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TITULO	Skype™ Conference Calls For Foreign Languages: Call Me On Skype™ Whenever You Want To Practice Your Target Language		
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PALABRAS CLAVE (Mínimo 3 y máximo 6)	Habilidad de habla		Llamadas de conferencia de Skype™ en la enseñanza y aprendizaje de idiomas
	Herramientas de comunicación		

RESUMEN DEL CONTENIDO (Mínimo 80 máximo 120 palabras)	<p>Este trabajo presenta los resultados de un estudio de investigación sobre la enseñanza y el aprendizaje de Inglés, utilizando herramientas de comunicación mediadas a través del computador, particularmente las llamadas de conferencia de Skype™. Este estudio se realizó con un grupo de 12 estudiantes adultos de inglés como lengua extranjera con un nivel lingüístico de A1 de acuerdo al Marco Común Europeo de Referencia en el instituto de lenguas (ILUD) de una universidad estatal en Bogotá, Colombia. El objetivo del estudio fue determinar el efecto de las llamadas de conferencia de Skype™ como una herramienta de comunicación mediada a través del computador en la promoción de la habilidad de habla en Inglés del grupo de participantes del estudio fuera de los salones de clase.</p> <p>Este estudio se realizó en virtud de las características y condiciones de la investigación-acción cualitativa. Los principales resultados mostraron que las llamadas de conferencia de Skype™ pueden ser consideradas como una herramienta de influencia para promover la habilidad de habla de estudiantes adultos de inglés como lengua extranjera, especialmente con fines de interacción social y el refuerzo oral de tanto los contenidos de clase como la fluidez en el lenguaje fuera de los salones de clase.</p>
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Skype™ Conference Calls for Foreign Languages: Call me on Skype™ Whenever You Want
to Practice Your Target Language



Universidad de La Sabana

Master in English Language Teaching –Autonomous Learning Environments

Department of Foreign Languages and Cultures

Universidad de La Sabana

Chía, 2012

Skype™ Conference Calls For Foreign Languages: Call Me On Skype™ Whenever You
Want To Practice Your Target Language.



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Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master in English Language
Teaching –Autonomous Learning Environments

**Universidad
de La Sabana**

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Chía, 2012

Resumen

Este trabajo presenta los resultados de un estudio de investigación sobre la enseñanza y el aprendizaje de Inglés, utilizando herramientas de comunicación mediadas a través del computador, particularmente las llamadas de conferencia de Skype™. Este estudio se realizó con un grupo de 12 estudiantes adultos de inglés como lengua extranjera con un nivel lingüístico de A1 de acuerdo al Marco Común Europeo de Referencia en el instituto de lenguas (ILUD) de una universidad estatal en Bogotá, Colombia. El objetivo del estudio fue determinar el efecto de las llamadas de conferencia de Skype™ como una herramienta de comunicación mediada a través del computador en la promoción de la habilidad de habla en Inglés del grupo de participantes del estudio fuera de los salones de clase. Este estudio se realizó en virtud de las características y condiciones de la investigación-acción cualitativa. Los principales resultados mostraron que las llamadas de conferencia de Skype™ pueden ser consideradas como una herramienta de influencia para promover la habilidad de habla de estudiantes adultos de inglés como lengua extranjera, especialmente con fines de interacción social y el refuerzo oral de tanto los contenidos de clase como la fluidez en el lenguaje fuera de los salones de clase.

Palabras claves: habilidad de habla, herramientas de comunicación mediadas a través del computador en la enseñanza del Inglés como lengua extranjera, llamadas de conferencia de Skype™ en la enseñanza y aprendizaje de idiomas.

Table of contents

	Page
Abstract.....	4
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	8
1. 1. Background.....	8
1. 2. Justification.....	10
1. 3. Research questions.....	13
1. 4. Research objectives.....	14
1. 4. 1. General.....	14
1. 4. 2. Specifics.....	14
Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework.....	15
2. 1. Speaking skill.....	15
2. 2. Computer-mediated communication tools in language learning and teaching.....	21
2. 3. Skype conference calls in language learning and teaching.....	26
Chapter 3: Research Design.....	32
3. 1. Type of study.....	32
3. 2. Researcher’s role.....	34
3. 3. Context.....	35
3. 4. Participants.....	37
3. 5. Data collection instruments.....	40
3. 6. Data collection procedure.....	41
3. 7. Research design – second cycle.....	43
Chapter 4: Pedagogical intervention: action plan and implementation.....	45



**Universidad
de La Sabana**

4. 1. Online Skype conference sessions.....	46
4. 2. Timeline of data collection and implementation.....	49
Chapter 5: Data analysis and findings.....	50
5. 1. Procedures of data analysis.....	52
5. 2. Data management.....	53
5. 3. Data reduction.....	55
5. 4. Data display.....	56
5. 5. Conclusion drawing/verification.....	56
5. 6. Analysis of results.....	61
Chapter 6: Conclusions, pedagogical implications and further research.....	86
6. 1. Conclusions.....	86
6. 2. Pedagogical implications.....	87
6. 3. Limitations.....	89
6. 4. Recommendation for further research.....	90
7. References.....	92
8. Figures.....	101
9. Appendices.....	102



Universidad de La Sabana

1. INTRODUCTION

1. 1. Background

Both in school and in later life, the ability to speak well is a key to success (Littell, 1985). It does not matter the language or the geographical context where it is spoken, being able to speak a language properly represents an undeniable advantage for anybody. Thus, in its simplest form, speaking can be defined as using words to say what one is thinking (Lewin & Shoemaker, 1998). However, when teaching speaking in a foreign language classroom, the term speaking refers to using language for the purpose of giving students the opportunity to use and practice the language they have learnt (Baker & Westrup, 2003). Therefore, one of the main functions of language teachers should be to provide as many opportunities as possible for their learners to develop their speaking skill in the target language. This is comprehensible in the sense that for many pupils the prime goal of learning a foreign language is to be able to speak it. Therefore, teaching should help them to achieve that goal to the best of their ability (Grauberg, 1997). However, helping students to develop such speaking skill tends to be a challenging task for many foreign language teachers. In this respect, Baker and Westrup (2003) believe that “organizing lessons to practice speaking English can be a big challenge for both teachers and students” (p. 1).

Traditionally, the teaching of speaking has taken place within formal classroom settings. Recently, with the rapid growth of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) the teaching of the English speaking skill and English in general have been taken to more contemporary teaching dimensions where computers and Internet—based technologies play a relevant role. Thus, more and more English language teachers have opted for incorporating such emerging technologies into their everyday teaching practices as such “technologies can empower them as teachers and improve their teaching as well” (Smith & Baber, 2007, p. 11). Smith and Baber (2007) argue that incorporating information technology into your teaching

practice can bring many concrete benefits, which include: It provides access to up-to-date material on every imaginable topic; It can be cheaper than face-to-face teaching; It allows non-native speakers to interact with native speakers; It allows students to study at their own pace, whenever they want; It enables people living far apart to come together and form communities; It can be intrinsically motivating and fun, among others (p. 11). Hence, such benefits and many more offered by computers and Internet—based technologies might clearly be used for the teaching of the speaking skill in the foreign language classroom.

With such a great influence of information technologies in human interaction, language teachers and students' communication is not limited exclusively to live classroom interaction. On the contrary, computers and Internet-based technologies offer a vast variety of options for online synchronous and asynchronous communication between language teachers and students. Such communication that takes place between human beings via the instrumentality of computers is known as Computer-Mediated Communication - CMC (Herring, 1996).

In relation to CMC, Bodommo (2010) states that it is defined as the coding and decoding of linguistic and other symbolic systems between sender and receiver for information processing in multiple formats through the medium of the computer and allied technologies such as PDAs (Personal Digital Assistant), mobile phones, and blackberries, and through media like the internet, email, chat systems, text messaging, YouTube, *Skype*™, and many more to be invented. In conclusion, *Skype*™ constitutes a useful CMC tool in order to achieve such human-computer interaction as a means for exchange of language knowledge and information. Additionally, *Skype*™ allows learners to interact, modify and elaborate their input (Doughty & Long, 2003), while engaging in meaningful “conversation.” (Long & Doughty, 2009).

1. 2. Justification

As stated in the previous sub-section, developing the ability to speak in a foreign language is a difficult and arduous task (Pawlak, Waniek-Klimczak & Majer, 2011). Pawlak, Waniek-Klimczak and Majer (2011) believe that this is because the acquisition of speaking involves the mastery of the different language subsystems to the point that they can be employed automatically in spontaneous communication. The following examples, taken from a teachers' on-line discussion forum and cited by Thornbury (2005), corroborate the idea that developing the speaking skill is a challenging task for many language teachers:

1. *My business students are good at giving presentations, but they can't have even the simplest conversations. How can I help them improve?*
2. *How can I help my students become more fluent? What is fluency? Is it good pronunciation?*
3. *My students always say that they want more speaking, but I don't know how to teach it, apart from giving them lots of useful expressions (p. 1).*

Questions like these express some of the common dilemmas teachers face when trying to address the teaching of speaking (Thornbury, 2005).

These sorts of statements are also commonly heard from students. As language teachers, we usually hear our students stating that they cannot speak English even though they have been learning this language for years or that they think they will never be able to speak such language, making clear reference to their previous unsuccessful learning experiences.

In reference to the specific context where this study was carried out, class observations showed that the participants of this study tended to have low scores, especially while assessing their spoken production. The assessment themes of such students at this language level (A1 or basic users) included simple descriptions of their families, daily routines, friends, houses etc. The participants of this study tended to obtain low scores in some of their evaluated speaking exercises (*see figure 1 and 2*), especially in their pronunciation area, which is a necessary part of speaking (oral communication) (Boyer & Boyer, 2002). They

also had low scores in the component of interaction with the audience, which required them to use their language background in order to ask and answer questions about their own presentation with the audience (their classmates).

The participants of this study had limited opportunities to speak English during their ordinary classes. In other words, learners had rather limited access to the target language both inside and outside the classroom, which is the norm in the majority of foreign language contexts (Pawlak, Waniek-Klimczak & Majer, 2011). Furthermore, Spanish is the official language of the learners' country. This did not help them much as their exposure to the target language, especially for oral language practice, was mainly restricted to their English class. As a result, these learners rarely heard spoken English except by their teacher and classmates and they almost never read English except in their English textbook (Baker & Westrup, 2003). This might have resulted into their evident lack of participation of the proposed course activities, especially of those that require of spoken interaction or oral language use. Finally, two more reasons influenced the researcher's motivation to start this study. First, the learners' misconception that learning English is a difficult task, which made them believe they were not able to speak the target language fluently. Second, the researcher's own classroom observation and experience also showed that learners not only had difficulties to express their ideas in English when they were orally assessed, but also when they were not assessed. This was evidenced through ordinary course speaking exercises in which learners expressed that they were not able to speak due to their limited range of vocabulary and lack of confidence in the target language. To wrap up, all the above-presented reasons were crucial in order to reveal that EFL adult learners at this language level (A1) at ILUD tend to face difficulties at the moment of expressing their ideas about everyday course contents and life experiences in English.

The above outlined facts stood for vital reasons and motivation to start this action research project with the main goal of promoting EFL adult A1 learners' speaking skill through Skype™ conference calls out of classroom settings³ at ILUD. Thus, the action research focal group of this study consisted of 12 volunteer⁴ EFL adult A1 learners, whose ages varied from 18 to 40 years old. At ILUD, every course has a duration of 48 hours in total. The levels of the courses at ILUD are organized as follows: Introductory I and II, Basic I and II, Intermediate I, II, III, Advanced I and II and Specialized I and II. The group of participants in this study was taking an introductory I English course. The level of English of the group responded to basic users (A1) according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. The learners' exposure to English input had been rather poor and limited in regard to their oral communication skills as evidenced in their scant spoken production showed through their assessed and non-assessed speaking exercises in class. The general purpose of the course, according to the syllabus, was to provide the group with basic grammatical forms of English and develop appropriate pronunciation patterns and communicative competences (speaking skill) in the target language. It also aimed at raising the learners' awareness in terms of form, meaning and function of the language features learned along the instruction process.

With a view to international, national, local and institutional language policies, specifically regarding the relevance of the development of the learners' speaking skill, this research project has found its main foundations under the following principles. Internationally talking, this study had its foundations based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages or (CEFR) (2001) which claims that in relation to the overall oral production (speaking), A1 or basic users must be able to produce simple mainly stated

³ In this study, the term *out of classroom settings* is synonym of the term *out-of-class learning* and it refers to curricular and non-curricular learning experiences for pupils and students outside the school environment (Resnick, 1987). It might also be understood as "any kind of learning that takes places outside the classroom" (Benson, 2011, p. 62).

⁴ This group of learners were told about the project and voluntarily agreed to make part of the same.

phrases about people and places and describe him/herself, what he/she does, and where he/she lives (p. 59). From a national point of view, this study found its support on the “Estándares Básicos de Competencias en Lenguas Extranjeras: Inglés” (MEN, 2006) (Basic Skill Standards in Foreign Languages: English), which states that A1 or basic users must be able to use everyday expressions to express their immediate needs in the classroom (p. 19). From a local point of view, the “Bogotá and Cundinamarca Bilingüe en diez años” program (2006) (Bogota and Cundinamarca Bilingual) seeks to have in a long term one hundred percent of graduate students from high school in Bogotá and Cundinamarca with a B1 proficiency level in English with reference to the CEF. Finally, from an institutional point of view, ILUD which is the language institute of Universidad Distrital (District university) “Francisco José de Caldas” seeks for developing competent English language users so that they can communicate and interact with others within and outside classroom settings (ILUD, 2010).

This research project aimed at outlining the possible benefits of the implementation of Skype™ conference calls as a means of promoting the speaking skill, especially with the goal of strengthening language course contents and developmental processes⁵. It also aimed to gain insights about learners’ feelings towards the implementation of Skype™ conference calls as a Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) tool in their learning and knowledge building experiences at formal educational contexts.

1. 3. Research Questions

- To what extent does the use of Skype™ conference calls help EFL adult A1 learners at ILUD promote their speaking skill?
- How do EFL adult A1 learners feel about the implementation of Skype™ conference calls as a computer-mediated communication tool in promoting their speaking?

