “which converts voice signals into data streams that are sent over the Internet and converted back to audio by the recipient’s computer” (Educause, 2007, p.2). Also, *Skype* is a free, downloadable communication tool that turns a personal computer, smart phone, or tablet into a telephone. However, *Skype* is more than just a telephone.

Skype provides both synchronous and asynchronous communication services. With a webcam and a headset, *Skype* users can have person-to-person or person-to-group online chats or conferences, which enables communication without the limitations of time and space. It is this feature that makes *Skype* a potential tool for language teaching and learning. According to Elia (2006), *Skype* facilitates language tandem exchange in which “two people of different mother tongues collaborate in the learning of each other’s language” (p. 271). It allows language learners to start language exchanges wherever they can connect to the Internet. Via *Skype*, users can share files or screen shots as needed. Even without webcams and headsets, *Skype* users can still communicate with each other by leaving instant messages. Figure 1 shows different ways of communicating using *Skype*.

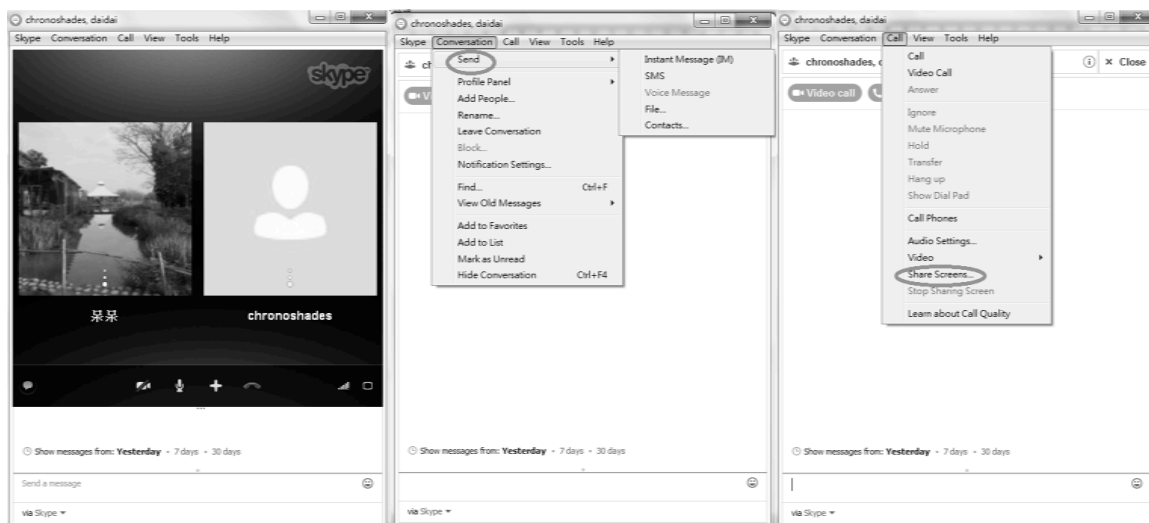


Figure 1. *Three ways people can communicate using Skype*

The number of *Skype* users has grown exponentially since its launch in August 2003. As Messenger, another online communication tool, merged with *Skype* on March 15, 2013, it is expected that the number of *Skype* users will continue to increase (Protalinsk, 2013).

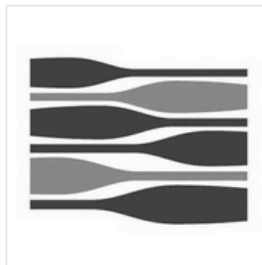
Skype in the classroom

Skype in the classroom, launched in March 2011, is a website especially designed for educational purposes. It is a platform where teachers and students can disseminate information about their classes, share educational resources, and find partners to start classroom projects. A number of businesses and organizations (e.g. River & Rowing Museum, NASA Digital Learning Network, and Penguin Books) have partnered with *Skype in the classroom* to provide provocative and meaningful *Skype* lessons (see Figure 2 for some partners of *Skype in the classroom*). Anyone who has a *Skype* account can use their *Skype* name and password to sign in to *Skype in the classroom* and decide to be a lesson participant or creator.

Our partners

We are collaborating with some amazing businesses and organisations around the world to bring inspiring educational experiences right into the classroom. Click below and see what engaging Skype lessons our partners have to offer.

Are you a business or organisation who wishes to take part?
See how you can get involved with our **Partner Program**.



River & Rowing Museum

The River & Rowing Museum celebrates the river, the sport of rowing, the story of the Wind in the Willows a...

View all 2 Skype lessons



Mr Toad and his Environment



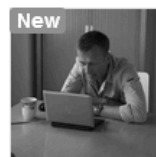
Picnicking with Mr Toad at the River & Rowing Museum



Peace One Day Education

Peace One Day aims to advance learning in the areas of conflict resolution, peace and sustainability, using...