⁵ Developmental processes refer to the enhancement of not only grammar items but also all linguistic skills such as speaking, reading, listening, and writing and other areas such as pronunciation, vocabulary, intonation etc. in the target language classroom.

1. 4. Research Objectives

1. 4. 1. General:

- To determine the effect of the use of Skype™ conference calls in promoting EFL adult A1 learners' speaking skill at ILUD.

1. 4. 2. Specific:

- To analyze the insights of EFL adult A1 learners towards the implementation of Skype™ conference calls as a computer-mediated communication tool at ILUD.
- To analyze the feelings of EFL adult A1 learners towards the implementation of Skype™ conference calls as a computer-mediated communication tool at ILUD.



Universidad de La Sabana

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study claimed that using Skype™ conference calls might to certain extent promote EFL adult A1 learners' speaking skill. Granted that, for the clarity and appropriate understanding of this action research project and its language teaching and learning implications, it was necessary to review the literature and state of the art in relation to the main constructs that were directly involved in the development and application of this project itself. In this respect, the literature review of this action research project aimed at outlining the definition and state of the art of the following constructs respectively: speaking skill, Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) tools in language learning and teaching, Skype™ conference calls in language learning and teaching.

2. 1. Speaking Skill

To start, international, national and local language teaching and learning policies have framed this study. Internationally talking, this study had its foundations based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages or (CEF). With reference to the CEF, the language level of the target group of this study belonged to Basic users or A1. The CEF (2001) establishes that the speaking skills of A1 English language users must be divided into spoken interaction and spoken production skills. In relation to the spoken interaction skills, the CEF (2001) states that language users must be able to ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics. In relation to the spoken production skills, language users must be able to use simple phrases and sentences to describe where they live and people they know. With that understood, this study sought to provide EFL adult A1 English users with a space where they could develop their spoken interaction and spoken production skills through the use of Skype™ conference calls. In this respect, the use of Skype™ conference calls aimed at generating more opportunities for adult learners

with A1 language level proficiencies to orally reinforce everyday course contents and main language items studied in their everyday classes.

From a national and local perspective, this study found its support on the “Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo” (National Bilingual Program) and “Bogotá and Cundinamarca Bilingüe” programs. The first one, the “Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo” (2004) seeks to create appropriate spaces and conditions to educate the Colombian population in a foreign language (English in this case) so that they can have more and better working and inclusion opportunities in the changing world that we live in nowadays. The second one, “Bogotá and Cundinamarca Bilingüe” program looks for designing short, medium and long-term strategies, among state and private institutions, that enable their citizens to be competitive in English as a foreign language (Concejo de Bogotá D.C., 2006). Based on these national and local policies, Skype™ conference calls might become valuable tools to contribute to these paramount goals of the Colombian nation as English language learners could promote their speaking skill and initiate themselves to reach the expected language proficiencies.

Many of my students' everyday talks confirm that the speaking skill still remains an unsatisfied ability in the language classroom. As a language teacher, I usually hear statements of this type from my students: “I understand many things I hear in English but when I have to speak, I feel like I cannot say a word,” or less optimistic positions like: “I have studied English for years and I cannot speak English yet. I feel I will not ever speak English.” From the teachers' perspective, Thornbury (2005) cites the following examples: “My students always say that they want more speaking, but I don't know how to teach it, apart from giving them lots of useful expressions” or “My business students are good at giving presentations, but they can't have even the simplest presentations. How can I help them improve?” These learners' common declarations just corroborate Martin Bygate's (1987) assumption that speaking is in many ways an undervalued skill in the language classroom. They also express

some of the common dilemmas that teachers face when trying to address the teaching of speaking (Thornbury, 2005). Similarly, Baker and Westrup (2003) state that speaking is a neglected language skill in many classrooms. In fact, the speaking skill is viewed for many language teachers and students as one of the most challenging skills to develop when teaching or learning a foreign language. Regarding this, Brown and Yule (1983) state that “learning to talk in the foreign language is often considered to be one of the most difficult aspects of language learning for the teacher to help the student with” (p. 25). Likewise, Thornbury (2005) affirms that speaking represents a real challenge to most language learners. This has been the main reason behind the formulation of this action research project as a response to the need of finding out alternative ways to promote the speaking skill out of classroom settings.

In this study, speaking is assumed as a skill and as such needs to be developed and practiced independently of the grammar curriculum (Thornbury, 2005). To understand what it was exactly meant by the speaking skill, it was necessary to fully comprehend what a skill represents in language teaching and learning. Bygate (1987) claims that by giving learners “speaking practice” and “oral exams,” we recognize that there is a difference between *knowledge* about a language and *skill* in using it and that this distinction between knowledge and skill is crucial in the teaching of speaking. Thornbury (2005) puts it this way: “speaking involves both a command of certain skills and several different types of knowledge.” (p. 1). Bygate (1987) affirms that the fundamental difference between knowledge and skill is that while both can be understood and memorized, only a skill can be imitated and practiced. This differentiation is congruent with the definition of *skill* given by Richards and Schmidt (2002) who state that a skill constitutes an acquired ability to perform an activity well, usually one that is made up of a number of coordinated processes and actions. Many aspects of language

learning are traditionally regarded as the learning of skills, such as learning to speak, or reading fluently (p. 489).

It is noticeable that the nature of the speaking skill itself is difficult to define taking into consideration that it is not easy to establish criteria to evaluate a speaking test (Richards & Renandya, 2002). Nevertheless, Dubin and Olshtain (1986) argue that the term speaking skill in language learning needs to be defined in terms of the communicative use the students will be able to make of it. Thus, Dubin and Olshtain (1986) affirm that such use may be quite limited for beginners or wide and comprehensive in scope. From a limited perspective, Dubin and Olshtain (1986) state that the speaking skill might be defined as the learners' ability to ask basic questions in an interview that might be appropriate for working as a customs officer at an airport. From a wide and comprehensive perspective in scope, Dubin and Olshtain (1986) believe that the speaking skill might be assessed in the way that students experience various situations in which they actually express their own ideas and participate in true conversations and discussions. To wrap up, the participants of this study might be classified into the limited perspective of speaking skill proposed by Dubin and Olshtain (1986) due to their beginning language proficiency. Although the idea in the end was to prepare them through the proposed Skype™ conference calls to gradually participate of more natural or spontaneous language situations in which they could interact with others in a less controlled way.

Bygate (1987) refers to two basic ways in which something we do can be seen as a skill. These are: motor-perceptive skills and interaction skills. Bygate (1987) affirms that the first, *motor-perceptive skills* involve perceiving, recalling and articulating in the correct order sounds and structures of the language. The second, *interaction skills* involve making decisions about communication, such as: what to say, how to say it, and whether to develop it, in accordance with one's intentions, while maintaining the desired relations with others. For the

purpose of this study, the latter constituted the most relevant skills to promote throughout the pedagogical intervention process, that is, the interaction skills.

In this study, interaction skills denote the idea of providing a suitable language-learning environment where students can socially interact with others in a verbal way while using the target language. Thus, the term *interaction skill* is intrinsically related to the social context where the verbal interaction takes place. Leach (2010) believes that social interaction skills are referred to as the skills required for individuals to develop meaningful relationships with others. In this respect, Curtis (2011) argues that socializing is a complex activity made up of many singular skills that when combined together they contribute to the interactions any one person has with others. Curtis (2011) claims that for the development of such social skills all that needs to be done is to take each singular skill required for a successful interaction and provide an individual with:

- *Lessons to develop the necessary skills*
- *Opportunity to practice the skill in a safe and nonjudgmental setting*
- *Feedback required to refine the skill*
- *Continued opportunity to practice and combine all singular skills so eventually each skill becomes unconscious and used automatically.*

Having said that, by achieving the main aim of this research study, participants would also practice the necessary skills in order to develop their social interaction skills through synchronous online communication. In this study, such necessary skills include technology literacy, basic English communication skills, Skype™ conference calls training etc. To do so, the participants of this study are provided with the necessary training sessions before its actual pedagogical implementation phase in order to guarantee as much as possible the appropriate development of the proposed Skype™ conference calls sessions.

Various academics have attempted to explain the changing processes that take place for the development of social skills. Lev Vygotsky introduced the social development theory in the 1920s. According to Liu and Matthews (2005) such theory became the origin of social

constructivism. Vygotsky's theory argues that the key role in cognition development lies in social interactions (Vygotsky, 1978). In other words, providing the appropriate context for learners to interact and exchange knowledge and experiences might result into learning for them. Thus, this study aims at providing the appropriate context, which is synchronous online communication reached by means of Skype™ conference calls, in order to promote the speaking skill in EFL adult A1 learners.

According to Garton (1992), "there are two important components to social assistance. There is the rather obvious external social support offered by more experienced language users and there is an innate predisposition on the part of humans to interact socially." (p. 60). For the sake of this study, both components are equally valued and considered as crucial for the promotion of social interaction skills with a direct effect on spoken language development. On the one hand, the external support to the participants of this study is represented by both their language teacher and other more experienced language users that they might talk to through Skype™ conference calls to practice their speaking skill. On the other hand, the participants of this study naturally tend to socially interact as "they are equipped with a range of sensory and motor functions that facilitate social interaction from the moment of birth." (Garton, 1992, p. 60).

Within the interaction skills, Bygate (1987) identifies at least two demands which can affect the nature of speech. The first relates to the internal conditions of speech: the fact that speech takes place under the pressure of time, in Bygate's (1987) words, that demand stands for *processing conditions*. The second involves the dimension of interpersonal interaction in conversation, or *reciprocity conditions*, in Bygate's (1987) words. In relation to the former, that is, the processing conditions, Bygate (1987) states that it generally makes a difference whether a piece of communication is carefully prepared or whether it is composed on the spur of the time. Bygate (1987) also affirms that in spoken interaction, the time constraint can

affect our choice of words, style and performance. This statement constituted the ground of this study in the sense that this project aimed at implementing a computer-mediated communication tool that enabled learners not to feel constrained about time limitations or in Bygate's (1987) words, the processing conditions. In other words, this study sought for providing EFL adult A1 learners with a technology-based tool through which learners might promote their speaking skill, especially with the purpose of strengthening their everyday course contents.

2. 2. Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) Tools in Language Learning and Teaching

In the previous subsection, it was outlined a discussion of the term speaking skill which constitutes a crucial construct in this study. Next, it will be presented a discussion of what is meant by computer-mediated communication from a language learning and teaching point of view.

To start, Thurlow, Lengel and Tomic (2004) state that:

Computer mediated communication (or just CMC as it is commonly known) has been around since the first electronic digital computer was invented (some time during World War II), or at least since the first recorded exchange of prototype emails in the early 1960s. From these moments on, people have been communicating about, and by means of, computer technology (p. 14).

Thurlow, Lengel and Tomic (2004) themselves affirm that “it has only really been since the mid-1990s that the fast growing popularity and ubiquity of personal computers (especially for emailing, chatting and surfing the web) has caused CMC to become so attractive to scholarly attention (p. 15).” Given that nowadays CMC is widely recognized as an academic field, it is quite pertinent to provide a definition of what is understood by CMC throughout this research study.

From a broad point of view, Thurlow, Lengel and Tomic (2004) define CMC as any human communication achieved through, or with the help of, computer technology (p. 15). In other words, CMC refers to “an integration of computer technology with our everyday lives and it studies how human behaviors are maintained or altered by exchange of information through machines” (Wood & Smith, 2005, p. 4). Similarly, Bodomo (2010) states that CMC is defined as the coding and decoding of linguistic and other symbolic systems between sender and receiver for information processing in multiple formats through the medium of the computer and allied technologies such as Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs), mobile phones, and blackberries; and through media like the Internet, email, chat systems, text messaging, YouTube, *Skype*™, and many more to be invented. CMC offers many kinds of services, including asynchronous e-mail, computer conferencing, bulletin boards, electronic databases, facsimile, teletex, videotex (Rice, 1990), voice messaging (Gluck, Coliz, & Rosenbaum, 1991), chatrooms (Halbert, 1999), among others. Amant and Kelsey (2012) put it this way: “CMC refers to any communicative situation which occurs through the use of connected computer networks.” (p. 154). From these definitions, it can be inferred that *Skype*™ conference calls constitute a valuable tool to promote real synchronic interaction among two or more people. Levy and Stockwell (2006) see it this way: “CMC tasks provide a means through which learners may engage in authentic interaction with others.” (p. 83). Through this spoken interaction, language learners can exchange ideas, concepts and knowledge out of classroom settings and above all from their own home. This constitutes one of the greatest advantages and benefits from the implementation of *Skype*™ conference calls as language learners can practice their language skills from the comfort of their own home. It means that they do not have to move to the traditional language-teaching classroom to practice their language skills as they can do so from their own home through the use of the *Skype*™ conferences.

From the perspective of language learning and teaching, Kern and Warschauer (2000) state that CMC allows language learners with network access to communicate with other learners or speakers of the target language. This assumption just validates the idea that Skype™ conference calls might constitute a precious tool to generate meaningful communication and interaction among the participants of this research study. More importantly, the researcher can closely monitor the students' progress in their spoken language skill from the use of Skype™ conference calls. In this regard, Levy and Stockwell (2006) state that CMC tools provide a method where teachers and researchers alike can monitor learner output easily and relatively non-intrusively. Nguyen (2008) affirms that a thorough understanding of CMC-supported learning processes is unequivocally essential for not only educators but language teachers as well. Hence, language professionals need to capitalize on the advantages and potential strengths that this technology has to offer (p.24). With a view to this perspective, CMC tools, especially Skype™ conferences, constitute a potential strength and tangible opportunity to help EFL adult A1 learners promote their speaking skill out of traditional classroom settings.

According to Nguyen (2008), CMC can be viewed both as mediational tools and as a communication process. When viewed as tools, CMC is examined from technological aspects that provide the medium for communication. Other aspects are revealed when CMC is perceived as a communication process, which includes the message, the sender and the receiver (p. 24). For the purpose of this study, Skype™ conference calls, which are CMC tools, were perceived as integrated and correlated tools that involve both mediation and communication processes. From a mediation point of view, the Skype™ conference calls aimed at generating spaces where the participants of the study could interact and exchange information in the target language among them with the use of technological devices such as computers, Internet, microphones etc. From a communication point of view, the Skype™

conference calls aimed at providing the participants of the study with the opportunity to communicate among them through the act of sending and receiving oral messages in the target language that are meaningful and relevant to them in their language learning experiences. Obviously, taking into consideration that through the use of the computer, the Internet and the CMC tools not only English grammar, spelling and vocabulary are affected but also the way we perceive and speak about the world (Greiffenstern, 2010, p. 8).

CMC allows for two types of time to elapse in online communication: synchronous and asynchronous communication (Wood & Smith, 2005, p. 42; Lamy & Regine, 2007). For the purpose of this study, Skype™ conference calls are framed under the principles of synchronous communication tools. Hrastinsky (2008) affirms that media such as video conferencing and chat commonly supports synchronous communication and it has the potential to support e-learners in the development of learning communities. In this respect, Richards and Schmidt (2002) state that in computer assisted language learning, this refers to communication that is instantaneous, with all participants logged onto their computers and sending messages in real time. Language classes often use this type of communication in the form of Internet chat, or with specialized programs (533). Veiga and Lupion (2008) believe that in synchronous communication the users are online at the same time. In order to communicate with each other, users should be available on the Internet. Chat and instant messaging programs are examples of synchronous communication. Similarly, Wood and Smith (2005) argue that “synchronous communication occurs when two or more participants are interacting in real time” (p. 42).

Hrastinsky (2008) affirms that the advantages of synchronous communication include the fact that learners and teachers experience synchronous e-learning as more social and avoid frustration by asking and answering questions in real time. Synchronous sessions help e-learners feel like participants rather than isolates (Hrastinsky, 2008). Similarly, but with focus

on the language-teaching field, Lamy and Hampel (2007) affirm that synchronous communication fosters peer collaboration and can be used to give feedback to students as well.

Next, some of the most common research focuses in relation to CMC found in the literature up to now are outlined.

Greiffenstern (2010) maintains that the study of CMC can have different starting points and that different linguists put their emphasis on different aspects. In an attempt to show the diversity of research focus in relation to CMC from its emergence, Greiffenstern (2010) maintain that some linguists try to classify CMC in relation with spoken and written language, others see it as something completely new. Some describe the emergence of features of CMC from the perspective of the medium shaping the language, others from the perspective of the language users trying to adapt to the new medium. Some take social factors into consideration and the way they can have an impact on CMC.

For instance, on the one hand, Liu (2002) argues that many of the earlier studies on CMC focused on the task-oriented communication model and that such model was primarily based on three theories: Social Presence Theory, Media/Information Richness Theory, and Social Context Cues Theory. Liu (2002) affirms that according to these three theories, face-to-face communication has the most social cues and information (including verbal and nonverbal cues) to convey emotions in communication, while CMC communication has the least social cues and information (limited to only verbal cues). Therefore, CMC tends to be inherently task-oriented and to lack emotional content in communication.

On the other hand, Liu (2002) also states that another relevant research focus on the topic of CMC has to do with the social-emotion-oriented model. The social-emotion-oriented research model in CMC environments is primarily based on Walther's (1992b) Social Information Processing Model, which is based on principles in

social cognition and interpersonal relationship development from social psychology (Liu, 2002).

This way, it can be inferred that the field of CMC is so immense that researchers and linguists might not have covered yet all the different varieties and functionalities involved in such a huge research ground. Greiffenstern (2010) agrees that: “it becomes obvious that there is probably not just one kind of CMC but several. Thus, linguists often concentrate on certain forms of CMC for their studies, e.g., email or instant messaging or on certain elements of CMC.” (p. 17).

It is true to say to this point that, after going through and revising most of the existing literature related to CMC, the study of CMC is still a rather new phenomenon (Greiffenstern, 2010). This is especially in relation to the use of synchronous CMC Skype conference calls with language teaching and learning purposes, which constitutes the main focus of this study.

2. 3. Skype™ Conference Calls in Language Learning and Teaching

Skype™ conference calls have been the chosen CMC tool in order to help ELF adult A1 learners promote their speaking skill out of formal classroom settings, for some of the following reasons. First of all, synchronous (text, audio and video conferencing) CMC Internet tools are some of the most widely employed for language learning due to the capacity they have to connect geographically dispersed audiences, especially students with other speakers of the language they are learning (Long & Doughty, 2009). Second, the main advantage of CMC tools, such as Skype™, for language learning lies in the potential they have for collaborative learning, and for allowing learners to interact, modify and elaborate their input (Doughty & Long, 2003), while engaging in meaningful “conversation.” (Long & Doughty, 2009). Third, Ritchie and Bhatia (2009) argue that laptops with Skype™ and classroom equipped with video conferencing facilities have made distance language learning

a reality as learners today can contact a native speaker in any part of the world and receive highly individualized feedback in spoken and written language at the time or place of the learner's choice.

The above outlined reasons constituted the main purposes behind the implementation of Skype™ conference calls as a suitable means to help learners promote their speaking skill out of their formal classroom setting. In other words, using cost-effective voice and video tools such as Skype™ affords students additional opportunities to use the target language for real time exchanges outside of class (Lee, 2009), thus learners can engage in self-access learning by means of the Internet (Zhang & Barber, 2008). Additionally, Mullen et al. (2009) argue that Skype™, the free Internet telephone service, is an excellent example of the kinds of Internet technologies that have emerged to foster communication between distantly separated users and the potential benefits to language learners of unrestricted, global conversation, completely free of charge, are self-evident. Furthermore, “for many, audio and videoconferencing technology have come to be seen as the next logical step in language teaching and learning since its real-time two-way video and audio transmissions allow for learning communities to interact in a synchronous environment.” (Eamer, 2010, p. 37).

In regard to the functionality of Skype™, Sheppard (2006) states that Skype™ is a free computer program you can use to make telephone calls over the Internet and that you can also use it to make conference calls and video calls, to chat, and to transfer files. Similarly, Loren and Susan Abdulezer and Dammond (2007) affirm that Skype™ can dramatically alter how you exchange information, how you meet new people, and how you interact with friends, family, and colleagues. Chen and Cordier (2008) maintain that Skype™ offers one of the most popular voice-over Internet protocol services and with a computer, an Internet connection and a few simple steps, foreign language speakers and learners can connect with and call one another across time zones. Chen and Cordier (2008) also affirm that with

Skype™ you can dial a contact (provided the person you are calling has also downloaded Skype™) and talk to and from any country, using a headset and microphone plugged into your computer.

Loren and Susan Abdulezer and Dammond (2007) argue that although you can make calls on Skype™, there is so much more to it and list some of the things you get or can do with Skype™:

- *Call to or receive a call from a regular telephone, a cell phone, or a computer on the Internet.*
- *Send or receive files over the Internet to and from fellow Skypers.*
- *Search your Outlook contacts and call them within Skype™.*
- *Search the Skype™ database of all Skype™ users on the planet.*
- *Hold a conference call with a group of people. Besides participating in audio conferencing, you can "simul-chat" with your conference participants – exchanging text, live Web links, and files.*
- *Make live video calls.*
- *Initiate a group chat.*
- *Hold a Skype™ cast for as many as 100 people at a time.*
- *Transmit secure and encrypted voice conversations, text, file transfers, and video.*

For the purpose of this study, the main Skype™ features used during its development and implementation were the conference calls.

Although many consumer audio and video conferencing tools are available on the market (iChat, Skype™, MSN Messenger and so on), literature on the use of such tools is still scarce (Kinoshita, 2008). Motteram and Thomas (2010) argue that a good deal of online teaching via synchronous audio communication tools is conducted via Skype™ with the first articles starting to appear from 2005 (Godwin-Jones, 2005).

Godwin-Jones (2005) explored the use of Skype™ and podcasting for language teaching and learning purposes in online environments. Overall, he found that both Skype™ and podcasting can be considered "disruptive technologies" in that they allow for new and different ways of doing familiar tasks and offer intriguing opportunities for language professionals and learners, as they provide additional channels for oral communication (Godwin-Jones, 2005).

Similarly, Elia (2006) conducted a research study where she explored the effect of Skype™ for language learning in *Tandem*⁶. For this, she used and recommended *The Mixxer* which is a free educational website for language exchanges via Skype™ (access it from: <http://www.language-exchanges.org/>). She concluded that “Skype™ language learning through ‘Mixxer’ can be a convincing application to be widely supported, experimented, and its efficacy monitored in different language learning contexts, as it can be a valid aid in trying to support language learners who always face problems connected to the difficulty in having contact with native speakers.” (p. 275).

Kinoshita (2008) explored the use of Internet-based audio communication, such as iChat and Skype™ in order to provide L2 learners opportunities to practice speaking with and listening to native speakers of the target language and experience real-life communication in the target language. She concluded that iChat and Skype™ as tools of communication and social interaction facilitate language learning and allow learners to talk with people on the other side of the earth at a very low cost to the consumer (Kinoshita, 2008).

Later, Mullen et al. (2009) conducted a research study where they explored the ways that Skype™ and similar technologies can be optimally exploited for language learning in an institutional environment. Overall, they concluded that using Skype™ to carry out Tandem exchanges is an important and well-recognized potential way to enable language students to benefit from communicative interaction with native speakers of their target language, but it is not enough as further refinement is necessary to avoid the pitfalls of poor sustainability and diminishing student motivation (Mullen et al., 2009).

More recently, Coburn (2010) conducted an action research study focusing on the online teaching of English conversation through Skype™, a VOIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol). He concluded that information elicited from interviews with eight conversation

⁶ *Tandem Language Exchange*: Launched in Edinburgh in 2007, Tandem is a popular language exchange programme run by EUSA. Tandem is designed to help you meet people and learn languages in a fun, relaxed, social environment without tutors, exams or lectures. Retrieved from: <http://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/global/tandem/>

facilitators showed how conversation assignments needed to be designed in order to facilitate interaction patterns conducive to language learning. In other words, there was a need to introduce new tasks for weaker students though this implied that students would need to bring printed resource materials with them to the online conversations. As for the intermediate students who already possessed sufficient linguistic resources to interact more easily, increased task variety and more student-centered topics could offer relief for struggling conversation facilitators and students (Coburn, 2010).

In Colombia, research on the area of language teaching and learning through Skype™, especially for the promotion of the English speaking skill is rather new and unexplored. Recently, Beltrán (2009) conducted a research study in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master in English Language Teaching –Autonomous Learning Environments at Universidad de la Sabana, Chía – Colombia. She explored the use of Skype™ chat for improving writing skills in an A2 adult learners group. She concluded that Skype™ text chat prompts students' motivation through the use of technology and it is an opportunity to improve the teacher's performance (Beltrán, 2009). Although the target population of Beltrán's study was similar to the population of this study in regard to the participants' chronological age (adult learners), their language levels, learning context and research focus were totally different from those specified in this study.

From the above outlined research studies, it can be inferred that Skype™ conference calls might be used in order to facilitate interaction patterns conducive to language learning (Coburn, 2010) and as a well-recognized potential way to enable language students to benefit from communicative interaction with native speakers of their target language (Mullen et al., 2009). Additionally, Skype™ conference calls might also be used in order to provide L2 learners opportunities to practice speaking with and listening to native speakers of the target language and experience real-life communication in the target language (Kinoshita, 2008). As

seen in the above-presented research studies, Skype™ has mainly been used to help language learners with specific language skills, principally through online interaction with native speakers of the students' target language. For the purpose of this study, Skype™ conference calls are implemented with the aim of helping a group of EFL adult A1 learners promote their speaking skill, but mainly among themselves and with non-native speakers of English out of formal classroom settings.

In conclusion, this chapter outlined the most outstanding ideas and concepts regarding the literature review and state of the art of the main theoretical constructs of this research study. Next chapter will outline the main methodological features and aspects of this research study.



Universidad de La Sabana

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter illustrates important methodological aspects of the current study. It starts by outlining the type of study. Then, it sketches out the researcher’s role, context where the study took place and its participants. Next, the data collection instruments used to gather the necessary information for the development of this study are described. Finally, it outlines the most significant methodological changes made between the first and second cycles of implementation of this research study. The following chart summarizes the main features of the research design process.

<i>Type of study</i>	<i>Action research</i>
<i>Researcher’s role</i>	<i>Teacher-researcher in charge of observing, reflecting and collecting relevant data to the study.</i>
<i>Context</i>	<i>ILUD – Language institute of Universidad Distrital “Francisco José de Caldas.”</i>
<i>Participants</i>	<i>EFL Adult learners, A1 level, according to the Common European Framework for Languages.</i>
<i>Data collection instruments</i>	<i>Survey; focus group; researcher’s reflective journal.</i>
<i>Data collection procedure</i>	<i>Data were collected at the while and post stages of the implementation.</i>

Table 1. Research design main features. This table illustrates the main features or characteristics of the research design of this study.

Research Design – First Cycle

3. 1. Type of Study

This section defines the type of research study implemented throughout this project as well as it outlines the four stages followed in the same process.

This research project has been carried out under the features and conditions of a qualitative research. According to Corbin and Strauss (2008) qualitative research allows researchers to get at the inner experience of participants, to determine how meanings are formed through and in culture, and to discover rather than test variables. Similarly, Denzin and Lincoln (2011) define qualitative research as “a set of complex interpretative practices,

which embraces tensions and contradictions, including disputes over its methods and the forms its findings and interpretations take” (p. 6). In this respect, Hughes (2003) adds that qualitative research is an interactive process through which the researcher learns from the participants in the study about their lives.

Within the umbrella term of *qualitative research*, it is found what has been called *action research*. Action research is defined as an investigation conducted by the person or the people empowered to take action concerning their own actions, for the purpose of empowering their future actions (Sagor, 2005). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) add that Action research may be used in almost any setting where a problem involving people, tasks and procedures cries out for solution, or where some change of feature results in a more desirable outcome. Similarly, Norton (2009) claims that the fundamental purpose of pedagogical action research is to systematically investigate one’s own teaching/learning facilitation practice with the dual aim of modifying practice and contributing to theoretical knowledge. While Burns (2010) argues that action research (AR) can be a very valuable way to extend our teaching skills and gain more understanding of ourselves as teachers, our classrooms and our students.