View all 1 Skype lessons



Request a Skype Talk with Peace One Day!



CHAT to the Future

CHAT To The Future Inc. is a registered Canadian charity that links schools from around the world to its sm...

View all 1 Skype lessons



Play, talk, and learn with a family of 18 orphans in...

Figure 2. Some Skype in the classroom partners

Find a Lesson

For individuals who want to take control of their own learning or learn a special topic according to their interests, and for language teachers who want to enrich their students' learning experiences, *Skype in the classroom* provides a variety of lessons that they can be selected. Examples of the options available can be seen in Figure 3.

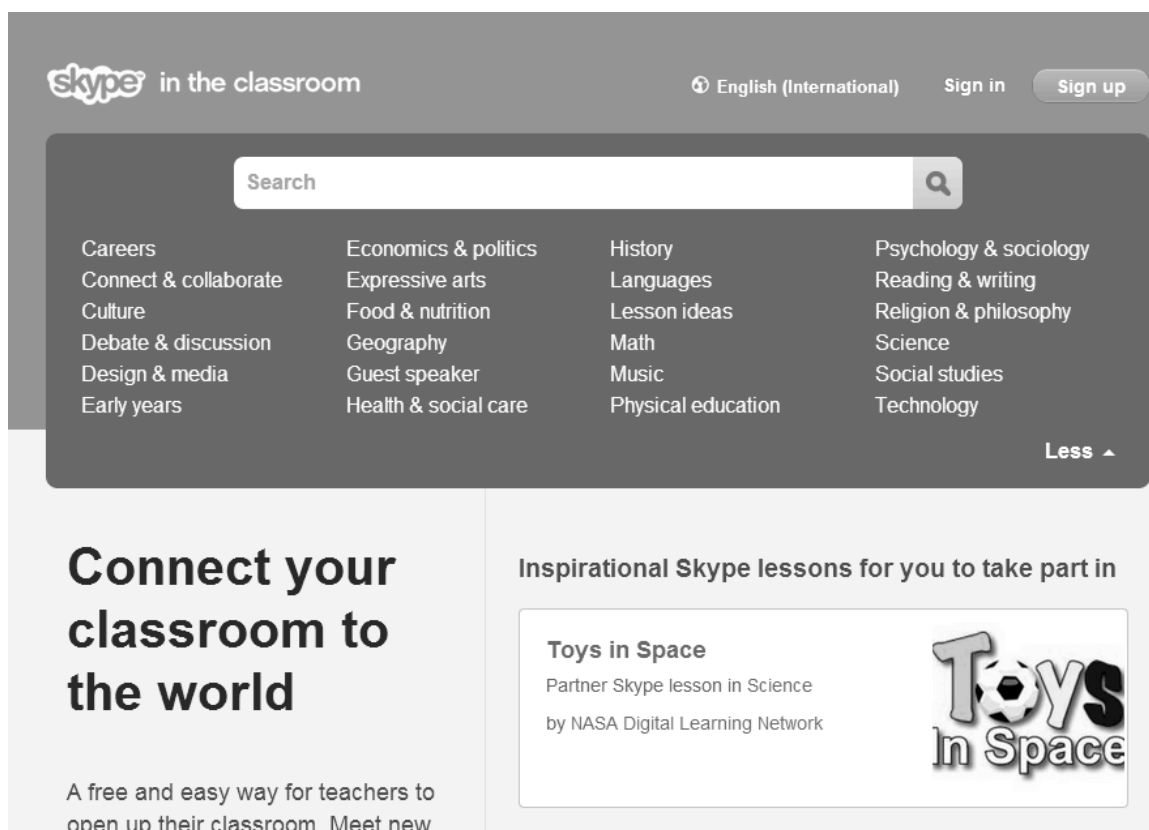


Figure 3. *Options for Skype in the classroom*

Language teachers and learners may find the “Languages” category especially useful because they can search for *Skype* language lessons that meet their needs (see Figure 4 for some examples of *Skype* language lessons). These lessons provide opportunities for learning another language or practicing language via language exchanges.


[Culture](#) | [Geography](#) | [History](#) | [Languages](#) | [Math](#) | [Science](#) | [Technology](#) | [More ▾](#)

Search / Languages (10511)
Show closed

Filters: ☒ Skype lessons ☒ Teachers ☒ Guest Speakers ☒

Skype lesson in Languages
Francês e Português para Estrangeiros

Skype lesson in Languages
Aprender inglês na Escola Pública brasileira é possível sim!