Action research has been the type of research procedure chosen for this project for two main reasons. First, action research has been widely proven to be an effective and appropriate research method to implement when the main goal of the research process is to generate tangible improvements in the educational context, and particularly in the field of foreign language teaching and learning processes. Second, considering the above-presented reason, it was a master program basic requirement to follow this qualitative action research methodology for the final research report of the master program studies.

According to Sagor (2005), the four stages to follow for the implementation of action research and especially applied to the current study are:


- *Stage 1: Clarifying vision and targets:* This stage is crucial as it determines the identification of the problematic area to be improved in the educational context with the proposed actions from the research study.
- *Stage 2: Articulating theory:* This phase allows identifying and delineating the appropriate theoretical principles that support the implementation and accomplishment of the research questions and objectives planned to achieve throughout the action research project.
- *Stage 3: Implementing action and collecting data:* This phase is also vital as it allows putting into operation the theory of action and it also provides the researcher with tangible and visible data, which will later in the process allow drawing conclusions and action plans for the improvement of the area of research.
- *Reflecting on the data and planning informed action:* This phase helps to critically and reflectively analyze the collected data and present the research findings and actions taken with the purpose of generating improvements in the identified area of research.

3. 2. Researcher's Role

In this study, the role of the researcher was that of teacher and researcher at the same time. The idea of being the English teacher and at the same time the researcher brought with it an evident advantage to the research process. It has been the fact that the person who conducted this study was somebody the participants knew well and not an outsider that they just met for the first time in their lives. Additionally, the main research activities carried out by the teacher-researcher had to do with the permanent observation, reflection and register of relevant data in regard to the research questions and objectives of this study. The teacher-researcher drew specific attention on the eventual changes in learners' oral communication skills and their insights about the implementation of Skype™ conference calls as a CMC tool

during the pedagogical intervention process of this research study. In conclusion, the active role and performance of the teacher-researcher has determined, to a great extent, success throughout this research study.

3. 3. Context



This research study took place at La Universidad Distrital (District university) “Francisco José de Caldas” (Bogotá D.C., Colombia), especially at ILUD, which is the language institute of the university. La Universidad Distrital was founded in 1948 and is a public and research university, located in Bogotá, Colombia. La Universidad Distrital has the following academic schools: Faculty of Engineering, Faculty of Science and Education, Environment Faculty, Faculty of Art, Technological Faculty, Accreditation Committee, Educational Study and Research Institute, and the Language Institute – ILUD, where this study has been carried out. ILUD has a current population of 7,000 active students approximately and 116 teachers of foreign languages. The main social mission of ILUD aims at contributing to the education of human beings, willing to generate comprehensive changes in their environment through reflection processes, based on the learners’ language learning experiences in a non-formal education context.

The ILUD curriculum responds to the design and conduction of special programs in languages for the educational community of Universidad Distrital (district university). It is also in charge of programming extension projects and consultancies in the context of education for work and human development. It is primarily designed to develop language programs that meet the real communication needs of people and institutions. The main features of ILUD curriculum includes:

- Every course has a duration of 48 hours in total. The levels of the courses at ILUD are organized as follows: Introductory I and II; Basic I and II; Intermediate I, II, III;

Advanced I and II and Specialized I and II. The group of participants in this study was taking an introductory I English course. Such 48 hours are divided into nine weeks, six hours per week, three sessions of two hours each. One of those three sessions per week is devoted to what has been labeled as *tutoring sessions* with a different teacher (tutor) from the learners' homeroom teacher. The main purpose of such tutoring sessions is to motivate learners to discover their interests, areas of improvement and / or requirements of practice and reinforcement for learning and developing the necessary skills in order to use a foreign language.

- At ILUD, learners should be able to achieve the following general linguistic and academic objectives at the end of each level:

Introductory I and Introductory II:

- Relate and communicate orally and in a written way in English about everyday personal, family, educational and social situations.
- Describe physically and emotionally to others and themselves, making comparisons.
- Describe events that have elapsed over their lives and future plans, expressing preferences and choices when necessary.

Basic I and Basic II:

- Relate past events in their personal lives and make reference to future plans or predictions in various situations.
- Talk about responsibilities, possibilities and suggestions about their daily life.
- Refer actions and their consequences in real and hypothetical situations using conditional forms and report on what has been done.

Intermediate I, Intermediate II and Intermediate III:

- Describe, suggest and report events in different situations and times.
- Answer and make invitations and complaints.

- Express expectations, thoughts and feelings about personal situations in the school or work.
- Talk about different topics expressing the probability of events.

Advanced I and Advanced II:

- Analyze situations from different points of view, arguing their views, generating hypothesis, supporting with examples and additional information.
- Present range of topics in different tenses, including situations in the past, describing actions, and using comparative and superlative when required.

Specialized I and Specialized II:

- Speculate on the present and the past with its future implications, paraphrasing what someone else has said.
- Talk about skills and talents in the past and present, about hypothetical situations in the future, past and present. Understand, exchange and compare information in different contexts.

3. 4. Participants

The action research focal group consisted of 12 EFL adult A1 learners, whose ages varied from 18 to 40 years old, at ILUD. Four of the participants were men and eight of them were women. The learners' educational background varied as they came from different socio-economic groups and academic backgrounds. The study population consisted of students from different faculties of the university, professionals of different vocations and independent people who learn English for varied reasons. At the moment of implementation and development of this research study, its target population was taking an introductory I English course. The level of English of the group responded to basic users (A1) according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. The general purpose of the

course, according to the syllabus, was to provide the group with basic grammatical forms of English and developing appropriate pronunciation patterns. It also aimed at raising the learners' awareness in terms of form, meaning and function of the language features learned along the instruction process. Through a survey⁷ (see appendix 1), which was one of the data collection instruments administered by the researcher after the implementation phase of this study, it was found that most of the participants had not used Skype™ before at ILUD for personal or pedagogical purposes.

In regard to their affective domain, this group of learners seemed to be highly motivated towards the target language learning. Their intrinsic motivation positively contributed to their language learning process. Thus, they clearly seemed to know the purpose for which they wanted to learn the target language. Within the same affective domain, there was another important aspect to highlight from this particular group of learners. It was their risk-taking ability towards their language learning process. Brown (2007) affirms that risk-taking is an important characteristic of successful learning of a second language. Based on this assumption, this group of learners seemed to have a developed sense of risk-taking as they always made assertive guesses about course contents and tended to make mistakes and learn from them as they occurred.

In reference to their sociocultural domain, it might be said that this group of learners had different social and cultural backgrounds. The average level of education of the class was high school, although some of them had professional diplomas from local universities. Though this group of learners was composed of students from different social groups and strata, they seemed to get along quite well and constructively cooperated one other for knowledge building processes around course contents. Culturally speaking, although the

⁷ The purpose of the survey was to collect the participants' insights about the implementation of Skype™ conference calls as a computer-mediated communication tool to promote their speaking skill in English.

students had diverse cultural basis, this did not seem to be an aspect that hindered their language learning performances at any moment.

In relation to their linguistic domain, one of the main goals of the language institute is to educate people who can competitively respond to the standard needs of foreign language use in varied contexts of their personal and professional lives. In this respect, the language institute aims to provide the students with the required knowledge and skills to properly master the language items and main features learned through the instruction process. Although these constituted some of the main outcomes expected from the students, the learners' actual performance did not fully meet these requirements. From the experience and observation of their language instructor and researcher of this study, it was noticed that some of them faced difficulties to properly master the four language abilities (speaking, reading, writing, and listening) in regard to their language level and syllabus requirements. Some of them showed difficulties to write short compositions in the target language about the topics studied during the course development. Some others, on the contrary, faced difficulties at the moment of appropriately decoding and understanding specific information in listening and reading exercises in class. Especially, it was noticed that due to the limited classroom time (2 hours per week/48 hours in total the whole course) many learners faced difficulties to express themselves in English, especially when talking about course contents and their life experiences. Dore and Guttridge (2005) see it this way: "bearing in mind that often few classroom hours are available, it is important to sensitize students to the issues involved in speaking well and provide them with strategies designed to help them work of their own." (p. 11). Therefore, this has been a vital reason and motivation to start this action research project with the main goal of providing EFL adult A1 learners with the strategy of Skype™ conference calls so that they can promote their speaking skill out of formal classroom settings.

3. 5. Data Collection Instruments

This section describes the data collection instruments implemented during the pedagogical intervention process of this study and the way these instruments helped the researcher to gather the necessary data. The data collection instruments chosen for the development and application of this project were the researcher's reflection journal, surveys and focus groups.

- *Researcher's journal:* According to Burns (2010), keeping a journal is common in action research. Burns (2010) states that journals are extremely useful as a way of capturing significant reflections and events in an ongoing way. That is why this research reflection instrument constituted a formal agenda in which the teacher–researcher recorded in a written form the relevant aspects to the questions and research objectives that emerged during the observation and intervention process. This journal helped the researcher keep track in a systematic and organized way of the most relevant stated opinions and feelings of the participants of the study during the intervention process. This data collection instrument also provided the researcher with a space where to reflect critically and analytically upon emerging events and constraints of the study, learners' talk, and classroom procedures related to the intervention process of this research study.

- *Focus groups:* Focus groups were chosen as one of the data collection instruments for the development of this research study. According to Stringer (2007), focus groups provide other means of acquiring information and might be characterized as a group interview. In this respect, Burns (2010) affirms that “focus groups have the advantage of thinking the individual spotlight off one speaker, who may get nervous or anxious about being interviewed, and allowing ideas and thoughts to be triggered by others in

the group” (p.77). A total of three focus groups, of four participants each were administered by the end of the pedagogical intervention phase of this study. That was to systematically gather the most relevant information with reference to the participants’ feelings towards the effectiveness of the implemented tool. This data collection instrument has been chosen as it provided the participants with the opportunities to freely express their ideas and impressions about the process followed in this study. In this respect, Stringer (2007) states that participants in a focus group should each have opportunities to describe their experience and present their perspectives on the issues discussed.

- *Surveys (see appendix 1)*: Surveys have proven to be effective instruments to collect data through action research processes. According to Stringer (2007), a survey may provide a very useful tool for extending the data collection to a broader range of participants in later stages of action research. Burns (2010) also affirms that surveys conducted by your students about their views on various aspects of language learning can provide you with good sources of information. This was basically the reason why a survey has been chosen to triangulate the data collected throughout the pedagogical intervention process of this study. One survey was administered by the end of the pedagogical intervention process with the purpose of collecting the participants’ insights about the implementation of Skype™ conference calls as a computer-mediated communication tool to promote their speaking skill in English.

3. 6. Data Collection Procedure

The data collection procedure to gather the required information for the later analysis in this research study is described in the following stages.

➤ *First stage:* Initially, the twelve (12) volunteer participants who took part of this action research project were gathered and officially acquainted with all the information concerning this research study. That was, the research questions and objectives, the identified problem to deal with through this study, the researcher's role and the participants' role in the study etc. At this first stage of the process, coordinators and the director at ILUD were also officially informed of the application of the project through a consent form, which let them know about the kind of study implemented and the main purpose of the study. Participants also received and signed a consent form (*see appendix 5*) through which they were formally told about the research study they were to make part of. This first stage occurred before the pedagogical intervention of this research study.

➤ *Second stage:* At this stage of the study, it was when the teaching strategy or Skype™ conference calls were implemented. At this moment, the participants of the study made use of the teaching strategy to evaluate its usefulness to promote adult A1 learners' speaking skill, especially with the purpose of reinforcing course contents.

The pedagogical intervention of this study included a minimum of 50 solid hours. Those 50 hours were divided into two research cycles, of 25 hours each. Those 25 hours were devoted to online Skype™ conference calls to orally reinforce the contents that the participants studied in their ordinary face-to-face sessions. During the application of the teaching strategy, the researcher was simultaneously reflecting upon and registering on a journal, relevant information to this study in regard to the research questions and objectives.

➤ *Third stage:* right after the end of the pedagogical intervention process, the researcher administered two data collection instruments. The first was a printed survey in which the participants expressed their opinions and feelings on how the experience of

making part of this research study had been to them. The second was a focus group or a group interview with the study participants, administered by the researcher. For the focus groups, three interviews were administered of four participants each. The same questions that the participants answered in the survey were the ones that the researcher used during the interviews of the focus groups. The information collected from these two data collection instruments, plus the researcher's journal were enough to triangulate the collected data through the pedagogical intervention process for its later analysis in this research study.

3. 7. Research Design – Second Cycle

This section outlines the most relevant methodological changes made between the first and second cycles of implementation of this research study. A second research cycle was implemented with the main purpose of corroborating or verifying the data collected during both the first and second research cycles. Both cycles comprise 25 hours of implementation for a total of 50 hours in the two cycles. Each cycle was implemented with a different population of participants since the objective was to confirm through the second cycle the results obtained during the first implementation cycle, essentially for the sake of validity and reliability of this research study findings.

In relation to the methodological approach of this study, most of the main features of the research design process between the first and second implementation cycles were the same (type of study, researcher's role, context, and data collection instruments). The main changes to be taken into account between the first and second cycles of implementation are described as follows.

- In regard to the study participants, as mentioned above, each cycle constituted a different population of participants, principally to verify the results obtained from both cycles.
- In regard to the data collection procedure, a reflective question after each Skype conference session was included with the purpose of collecting the participants' opinions and feelings about each online encounter. The reflective question was this one: *How did you feel in the Skype conference today and why?* (See appendix 4). The main goal was that the participants took the time to respond this question after each online session and brought their written answer to their next face-to-face class, which was handed in to the researcher. The information collected from this reflective question answered by the participants served the purpose of enriching the researcher's reflective journal, which was one of the data collection instruments used by the researcher throughout the implementation stage of this study.

In conclusion, this chapter has outlined the main features of the research design process of this study. The next chapter draws specific attention on the action plan for the implementation of Skype™ conference calls and the methodological procedure for the pedagogical intervention stage in this study.

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IV. PEDAGOGICAL INTERVENTION: ACTION PLAN AND IMPLEMENTATION

This chapter describes the action plan for the implementation of Skype™ conference calls as a means of promoting the participants' speaking skill. It also outlines the methodological procedure for the pedagogical intervention of the proposed CMC tool in this study.

Planning the Project

Once the problem was detected (poor oral production skills), the researcher decided to propose a possible solution to this problematic situation. As stated in the introduction, the problematic situation in this study was identified based on the following criteria. First, low scores in their assessed in-class spoken exercises. Second, the learners' lack of active involvement of course activities, especially of those that require of oral language use. Third, learners had reduced opportunities to practicing their oral communication skills in class. Fourth, the researcher's own classroom observation and experience which showed that EFL adult learners at this language level (A1) at ILUD tended to face some difficulties when orally expressing themselves in English. Granted this, the possible solution to this problematic situation was the implementation of Skype™ conference calls as a means of promoting the speaking skill of a group of EFL adult A1 learners, the target group of this study. These Skype™ conference calls aimed at reinforcing everyday course contents of the participants, mainly with an oral communication focus, out of classroom settings.

Carrying out the Project

This research study was divided into three main stages: pre, while and post pedagogical implementation.

- Pre-stage: This initial stage was essentially devoted to informing the participants and the administrative staff at ILUD of the main objectives of the implementation of this research project.
- While stage: During the pedagogical intervention of this project, the online Skype™ conference calls were implemented. The main purpose of the Skype™ conference calls was to determine their effect as a CMC tool in promoting the participants' speaking skill. In this respect, the objective was to orally reinforce everyday course contents through the use of Skype™ conference calls out of classroom settings.

For the pedagogical intervention: action plan and implementation, the online Skype™ conference calls sessions were developed as follows:

4. 1. Online Skype™ Conference Sessions

The main purpose of the online Skype™ conferences sessions was to orally reinforce everyday course contents out of classroom settings. In this regard, the 25 hours of the pedagogical intervention were held according to the participants' time availability. Thus, these online sessions were scheduled on Saturday evenings, from 5:00 to 9:00 p.m. and Sunday evenings, from 5:00 to 9:00 p.m. It means that the 25 hours of the online Skype™ conference calls were covered within a total of four weeks. The researcher and participants met on Skype™ one week before starting the intervention phase of this study with the intention of providing students with the necessary information on how to use Skype™ and the dynamic of the subsequent online encounters. Three (maximum four) participants, plus the researcher of the study integrated each online session. Before the online sessions, the researcher provided the participants with a set of questions based on the main topic of discussion of the session, so participants were familiar with the questions they were to talk about during the online sessions.

The topics of discussion for the online sessions were the same topics that the participants had previously covered during their ordinary face-to-face sessions. These topics were chosen since the idea was to provide learners with the opportunity to orally practice the same topics that they had gone through during their live sessions. Thus, each session mainly intended to practice and develop the learner's speaking skill through an online-based learning environment. Such topics were covered within four weeks during the implementation stage of this study and were structured as follows:

- Week one: The topic covered during this first week was labeled as: *Your family*. The main goal of this first online session was to get the participants to talk about their own lives including basic information about themselves and their families. The language items learners were supposed to use during this first online session included: *subject pronouns + positive forms of to be; possessive 's; yes / no questions with to be; indefinite articles a / an; negative forms of to be*.
- Week two: The topic covered during this second week was labeled as: *Activities*. The main goal of this second online session was to get learners to talk about their daily routine activities and those of their family members. The language items learners were supposed to use during this second online session included: *present simple in the affirmative, negative, interrogative forms and short answers; auxiliary verbs do and does*.
- Week three: The topic covered during this third week was labeled as: *Free time activities*. The main goal of this third online session was to get learners to talk about their most common free time activities and those of both their classmates and family members. The language items learners were supposed to use during this third online session included: *present simple in the affirmative, negative, interrogative forms and short answers; auxiliary verbs do and does; can / can't*.

➤ Week four: The topic covered during this fourth week was labeled as: *Food and Home*. The main goal of this fourth online session was to get learners to talk about their lifestyles, favorite food and drinks as well as their home and important possessions. The language items learners were supposed to use during this fourth online session included: *countable and uncountable nouns; how much and how many; a / an / some and any; there is and there are; have got.*

The idea of having groups of three participants in an online session responded to the fact that they could interact and exchange information with each other within the same discussion topic. This was undoubtedly more convenient due to the social and interactional nature of this study. For a more detailed description of a lesson plan sample which shows the exact structure of one of the online sessions held during the implementation phase of this study, see *appendix 2*.

The following table briefly outlines the topics dealt with during the online Skype™ conference sessions throughout the pedagogical intervention phase:

<p><i>Week 2, topic 2: YOUR LIFE Main goal:</i></p> <p>➤ <i>To talk about the participants' own life including basic information about them and their families.</i></p>	<p><i>Week 3, topic 3: ACTIVITIES Main goal:</i></p> <p>➤ <i>To talk about the participants' daily routine</i></p>
<p><i>Week 4, topic 4: FREE TIME ACTIVITIES Main goal:</i></p> <p>➤ <i>To talk about the participants' free time activities.</i></p>	<p><i>Week 5, topic 4: FOOD AND HOME Main goals:</i></p> <p>➤ <i>To talk about the participants' life styles, favorite food and drinks.</i></p> <p>➤ <i>To talk about the participants' home and their important possessions.</i></p>

Table 2. Pedagogical intervention Topics. This table illustrates the main topics cover during the pedagogical intervention phase of this study.

➤ Post stage: Once the 25 hours of the pedagogical intervention were covered with online Skype™ sessions, two data collection instruments were administered by the researcher. The first one was a survey and the second one was a focus group. Both instruments aimed

at collecting data related to the participants’ insights on the experience of making use of Skype™ conference calls to promote their speaking skill about everyday course contents.

As the main purpose of this chapter was to describe the steps and processes followed during the pedagogical intervention of this study, the following table outlines the time line of such processes:

4. 2. Timeline of Data Collection and Implementation

Stage	Month	Week (Dates)	Activity	Data Collection Instrument(s)
Pre-stage	February/ March	February – Week 1 Design of action plan	Designing the action plan for the pre, while and post stages of the research study	None
		February – Weeks 2, 3, 4. Design and piloting of data collection instruments	Designing and piloting the data collection instruments Adjusting the questions of the data collection instruments based on the participants’ feedback.	None
		March – Week 1 Consent Letters	Getting the institutional permission for implementing the research study Informing the participants as well as getting their approval towards their participation of the study.	None
While - stage	March/April	March – Week 3 First Online Skype™ conferences	To talk about the participants’ own life including basic information about them and their families.	Researcher’s notes.
		March – Week 4 Second Online Skype™ conference	To talk about the participants’ daily routine.	Researcher’s notes.
		April – Week 1 Third Online Skype™ conference	To talk about the participants’ free time activities.	Researcher’s notes.
		April – Week 2 Fourth Online Skype™ conference	To talk about the participants’ life styles, favorite food and drinks. To talk about the participants’ home and their important possessions.	Researcher’s notes.
Post-stage	April	April – Weeks 3, 4. Administering and Monitoring data collection instruments	Applying the data collection instruments to the participants of the study Collecting the necessary data in regard to the participants’ opinions and feelings about their participation in the research study	Survey Focus groups
		April – Week 4; May – Weeks 1, 2. Analysis of data Triangulation process	Analyzing and interpreting data collected through the data collection instruments.	Triangulation
		May – Week 3 Writing and refining the final document. Sharing findings.	Writing the report of the second action research cycle.	

Table 3. Timeline of Data Collection and Implementation.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This chapter outlines the data analysis and findings of this research study. It starts by outlining the data analysis method and the type of analysis procedure followed in this study. Then, it describes the data management, reduction and display procedures, including the coding stages followed to reduce the data collected during and after the pedagogical intervention phase. Later on, it describes the emerging categories and subcategories from the data collected which aimed at responding each of the research questions.

As stated in the research design chapter, this study was framed under the principles of qualitative research which “allows researchers to get at the inner experience of participants, to determine how meanings are formed through and in culture, and to discover rather than test variables” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 12). According to Auerbach and Silverstein (2003), qualitative research involves analyzing and interpreting texts and interviews in order to discover meaningful patterns descriptive of a particular phenomenon. Similarly, Denzin and Lincoln (2011) define qualitative research as “a set of complex interpretative practices, which embraces tensions and contradictions, including disputes over its methods and the forms its findings and interpretations take” (p. 6). In Flick’s words (2007), qualitative research is intended to approach the world “out there” (not in specialized research settings such as laboratories) and to understand, describe and sometimes explain social phenomena.

Granted the above-presented definitions of qualitative research, the data analysis procedure chosen in this study was a qualitative data analysis. According to Dey (1993), a qualitative data analysis involves breaking data into bits, and then “beating” the bits together. It is a process of resolving data into its constituent components to reveal its characteristic elements and structure. Similarly, Corbin and Strauss (2008) defines

qualitative data analysis as “a process of examining and interpreting data in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge” (p. 1). In relation to action research, the specific type of research of this study, Burns (1999), states that data analysis in action research involves moving away from the “action” components of the cycle, where the main focus is on planning and acting, to the “research” aspects, where the focus changes to more systematic observation and reflection. In regard to this definition, the researcher’s main purpose throughout the data analysis procedure of this study was to assume an objective and reflective position that allowed arriving at the most relevant and significant emerging data which responded to the research questions and objectives of this study.

Taking into consideration that a whole range of procedures can be employed in analyzing qualitative data (Dey, 1993; Norton, 2009; Darlington & Scoot, 2002), the methodology of data analysis adopted in this study was Grounded theory. Grounded theory is a specific methodology developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) for the purpose of building theory from data and it denotes theoretical constructs derived from qualitative analysis of data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In this respect, Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) state that the grounded theory method allows the research to begin a research study without having to test a hypothesis. Instead, it allows the researcher to develop hypotheses by listening to what the research participants say. In this same way, Richards and Schmidt (2002) add that Grounded theory refers to “a general methodology of analysis in qualitative research, in which the first level of analysis is systematically collected data, the second is the conceptualization of the data into categories and their properties the third is an inductive theory, usually illustrated by characteristic examples of data” (p. 233).

5. 1. Procedures of Data Analysis

In order to successfully develop grounded theory, it is necessary to use a procedure called coding (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Richards and Schmidt (2002) define coding as a research technique in which data that have been collected are turned into classes or categories (i.e. codes) while Auerbach & Silverstein (2003) understand it as a procedure for organizing the text of the transcripts, and discovering patterns within that organizational structure. Similarly, Corbin and Strauss (2008) define coding as “deriving and developing concepts from data” (p. 65). In Miles and Huberman’s words (1994) “coding as a part of analysis involves how you differentiate and combine the data you have retrieved and the reflections you make about this information” (p. 56). In the same way, Dey (1993) affirms coding is a process of creating categories and assigning them to selected data. Granted this, the main coding procedures followed for the analysis of data in this study were open coding, axial coding and selective coding. This coding procedure was chosen as the main route of analysis of data in this study for the major reason that it “involves interaction with data (analysis) using techniques such as asking questions about the data, making comparisons between data, and so on, and in doing so, deriving concepts to stand for those data, then developing those concepts in terms of their properties⁸ and dimensions⁹” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 66).

In this study, the terms open coding, axial coding and selective coding were defined and understood as follows. The first term, open coding was understood as the process of breaking data apart and delineating concepts to stand for blocks of raw data. Such concepts were qualified in terms of their properties and dimensions (Corbin &

⁸ Properties: Characteristics or components of an object, event or action. The characteristics give specificity to and define an object, event and or/action (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 46).

⁹ Dimensions: Variations of a property along a range (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 46).

Strauss, 2008). At this first step, the researcher began by breaking data down into manageable pieces, reflecting upon those data and conceptualizing what he thought the data were indicating (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

The second term, axial coding was understood as the process of crosscutting or relating concepts to each other (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The third term, selective coding is the final step of analysis for researchers whose research aim is theory building and it requires sifting and sorting through all the memos and looking for cues on how all categories might fit together (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

5. 2. Data Management

This qualitative data analysis has been accomplished with the use of computers. According to May (2002), this analysis procedure is known as a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis (CAQDAS) which seeks to facilitate data management chores which are tedious and subject to error when done manually, make the analytic process more ‘transparent’ and accountable, and support analytic approaches which would otherwise be cumbersome (p. 1629). In this respect, Darlington and Scoot (2002) state that there is no doubt that the use of computers to assist qualitative data analysis can be of enormous benefit as computers can manage amounts of data that it would be impossible for any researcher to keep in their mind.

Once data were collected, the next step in the process was to manage those data. Data management is a crucial step in qualitative action research study given that the organization, storage, and management of data may play an important role in the later analysis of data. According to Dey (1993) good data analysis requires efficient management of one’s data. Miles and Huberman (1994) state that data management is really important for qualitative researchers and it refers to systematic data sets,

codebooks, data cleaning, documentation of defined variables, records of analyses carried out and so on. This way, the data management procedure followed throughout this study was “a hierarchical filing system which allows files to be “nested” together within folders” (Dey, 1993, p. 83). In relation to Dey (1993), by storing and managing data in a computer, the computer operates a hierarchical filing system where the data and related information can be stored in a family of documents or files within one main folder (see figure below).

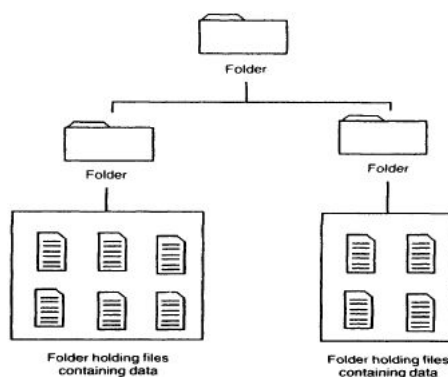


Figure 3: Data kept in a hierarchical file system¹⁰.

The instruments used to collect data in this study were surveys, focus groups and the teacher-researcher’s reflective journal. Data were hierarchically organized and managed as follows. There was a main folder named: *data analysis*. Within this main folder, there were three subfolders corresponding to each of the data collection instruments in this study. Within each subfolder, files were organized according to the participants’ responses to the questions in the instruments and their relation to the main research questions and objectives of the study. For example, within the subfolders of the surveys and focus groups, files were stored and classified by the number of questions in each instrument. That is to say, a first file contained all the participants’ responses to question number one, a second file contained the participants’ responses to question number two and so forth. In regard to the subfolder of the teacher-researcher’s reflective

¹⁰ Data kept in a hierarchical file system¹⁰. Retrieved from Dey (1993, p. 83).

journal, data were classified into files according to their relation to the main research questions and objectives as well as into files containing useful information for other sections of the research paper such as pedagogical implications, limitations, further research etc.