Skype lesson in Languages
Partnership Project. English and Spanish


Skype lesson in Languages
Skype Pen Pals

Skype lesson in Languages
Club De Viajeros Internacionales Y Generadores De Ingresos Desde El Hogar

Skype lesson in Languages
Teaching English as a Foreign Language to Kids

Skype lesson in Languages
Soziety: the language exchange community for teachers and students

Skype lesson in Languages

Figure 4. *Language lessons on Skype in the classroom*

Language teachers and learners can enroll in any language lesson according to their needs and interests. More detailed description of the lesson, the profile of the lesson creator, and the number of participants can be viewed (see Figure 5 for an example *Skype* lesson). Once deciding to join the class, language teachers and learners have to contact the lesson creator via email or *Skype* to arrange meeting times.

The screenshot shows a Skype lesson page. At the top, the title "Teaching English as a Foreign Language to Kids" is displayed in a large, bold font. Below the title, there is a button labeled "Sign up to take part" which is circled in red. To the right of the button, there are three filters: "LOOKING FOR: Anyone", "STUDENT AGES: 6-11", and "CATEGORY: Languages". A heart icon is visible in the top right corner, and a "SHARE" button with a share icon is also present.

Below the filters, the page is divided into two main sections. The left section is titled "About this Skype lesson" and contains three paragraphs of text. The right section displays statistics: "94 TAKING PART", "0 FEEDBACK", and "9 COMMENT". Below these statistics, it shows the creation date "30 Mar 2011" and the language "English". A link to "The timezone converter" is also visible.

At the bottom right, there is a circular profile section titled "Created by" which is also circled in red. It features a profile picture of Joe Speck, his name, and his location "Spain". Below the profile picture, it states "TEFL Teacher and TEFL Course Coordinator at Oxbridge, Spain." and "(Teacher's Profile)".

About this Skype lesson

I'm interested in finding out how other people approach teaching English as a foreign language to kids?

What sort of activities do you create for them and how much detail do you go into in grammar exercises?

One thing that I'm thinking about is an online language intercambio. We teach Spanish kids, teenagers and adults English in Barcelona and Madrid. It could be interesting to get our students to practice speaking with some native English speaking students via Skype.

Let me know if you think this is at all interesting... it could be the 21st century version of 'pen-pals'?

If people are interested then we could share some of the activities that we use to teach kids?

94 TAKING PART **0** FEEDBACK **9** COMMENT

CREATED: 30 Mar 2011

LANGUAGES: English

[The timezone converter](#)

Created by

 **Joe Speck**
Spain

TEFL Teacher and TEFL Course Coordinator at Oxbridge, Spain.

(Teacher's Profile)

Figure 5. *An example of a Skype English lesson in Skype in the classroom*

Create a Lesson

People intending to teach a class, find a partner class, provide tutoring services, or look for language exchange opportunities can share such information by creating a lesson using *Skype in the classroom*. Users create *Skype* lessons by following the basic format shown in Figure 6.

Create a Skype lesson

This is your time to shine. The best Skype lesson descriptions are those that really bring to life what it is you want to achieve for your class, or what you think you have to offer as an expert or guest speaker. Be as detailed and interesting as you can – the top descriptions are much more likely to get a response and could be actively promoted as a star feature.

1 About your Skype lesson

Title REQUIRED

Be as descriptive as you can, but keep it punchy and interesting

110 of 110

Add an inspirational cover image for instant impact

未選擇檔案

☐ I have the rights to use this image.

☐ Are you happy to share/let other people use this in the future?

Description

This is your chance to explain exactly what your Skype lesson is all about and really inspire teachers and experts to get involved. Remember to include:- The subjects will your Skype lesson cover- How long it will take- The opportunities for interaction and participation- Is it a one-off or part of a series

2 Photos and video

The best way to grab attention is to use images and video along with your written description. Add them now, or add them later if you're planning a program of Skype lessons.

+ Add an image

Paste your video embed code here

3 Who are you looking for?

I. A class

II. Which language is best suited to this Skype lesson? REQUIRED

Select one

III. What age group is this Skype lesson most relevant to? (You can choose more than one) REQUIRED

☐ 3-5 ☐ 6-11 ☐ 12-15 ☐ 16-18 ☐ 18+ ☐ Any

IV. Which category best describes your Skype lesson? REQUIRED

Select one

4 Availability

Would you like this Skype lesson to expire?

Finished? Save your Skype lesson

Figure 6. *Creating a Skype lesson*

Evaluation of *Skype* and *Skype in the classroom*

The seven criteria of Bates's (1995) ACTIONS model can be used to evaluate the potential of *Skype* and *Skype in the classroom* for language teaching and learning.

Access

Both *Skype* and *Skype in the classroom* are easy to access. To get *Skype*, the user simply goes to the download page of the official *Skype* website (<http://www.skype.com>) and then selects the appropriate version the user's operating system. The download and set up processes are very user-friendly, and setting up *Skype* and creating a *Skype* account are not daunting tasks.

Skype in the classroom is also highly accessible as long as users have an Internet connection. The webpage of *Skype in the classroom* is clear and not difficult to browse. In sum, *Skype* and *Skype in the classroom* are both highly accessible, and users can navigate both tools easily.