In order to deepen a bit more on the specific qualitative data analysis followed throughout this study, it was adopted the Miles and Huberman's (1994) view of analysis which consisted of three concurrent flows of activities: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification.

5. 3. Data Reduction

Data reduction refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting and transforming the data that appear in written-up field notes or transcriptions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this respect, Burns (2010) states that analyzing action research data is a continuing process of reducing information to find explanations and patterns. To do so, the data collected through the instruments in this study were exhaustively read in order to find such explanations and patterns previously mentioned by Burns (2010).

In order to start classifying the collected data at this beginning stage of analysis, it was necessary to go through the data and look for broad patterns, ideas and trends that seemed to answer the research questions (Burns, 2010) of this study. Corbin & Strauss (2008) name this initial stage as basic or lower-level concepts and they define concepts as “an analyst's impressionistic understanding of what is being described in the experiences, spoken words, actions, interactions, problems, and issues expressed by participants” (p.51). Such lower-level concepts were assigned a color and classified in order to start refining them by coding the data into more specific patterns or categories (Burns, 2010). In this manner, all the data related to the first research question and

objective were colored with yellow and those data related to the second research question and objective were colored with red. This way, this stage of data reduction is a form of analysis that sharpens, sorts, focuses, discards and organizes data in such a way that “final” conclusions can be drawn and verified (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 11).

5. 4. Data Display

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), the second major flow of analysis activity is data display and it helps us to understand what is happening and to do something – either analyze further or take action – based on that understanding. In Corbin and Strauss’s words (2008), this analysis stage refers to higher-level concepts that they call categories. At this stage, Corbin and Strauss’s words (2008) state that it is crucial to be open to all possible meanings in data as well as potential relationships between concepts (categories¹¹). By the same token, Burns (2010) calls this stage as *comparing the data* and affirms that once your coding is complete, it is important to compare the categories or patterns across your different sets of data (e.g. interviews compared with surveys) to see whether they say the same thing or whether there are contradictions that you can highlight. At this stage, the most relevant categories and subcategories were identified and classified according to their relation to the research questions and objectives of this study.

5. 5. Conclusion Drawing/Verification

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), the third stream of analysis activity is conclusion drawing and verification which refers to the process of portraying

¹¹ Categories: Higher-level concepts under which analysts group lower-level concepts according to shared properties. Categories are sometimes referred to as themes. They represent relevant phenomena and enable the analyst to reduce and combine data (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 159).

conclusions that emerge from the whole data collection process, although final conclusions may not appear until the data collection is over. Miles and Huberman (1994) state that such conclusions are also verified as the analyst proceeds which leads to a decision-making process in order to test the conclusions drawn. The above presented cycle can be summarized in the chart below, proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994).

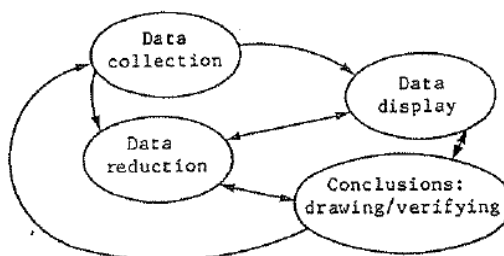


Figure 4: Components of Data Analysis: Interactive model¹².

At this stage, it was necessary to “*build meaning and interpretations*” which refers to the process of thinking deeply about what the data were saying by reflecting beyond the immediate surface details, looking for more abstract ‘big picture’ concepts and not just step-by-step descriptions of what it had been found (Burns, 2010). Corbin and Strauss (1990) define this process as *axial coding* and it refers to the process of seeking relationships between categories in order to link them while taking into account causal, contextual, intervening and many other factors and properties.

It was necessary to fall back on the principles of triangulation in order to validate the emerging conclusions and findings resulting from the process of seeking relationships between categories as named by Corbin and Strauss (1990). Triangulation has to do with “the process of collecting data from several different sources or in different ways in order to provide a fuller understanding of a phenomenon” (Richards & Schmidt, 2002, p. 565). In Golafshani’s words (2003) “triangulation is a strategy that improves the validity and reliability of research or evaluates findings” (p. 603). Obtaining data from more than one source (e.g. interviews, observations, and

¹² Components of Data Analysis: Interactive model (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

documents) is the most commonly used type of triangulation (Richards & Schmidt, 2002). In this manner, this study used surveys, focus groups and the researcher's reflective journal as the main data analysis sources in order to triangulate the information collected from the participants and that registered in the researcher's journal.

The final step in the analysis of data in this study is called *selective coding* and it consisted of selecting the central category, relating it to other categories, validating those relationships and filling in categories that needed further refinement and development (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The central, or as it is sometimes called, the "core category," represents the main theme of the research. It is the concept that all the other concepts will be related to (Strauss & Corbin, 2008, p. 104). Additionally, integration is the final step of analysis for researchers whose research aim is theory building (Strauss & Corbin) as in the case of this study.

The rigorous analysis procedure proposed by Strauss and Corbin (2008) which implies moving from open coding, axial coding, up to selective coding comes down to one central or core category in this study. This idea finds its support in the fact that "the notion of theory development implies that all ideas are incorporated into one theoretical scheme" (Strauss & Corbin, 2008, p. 105). In this respect, Burns (2010) adds that to reach this final stage of analysis it is necessary to pose questions, identify connections, and develop explanations about what the research means at the broadest level of our understanding of it. Strauss and Corbin (2008) suggest some useful "techniques that can be used to facilitate identification of the central category and the integration of concepts" (p. 106). The specific technique that was adopted to come up with the above identified core category was *the use of integrative diagrams*. According to Strauss and Corbin (2008), diagrams can be valuable tools of integration because integrative

diagrams are abstract but visual representations of data. Strauss and Corbin (2008) also affirm that a diagram need not contain every concept that emerged during the research process, but should focus on those that reach the status of major categories.

The central or core category in this study was identified as: *Promoting social interaction skills and increasing self-efficacy towards the English language learning*. This core category links the other categories together and it also has the ability to explain or convey “theoretically” what this research study is all about (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). The major categories and subcategories identified in this study which resulted into the above outlined core category were these ones: First: *Promoting social interaction skills* which directly responds to the first research question: To what extent does the use of Skype™ conference calls help EFL adult A1 learners at ILUD promote their speaking skill out of classroom settings? Second: *Increasing self-efficacy towards the English language learning* which directly responds to the second research question: How do EFL adult A1 learners feel about the implementation of Skype™ conference calls as a computer-mediated communication tool in promoting their speaking skill at ILUD out of classroom settings?

Each of the above outlined categories is supported by its own subcategories. In relation the first category: *Promoting social interaction skills*, its supporting subcategories are: a) fluency reinforcement and b) oral reinforcement of course contents. In regard to the second category: *Increasing self-efficacy towards the English language learning*, its supporting subcategories are: a) increase of online intercultural exchange b) increase of self-directed language learning practices. These emerging categories and subcategories are discussed in depth below.

The following diagram shows the core or central category of this study as well as its main supporting categories and subcategories:

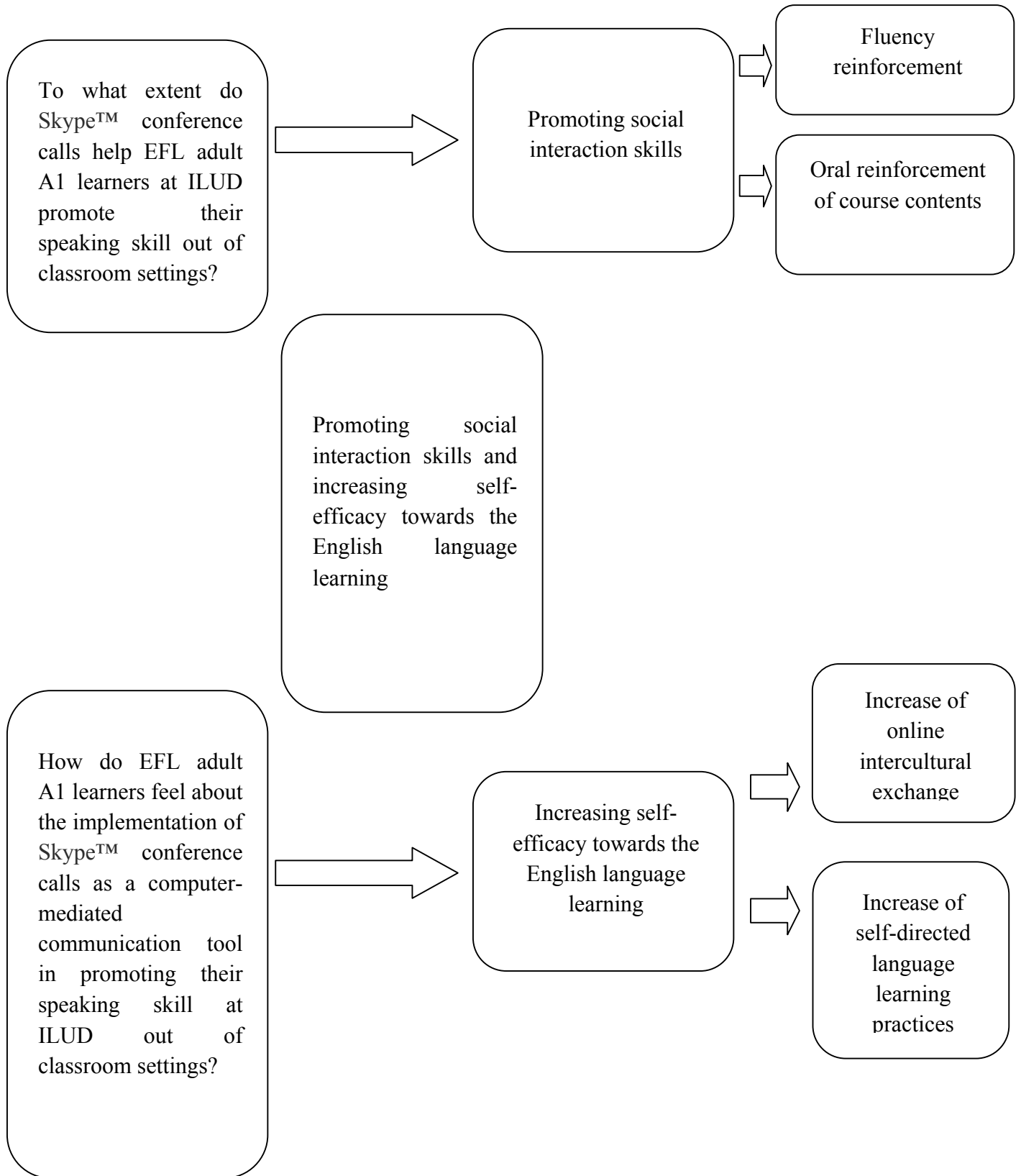


Figure 5: Core category and its supporting categories and subcategories

5. 6. Analysis of Results

This research study included two cycles of pedagogical implementation and data collection stages. Though, the results reported in this session of the paper account for the emerging categories and subcategories compared and contrasted from both cycles which aim at responding each of the research questions of the study. It includes the excerpts from the participants and the dates in which the surveys, focus groups and researcher's notes were conducted to give credit to the categories and subcategories outlined. Additionally, for the sake of validity and reliability of the emerging findings of this study, each piece of sample from the participants is triangulated at least with two different data collection instruments. Numbers are used to keep the participants' actual names unrevealed.

In reference to Strauss and Corbin (2008) a “theory denotes a set of well-developed categories (themes, concepts) that are systematically interrelated through statements of relationship to form a theoretical framework that explains some phenomenon. To develop such theory, it was necessary to select the central category, relate it to other categories, and validate those relationships among them, which is defined as *selective coding* by Strauss & Corbin (1990). Granted this, the core category that constitutes the main theoretical ground in this study was defined as follows: ***Promoting social interaction skills and increasing self-efficacy towards the English language learning.*** This emerging theoretical principle has been fully explored and considered from many different angles and perspectives (Strauss & Corbin, 2008) and constitutes the integration of the categories and subcategories outlined and explained below.

Such core category shows what learners revealed through their insights and feelings towards the implementation of the chosen strategy, Skype™ conference calls, in order to promote their English speaking skill out of formal classroom settings. More exactly, it describes the relevance of Skype™ conference calls as a powerful synchronous CMC tool in the promotion of

social interaction skills and increase of self-efficacy towards the English language learning. This is evident and demonstrated below through the presentation and description of the main categories and subcategories which originate the above-outlined core category and also respond to both the first and second research questions of this study.

In response to the first research question: To what extent does the use Skype™ conference calls help EFL adult A1 learners at ILUD promote their speaking skill out of classroom settings?, the main identified category was the following one:

Promoting Social Interaction Skills

This category aims to show that the use of Skype™ conference calls promotes EFL A1 adult learners' social interaction skills out of classroom settings. Social interaction is defined by Fitch and Sanders (2005) as a diverse, multidisciplinary convergence of interests that include conversation analysis, pragmatics, discourse analysis, ethnography, and the subarea of social psychology called language and social psychology. In this study, Skype™ is understood a computer-mediated communication tool that uses the Internet as the main means of online communication and social interaction. In this respect, Dumova and Fiordo (2010) affirm that the introduction of social interaction technologies has helped the Internet to reflect the real world with its rich social connections and interactions more closely. It is not a secret that those social connections have been greatly impacted by the use of new technologies and computer-mediated communication tools such as Skype™. Therefore, the shift from more traditional social interaction settings such as the language classroom to a more computer-driven learning environment might represent a challenge for both language teachers and learners. In this respect, Dumova and Fiordo (2010) state that the lack of physical presence is challenging but social interaction technologies enable learning as the key process of virtual work to be achieved more

deeply. This was in essence the main purpose of this study as the major goal was to provide learners with a computer-driven learning environment that enabled them to interact with others while using and communicating in the target language.

The learners' need to socially interact with others was one of the most recurrent patterns identified throughout the data collection and analysis stages of this study. It was found that this social interaction need was evident in a high number of occasions in both the first and second cycle of implementation all through the students' surveys, focus groups and the teacher's reflective instrument. More specifically, it was found that learners seemed to notice a relevant connection between language and social interaction practices. In this respect, Fitch and Sanders (2005) identify a bilateral relationship between language and social interaction. Fitch and Sanders (2005) put it this way: "Language use is examined with reference to the social interactions that comprise it and social interactions are examined with reference to the language use that forms and organizes them" (p. 4). From this statement, it could be inferred that learners in this study seemed to notice the relevance of using the target language with the main purpose of socially interacting with their peers through the use of Skype™ conference calls. The following excerpts, collected from the same learner in different data collection instruments and corroborated by an entry taken from the researcher's reflective instrument, show clear examples of the above discussed need for social interaction through the use of the target language.

I think that Skype™ helps me speak with my other classmates out of the classroom and I can practice my English this way.

Excerpt 1. Survey, student 4, April 19th, 2011, translated from Spanish original

Yes, student 2 is right. Skype™ is good because I can practice English with my classmates and with friends that I have from other levels

Excerpt 2. Focus group, student 4, April 21st, 2011, translated from Spanish original

Students expressed that they liked Skype™ because they could interact in English among them. They also said that they could use Skype™ conference calls to keep in touch with their old friends at a low price.

Excerpt 3. Researcher's reflective journal, third online session, April 9th and 10th, 2011

As noticed in the above-presented excerpts, students acknowledged that Skype™ conference calls helped them practice their language skills and at the same time expand their social relationships; not only with their classmates but also with other people they knew from diverse contexts. It was also evidenced from the excerpts that students seemed to use the language as a means of constructing their social networks which is congruent with Maynard and Peräkylä's (2009) assumption that "it is partly through language that humans "do" the social world" (p. 233).

The following subcategories are linked to the previously outlined category and also respond to the first research question of this study. Such subcategories are: a) fluency reinforcement and b) oral reinforcement of course contents. Each of them is analyzed separately below and the way they respond to the first research question of this study.

a) Fluency Reinforcement

The participants of this study agreed that they had reinforced their oral language fluency by means of the Skype™ conference calls. This can be evidenced through the following excerpts, collected from the same learner in different data collection instruments.

I feel that the Skype™ conference calls have helped me speak better and more fluently in English.

Excerpt 4. Survey, student 10, April 19th, 2011, translated from Spanish original

When you are in the Skype™ conference calls, you have time to organize your ideas while another person is speaking. Then, you can speak better and more confidently.

Excerpt 5. Focus group, student 10, April 21st, 2011, translated from Spanish original

In this study, the idea of reinforcement is understood as the strengthening of a response as a result of repetition followed by a positive reward (Richards & Schmidt, 2002). Similarly, Ashford, Lecroy and Lortie (2001) define reinforcement as anything (a reinforcer) that follows a behavior and increases the likelihood of that behavior. According to Miller (2006), a reinforcer is any event or stimulus that follows a behavior closely in time and increases the frequency of that behavior. This way, the idea of reinforcement in this study is understood as the strengthening of a certain language system (such as fluency) that can be developed or acquired by the language learner in his/her learning process.

In relation to the idea of fluency, Brumfit (1984) defines it as the maximally effective operation of the language system so far acquired by the students. More recently, Richards and Schmidt (2002), claim that in second and foreign language teaching, fluency describes a level of proficiency in communication, which includes:

- a) *The ability to produce written and/or spoken language with ease*
- b) *The ability to speak with a good but not necessarily perfect command of intonation, vocabulary, and grammar*
- c) *The ability to communicate ideas effectively*
- d) *The ability to produce continuous speech without causing comprehension difficulties or a breakdown of communication (p. 204).*

For the purpose of this study, the level of fluency which has been analyzed and taken into account is that of the ability to speak with a good but not necessarily perfect command of intonation, vocabulary and grammar (Richards & Schmidt, 2002). This level of fluency has been chosen as it represents the most concurrent patterns identified throughout the data collection and analysis stages of this study. Additionally, in this study, fluency is referred specifically to

speaking; however, today the concept is also being used about other major skills, such as ‘reading fluency’ and ‘fluency in writing’ (Simensen, 2010; Richards & Schmidt, 2002).

As noticed in the above-presented excerpts, learners agreed that through the Skype™ conference calls they felt they could communicate in English more fluently as they had the necessary time to organize their ideas in mind while other participants were doing their interventions. Furthermore, the fact of informing learners with anticipation of the main topics or ideas to be discussed throughout each Skype™ conference also seemed to help them be more fluently in their spoken language as they could plan ahead and slightly structure their ideas before the actual Skype™ conference took place. On top of that, the main purpose of the Skype™ conference calls was to orally reinforce the same language contents that learners had previously been exposed to during their ordinary face-to-face sessions. It means that they were already familiarized with such contents which made it easier for them to actively participate of the online Skype™ conference calls with ease and fluency.

The use of Skype™ conference calls helped learners reinforce their oral language fluency as they could communicate in the target language more effortlessly and with an easier command of language. This statement responds to the principle that fluency is typically measured by speed of access or production and by the number of hesitations (I. S. P. Nation & Newton, 2009). This was evidenced through the following excerpts:

I think that the Skype™ conference calls have helped me to speak English more fluently and more confidently as well.

Excerpt 6. Focus group, student 9, April 21st, 2011, translated from Spanish original

After this Skype™ conference today, I noticed that student 5 and 9 could communicate in English more fluently and with less pauses than before.

Excerpt 7. Researcher's reflective journal, fourth online session, April 16th and 17th, 2011

As noticed in the previously presented pieces of samples, the Skype™ conference calls seemed to have a direct influence in the learners' oral language fluency. This was demonstrated as learners agreed that by means of the online Skype™ encounters, they could communicate in the target language more effortlessly, with less hesitation and better speed production. Such manifested reinforcement in the learners' oral language fluency might have been influenced by various aspects, among them: (a) their active engagement in the Skype™ conferences, (b) allocated time for preparing their participation of every Skype™ conference with anticipation, (c) the fact that learners were familiarized with the topics of discussion during the Skype™ conferences etc. Any the influencing factor might have been, it was evidenced that the Skype™ conference calls seemed to have a positive effect on the learners' oral language fluency, especially when reinforcing course contents.

b) Oral Reinforcement of Course Contents

The participants of this study also agreed that through the Skype™ conference calls they had been able to orally reinforce course contents and increase their English practice from out-of-class learning environments. In regard to the oral reinforcement of course contents, it can be evidenced through the following excerpts, collected from the same learner in different data collection instruments and corroborated by an entry taken from the researcher's reflective instrument.

The good thing of the Skype™ conference calls is that one can practice the topics that we study in class but in an oral way. This way, one progressively forgets about the fear to speak

Excerpt 8. Survey, student 1, April 19th, 2011, translated from Spanish original

Yes, with these Skype™ conference calls, one can practice in a spoken way what we study in the face-to-face class.

Excerpt 9. Focus group, student 1, April 21st, 2011, translated from Spanish original

Students affirmed that one of the best things of the Skype™ conference calls is that they can practice and reinforce the same topics that have studied in class but in an oral way.

Excerpt 10. Researcher's reflective journal, second online session, March 26th and 27th, 2011

As stated above, the word reinforcement in this study is understood as anything (a reinforcer) that follows a behavior and increases the likelihood of that behavior (Ashford, Lecroy & Lortie, 2001). On the contrary, the word course content in this study refers to all the different activities, language-related exercises and linguistic items that integrate a language program. Granted this, and as it has been evidenced in the above-presented excerpts, participants in this study declared that Skype™ conference calls might be considered as a valuable and potential tool for oral reinforcement of course contents, especially in the field of language teaching and learning. In this respect, Flewelling and Snider (2005) state that technological tools (such as Skype™) can help instructors address the oral skills in a more balanced fashion since it can so effectively facilitate oral language reinforcement.

In regard to the increase of English practice from out-of-class learning environments, it can be corroborated through the following excerpts:

Yes, because I could practice my speaking ability out of the classroom with my other classmates and the teacher through the Skype™ conferences.

Excerpt 11. Survey, student 6, April 19th, 2011, translated from Spanish original

The Skype™ conferences were very useful and motivating because they helped me practice my English from the comfort of my home and I did not have to pay the TransMilenio ticket. One saves time as well and speaks even more than in class.

Excerpt 12. Focus group, student 6, April 19th, 2011, translated from Spanish original

In this study, the concept of out-of-class learning environment is understood as curricular and non-curricular learning experiences for pupils and students outside the school environment (Resnick, 1987). More recently, Benson (2011) defines out-of-class learning as “any kind of learning that takes place outside the classroom” (p. 62). It was found that the Skype™ conference calls seemed to help the participants in this study practice their English language skills, especially their speaking skill out of the formal language classroom setting. This view is supported by Bialystok (1981) in the following passage: “out-of-class exposure to the target language in communicative situations help the learners complete language tasks they meet subsequently, and that such functional practice is critical to the development of all language skills.

From the above-outlined excerpts it can be deduced that learners acknowledged that through the Skype™ conference calls they tended to have much more time to practice their spoken language skills than during their face-to-face sessions. This is no doubt a quite interesting finding that comes to enrich the large list of studied, identified and explored benefits of most of the current CMC tools for language teaching and learning purposes. Moreover, learners admitted that through the Skype™ conference calls they avoided having to commute and spend valuable time and money to reach their traditional language classroom. It does not for any reason underestimate the value of traditional language teaching and learning practices through face-to-face instruction. On the contrary, it simply brings to the table a valuable technological tool that

might be contemplated and explored not only for the promotion of oral language skills but also for other teaching and learning areas and fields from different perspectives and research foci.

Additionally, it was noticed that learners were highly engaged into participating of the online Skype™ encounters. This was evidenced through their positive and enthusiastic reactions and feelings towards the proposed Skype™ conference calls with the main purpose of oral practice of class topics. This can be supported through the following excerpts:

...Yes, I really enjoyed the Skype™ conferences because I could talk about the same themes of the class but with more time and in a more comfortable way.

Excerpt 13. Focus group, student 5, April 19th, 2011, translated from Spanish original

I always felt really good in the Skype™ conferences with the teacher and my other classmates because the topics of the conferences were the same topics of the class. Also, the teacher gave us the questions to talk about in the conferences with anticipation, so it was easy for me to talk about the same topics that we had studied in class before.

Excerpt 14. Survey, student 6, April 19th, 2011, translated from Spanish original

Thus, it can be inferred that the Skype™ conference calls influenced learners' engagement to orally practice course contents for the following two reasons: First, the Skype™ conference calls made it easier for them to speak about the same topics of their face-to-face sessions as they were already familiarized with such topics. This way, learners could continue expanding and reinforcing their course contents through a different, fashionable and attractive way. Second, the Skype™ conference calls influenced the learners' engagement to practice course contents as they had much more time to talk and express their own opinions about such contents than during their face-to-face sessions. That is to say, the idea of having more time to talk about the proposed

topics through the Skype™ conference calls seemed to engage learners to participate more actively into the online encounters.

In conclusion, the examined samples represented the most concurrent patterns found in the data collection instruments both in the first and second cycles of implementation, in response to the first research question of this study. It can be inferred that the Skype™ conference calls might be considered as an influential CMC tool to promote social interaction skills in EFL adult A1 learners. This was evidenced as learners agreed that the Skype™ conference calls had helped them expand their social relationships, both with their classmates and other local, national or international speakers of English. Learners also agreed that the positive point of using the Skype™ conference calls was that they could both make more friends and learn from them, while using the target language. In the end, this constituted the main foundation for the formulation of this action research project. Additionally, it was evidenced that the Skype™ conference calls might also help learners in the reinforcement of their fluency in the target language. This was corroborated as learners expressed that by means of the online Skype™ encounters, they could communicate in the target language more fluently, with less hesitation and better speed production. Finally, it was showed that the Skype™ conference calls might also help learners to both reinforce their language course contents and practice their English out of formal classroom settings. This was proved as learners stated that the Skype™ conference calls had helped them strengthen their knowledge about their previously studied class topics through an out-of-class learning environment.

In response to the second research question: How do EFL adult A1 learners feel about the implementation of Skype™ conference calls as a computer-mediated communication tool in promoting their speaking skill at ILUD out of classroom settings?, the main identified category was the following one:

Increasing Self-efficacy Towards the English Language Learning

In relation to the second research question of this study, it was found that the participants' insights towards the implementation of the Skype™ conference calls were diverse. This category aims to show that the use of Skype™ conference calls might increase EFL A1 adult learners' self-efficacy towards the English language learning.

To start off, Leaver, Ehrman and Shekhtman (2005) claim that “self-efficacy has to do with one's feeling that one can accomplish a task or project, such as learning a foreign language” (p. 109). Similarly, Brown (2007) states that self-efficacy refers to the fact that “if a learner feels he or she is capable of carrying out a given task, in other words, a high sense of self-efficacy, an appropriate degree of effort may be devoted to achieving success” (p. 156). MTD Training (2010) adds that self-efficacy is an individual's evaluation of his or her own ability to be successful in attaining a specific goal. While, Bandura (1994), who is considered an expert and pioneer on the concept of self-efficacy (MTD Training, 2010), affirms that perceived self-efficacy is defined as people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives. In other words, self-efficacy is related to our judgments about our own capabilities and what we believe we are or not able to do with those capabilities (MTD Training, 2010).

It might be said that the participants in this study were found to have a strong sense of efficacy which enhances human accomplishment and personal well-being in many ways (Bandura, 1994). This statement is based on the fact that learners found the Skype™ conference calls as challenges to be mastered rather than as threats to be avoided. In other words, they set themselves challenging goals and maintain strong commitment to them which is essential for learners to believe in themselves in order to succeed at a set of tasks (Brown, 2007). This can be

noticed from the following excerpts which were collected from the same learner in different data collection instruments.

It was not easy for me at the beginning since I thought that I could not do it because I am very shy, but little by little I learned how to use Skype™ and felt more confident in the conferences. It was really interesting.

Excerpt 15. Survey, student 3, April 19th, 2011, translated from Spanish original

Teacher, I had not used Skype™ before and less to speak English, but I wanted to learn how to use it in order to practice my English.