Costs

The costs of *Skype* and *Skype in the classroom* can be divided into two parts: software costs and hardware costs. For software costs, downloading *Skype* and browsing the *Skype in the classroom* website are both free. However, advanced features, such as group video calls, require users to pay a fee and upgrade to a premium account to get the service. Calling fees vary depending on the countries the user calls and the amount of time spent on calls. Subscribing to a premium account, which will allow users to use services such as group video chats, currently costs US\$59.88 for 12 months. US\$4.99 per month is not very expensive.

The major cost of using *Skype* lies in the hardware. First, users need to have an appropriate electronic device to use *Skype* and *Skype in the classroom*. An Internet connection is, of course, also necessary, and some users may need to purchase webcams and headsets for video images and audio effects. Though webcams and headsets are not required for teaching and learning a lesson, having these technologies enriches the teaching and learning experience. Nonetheless, since most new computers come with built-in webcams and speakers, anyone with the financial means to buy a computer probably already has most of what is necessary to use *Skype* and *Skype in the classroom*.

A suggestion for minimizing costs of using *Skype* and *Skype in the classroom* is to use public resources such as schools, libraries, or community centers, which may already have Internet access and the necessary equipment.

Teaching and Learning

The use of *Skype* and *Skype in the classroom* supports teaching and learning in many ways. First, these tools promote collaborative learning, no matter if the cooperation happens in group-to-group, group-to-person, or person-to-person. Through using *Skype* and *Skype in the classroom*, an English as a foreign language learner can practice English by participating in a *Skype* lesson; a non-native speaking teacher could, for example, find a native speaker to be a guest speaker for his or her students. Such opportunities support collaborative teaching and learning.

Second, *Skype* and *Skype in the classroom* promote authentic learning. According to Lombardi (2007), authentic learning emphasizes “real-world, complex problems and their solutions, using role-playing exercises, problem-based activities, case studies, and participation in a virtual community of practice” (p.2). Thus, authentic learning happens as learners participate in real-world relevant tasks that require their judgment to distinguish information, patience to participate, ability to adapt themselves to unfamiliar contexts, and flexibility to work with people from different cultures. In this view, *Skype* and *Skype in the classroom* allow language teachers and learners to participate in a context of authentic learning.

Finally, many functions built into *Skype* and *Skype in the classroom* can be used to facilitate teaching and learning. Functions on *Skype* such as group calls, sending files and messages, and sharing screen shots make a computer a virtual white board that language teachers and learners can draw on during lessons.

Interactivity and User-Friendliness:

Skype and *Skype in the classroom* enable synchronous and asynchronous communication among language teachers and learners. The built-in functions of *Skype* and *Skype in the classroom* are easy to operate and facilitate interaction among users from different parts of the world. Moreover, language teachers and learners, once becoming *Skype* users, can stay in contact even after *Skype* lessons are over, which encourages other learning opportunities as well.

Organizational issues

Since *Skype* and *Skype in the classroom* have not yet been widely used in language teaching and learning, teachers in some contexts may need to get the approval of their institutions to use *Skype* and *Skype in the classroom*.

Novelty

For regular users of the Internet and electronic devices, the skills and knowledge required to use *Skype* and *Skype in the classroom* are not particularly new. However, for those who lack access to electronic devices and the Internet, teaching and learning via *Skype* and *Skype in the classroom* could be an entirely new experience. Regardless of the user's level of technological proficiency, the experience of using *Skype* and/or *Skype in the classroom* to engage in, for example, video chats for language learning purposes will be novel for most users.

Speed

Once *Skype* lessons are set up and planned, both teachers and students can start classes quickly. Class materials can be updated and adapted easily and quickly, which is an advantage for language teachers wishing to tailor their lessons according to students' learning pace.

Limitations

Although *Skype* and *Skype in the classroom* provide an intriguing option for language teaching and learning, there are some limitations as well. First, there are minimum download/upload speeds required for using *Skype*. For example, video calling and screen sharing require 128kbps/128kbps as the minimum download/upload speed; group video calling requires 4Mbps/128kbps as the minimum download/upload speed. Therefore, *Skype* users need to check whether their Internet connection meets such requirements to avoid video and audio lag during *Skype* lessons.

In addition, when teachers and students from different countries around the world try to use *Skype* and/or *Skype in the classroom*, setting up meeting times can be an issue.

Conclusion

Skype increases opportunities for communication, and *Skype in the classroom* makes a global classroom possible. When combined, *Skype* and *Skype in the classroom* become powerful tools for language teaching and learning. They facilitate cross-cultural and global communication as well as interactions among people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Using *Skype* and *Skype in the classroom* is a way to not only engage students in language learning, but also encourage them to focus on their own learning interests. All of these factors should enrich language teaching and learning experiences and promote lifelong language learning.

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