Excerpt 16. Focus group, student 3, April 21st, 2011, translated from Spanish original

From the above-presented excerpts, it can be inferred that learners' success in their participation of the Skype™ conference calls depended on their own sense of self-efficacy since they approached such challenging situation to them with assurance that they could exercise control over it (Bandura, 1994). Put differently, learners thought they could accomplish this specific task, so they were likely to want to try it (Leaver, Ehrman & Shekhtman, 2005).

The question now is: where did learners' strong sense of self-efficacy come from? Was it their own desire to learn English that motivated them? Was it the use of new technological tools and the Internet that caused their motivation? Was it the fact that they wanted to live a language learning experience different from that of the traditional language classroom? Any their own source of self-efficacy might have been, it is evident that learners had an efficacious outlook of themselves which fostered their intrinsic interest and produced personal accomplishments (Bandura, 1994) at the moment of participating of the Skype™ conference calls.

In relation to the possible sources of self-efficacy, Bandura (1997) identifies four main sources that allow people to build their self-efficacy. Those are: *mastery experiences, social*

models, social persuasion and emotional states. In this respect, during the data collection and analysis phases of this study, it was found that the most concurrent patterns that might have represented these learners' possible sources of self-efficacy have been those of *mastery experiences* and *social persuasion*. Each of them is analyzed separately below.

On the one hand, *mastery experiences* represent the most effective way to create a strong sense of self-efficacy for a person and it refers to the fact that as each success is achieved, the sense of self-efficacy is reinforced (MTD Training, 2010). In other words, once we see ourselves succeed, we are more likely to believe that we can do it again (MTD Training, 2010). Leaver, Ehrman and Shekhtman (2005) put it this way: “a sense of self-efficacy is normally the result of previous successful experience” (p. 109). In other words, successes build a robust belief in one's personal efficacy (Bandura, 1994). The following excerpts show the potential influence of the “*mastery experiences*” factor discussed above.

At the beginning of the Skype™ conferences, I was very shy and did not speak much. After the first conference with the teacher and my other classmates, I started to feel more confident and spoke more and more each time.

Excerpt 17. Survey, student 6, April 19th, 2011, translated from Spanish original

That is right, student 1. I remember that it was so difficult for me to say anything, but later I could speak more and more in the conferences.

Excerpt 18. Focus group, student 6, April 21st, 2011, translated from Spanish original

The previously presented pieces of language showed that learners' success seemed to come from their own sense of achievement at the moment of interacting with others through the Skype™ conference calls. Such samples show that their own sense of self-efficacy increased as they got more involved and participated more of the Skype™ conferences. Thus, learners' involvement of the online Skype™ encounters positively contributed to their increase of self-

achievement, and eventually to their success during the proposed online encounters. In other words, the more learners engaged and participated of the Skype™ conferences by interacting with others, the greater was their self-efficacy and their successful experiences during the development of this research study. This idea finds its theoretical support on Bandura's assumption (1994) that performing a task successfully strengthens our sense of self-efficacy. Leaver, Ehrman and Shekhtman (2005) see it this way: "if you have succeeded at the same or a similar task, you will enter the new project confident that you can do this one too" (p. 109).

On the other hand, the second evident source of self-efficacy found in this study has to do with *social persuasion*. The following excerpts show the potential influence of the "social persuasion" factor on the learners' self-efficacy towards their participation of the Skype™ conference calls and their language learning process.

I was very shy at the beginning in the Skype™ conferences but my friends, student 7 and 9, were all the time telling me that I could do it. Their motivation helped me very much.

Excerpt 19. Survey, student 11, April 19th, 2011, translated from Spanish original

I think that the help of the teacher was very important because he was always motivating us and supporting us in the Skype™ conferences.

Excerpt 20. Focus group, student 4, April 21st, 2011, translated from Spanish original

Student 9 said: "I was a bit worried because I did not have time to prepare the questionnaire but the teacher and student 7 told me to relax and I really liked the conference this day."

Excerpt 21. Researcher's reflective journal, second online session, March 26th and 27th, 2011

This social persuasion factor refers to the idea that "when we can persuade someone that they have the competences and abilities to master an activity, they are more likely to make

longer, sustained efforts at achieving success than if they have significant self-doubt” (Bandura, 1994). Bandura (1994) adds that it is in peer relationships that learners broaden self-knowledge of their capabilities as a vast amount of social learning occurs among peers.

From the above-related excerpts, it can be inferred that the learners’ sense of self-efficacy seemed to be highly influenced by both their peers and their teacher. It was evident that learners needed other people’s words and support to believe that they could accomplish their respective assigned tasks. This external support from others seemed to increase their sense of efficacy as we will believe we can do something more readily if we have others tell us that they believe we can do it (MTD Training, 2010). In other words, both the teacher and other peers’ words and support generated the learners’ sensation that they had the ability to undertake the proposed activities through the Skype™ conference calls which also contributed positively to the achieved success of each online encounter.

Such social persuasion factor played a crucial role in learners’ engagement of the proposed activities through the online Skype™ meetings in this study, in this case modeled by both classmates and teachers. On the one hand, the learners’ social persuasion influence can be evidenced through the following excerpt:

Student 5 always motivated me to participate of the Skype™ conferences since it was the first time I used this program and I did not know how to use it.

Excerpt 22. Focus group, student 4, April 21st, 2011, translated from Spanish original

From the above excerpt, it can be noticed how learners’ engagement to participate of the proposed Skype™ meetings was greatly stimulated by their peers’ encouraging words. It can also be seen that the learner from the excerpt (student 4) did not quit from participating of the current study just because she did not know how to use Skype™ at the beginning of the strategy implementation. On the contrary, she used her classmate’s words to motivate herself to continue

making part of the study. In other words, this learner received realistic encouragement, which made her more likely to exert greater effort and to become successful than if she were troubled by self-doubts (Wood & Bandura, 1989).

Additionally, it was noticed how learners used the Skype™ conference calls in order to help and give each other feedback about the specific planned topics for the online encounters. This can be proved through the following entry taken from the researcher's reflective instrument:

Students 7 and 9 said that they had met on Skype™ thirty minutes before the actual Skype™ conference to revise the questions of the discussion topic and to share collected information about the same topic.

Excerpt 23. Researcher's reflective journal, second online session, March 26th and 27th, 2011

Learners used the Skype™ conference calls in order to help each other in reducing their levels of anxiety some minutes before the actual online meeting with their teacher and other classmates. This way, they could clarify any doubts or concerns about any specific questions that they could have on the proposed discussion topic.

On the other hand, learners' engagement of the online Skype™ encounters was also influenced by the teacher's social persuasion. This can be verified through the following excerpt:

After this Skype™ conference, learners agreed that the teacher's help was really important as the teacher had helped them clarify some doubts they still had about the use of how much and how many with countable and uncountable nouns.

Excerpt 24. Researcher's reflective journal, fourth online session, April 16th and 17th, 2011

Learners admitted that the teacher's help and support had a positive effect in their active participation of the proposed online Skype™ conferences as they could clear up unresolved doubts that they still had from their live sessions. This way, it was evidenced how the teacher's

presence and social persuasion contributed positively to the increase of the learners' sense of efficacy towards their participation of the online Skype™ meetings.

The following subcategories are linked to the previously outlined category and also respond to the second research question of this study. Such subcategories are: (a) increase of online intercultural exchange and (b) increase of self-directed language learning practices. Each of them is explored separately below and the way in which they respond to the second research question of this study.

a) Increase of Online Intercultural Exchange

The following excerpts, collected from different learners through different data collection instruments and corroborated by an entry taken from the researcher's reflective instrument, show clear examples of the increase of online intercultural exchange experienced by the participants in this study through the use of Skype™ conference calls.

It was a very good experience because we could practice our English with other classmates and with other people from other countries. For example, when the teacher got us to speak to his friend from America, we asked him many things about his culture. It was very fun that day.

Excerpt 25. Survey, student 10, April 19th, 2011, translated from Spanish original

I really like Skype™ because now I have some friends from other countries and they help me with my pronunciation and vocabulary, too.

Excerpt 26. Focus group, student 8, April 21st, 2011, translated from Spanish original

Student 5 said: "I am using the web page¹³ that the teacher recommended us the other day to find native speakers of English there. I ask them their Skype™

¹³ The web page that was recommended to them for online language practice and cultural exchange was: www.sharedtalk.com

name and I talk to them from Skype. For example, Keera is a friend from England that has taught me many things about English and her culture.”

Excerpt 27. Researcher’s reflective journal, fourth online session, April 16th and 17th, 2011

On the one hand, Richards and Schmidt (2002) define culture as “the set of practices, codes and values that mark a particular nation or group: the sum of a nation or group’s most highly thought of works of literature, art, music, etc.” (p. 138). Similarly, Amant (2007) states that culture involves collections of symbols and norms that affect how humans gather, organize and process information. On the other hand, the term ‘online intercultural exchange’ refers to the activity of engaging language learners in interaction and collaborative project work with partners from other cultures through the use of online communication tools such as e-mail, videoconferencing and discussion forums (O’Dowd, 2007, p. 4). More recently, Stickler and Emke (2011) argue that the term intercultural exchange can be mediated both online or face-to-face and refers to any exchange of information or experience that the learner experiences consciously as an encounter beyond her/his home culture. Granted these ideas of culture and intercultural exchange and with reference to the above-presented excerpts, this study argues that EFL adult A1 learners can increase their online intercultural exchange through the use of Skype™ conference calls for the following two reasons.

First, learners agreed that they had used the Skype™ conference calls with the purposes of generating online intercultural exchange with native and non-native speakers of English from other countries in order to develop students’ communicative ability in the target language, to increase intercultural sensitivity and to encourage learner independence (Belz, 2003). In other words, the Skype™ conference calls provided learners with the opportunity to interact through an online environment in order to meet, discover and understand other people’s main cultural patterns (native and non-native speakers of English) so that they became more conscious of such

existing cultural variations and their influence in their language learning experiences. O'Dowd (2007) sees it this way: through online interaction, it is argued that learners can become aware that communicating in a foreign language involves not only the exchange of information, but also the expression of speaker identity and the development of relationships in situations of intercultural contact. This can be evidenced through the following excerpt:

Now, I have various friends on Skype™ from England for example and they help me with my English and teach me many things about their culture.

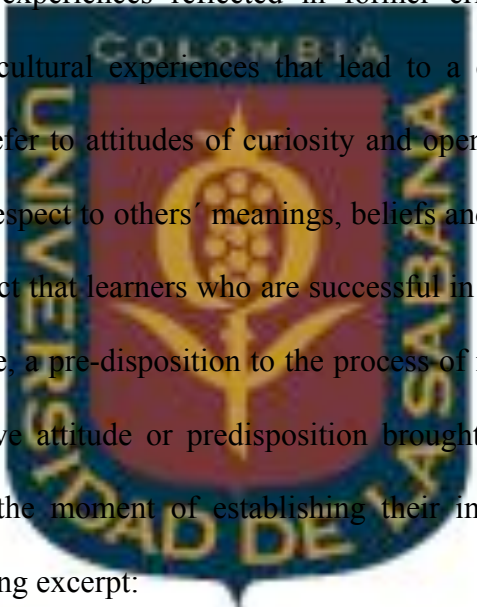
Excerpt 28. Focus group, student 5, April 21st, 2011, translated from Spanish original

The above excerpt shows how this learner used the Skype™ conference calls not only with the purpose of practicing and improving her English with native English speakers, but also with the intention of exchanging relevant intercultural patterns among them. This idea just validates Stickler and Emke's (2011) assumption that in recent years the benefits of CMC tools, such as Skype™, for intercultural learning have become increasingly obvious. In other words, language learners might use CMC tools such as Skype™, not only for language and knowledge exchange but also for expanding their intercultural awareness about the target language culture, as showed in the previously presented sample

Second, learners also acknowledged another potential advantage from the use of Skype™ conference calls for language teaching and learning purposes. It has to do with the fact that the Skype™ conference calls did not only help them promote their oral language skills and increase their online intercultural exchange with other language speakers and learners but they also helped them increase their knowledge of other areas of the language such as their pronunciation and their vocabulary. Exploring the potential use of Skype™ conference calls for the teaching and learning of language areas such as pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, intonation etc., might be

considered as possible research interests for future or further studies involving the use of Skype™ conference calls.

It was also found that the specific group of learners in this study seemed to have an *existing attitude of curiosity and openness* in relation to their intercultural exchanges through the proposed online Skype™ conferences. Taylor (1994) and Byram (1997) coined this term and it refers to an array of prior experiences reflected in former critical events, personal goals, education and previous intercultural experiences that lead to a context of learning readiness (Taylor, 1994). It may also refer to attitudes of curiosity and openness, of readiness to suspend disbelief and judgment with respect to others' meanings, beliefs and behaviors (Byram, 1997). In other words, it refers to the fact that learners who are successful in their intercultural interactions bring a certain kind of attitude, a pre-disposition to the process of intercultural learning (Stickler & Emke, 2011). Such positive attitude or predisposition brought by learners as described by Stickler & Emke (2011) at the moment of establishing their intercultural exchanges can be evidenced through the following excerpt:



Learners commented that now that they have found more about British and American cultures through their talks on Skype™ with English speakers of these countries, they have changed certain misconceptions that they had about them and come to respect and value the differences between their own culture and those of others in different contexts.

Excerpt 29. Researcher's reflective journal, fourth online session, April 16th and 17th, 2011

The above-presented excerpt shows how learners acknowledged that through their guided (with the teacher's presence) and independent online encounters on Skype™, they had learned how to respect and tolerate intercultural variations that emerged throughout their online exchanges with their Skype™ contacts. This is crucial and highly beneficial for their language

learning process as students understand that learning a second or foreign language implies not only learning to master its main skills (listening, reading, writing, speaking) and other important linguistic areas (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, intonation etc.), but also learning about the main intercultural patterns and characteristics behind such target language. This positive attitude and pre-disposition to value and tolerate other foreign language cultures seems to be more common in adults than in younger language learners. This assumption is corroborated by King and Baxter Magolda (2005) who argue that adult learners are in a better position to achieve this developmental complexity which allows them positive acceptance of others in personal development and openness to different cultures.

b) Increase of Self-Directed Language Learning Practices

The following excerpts, collected from different learners both in the first and second cycle of implementation in this study, and corroborated by an entry taken from the researcher's reflective instrument, show clear examples of the increase of the participants' self-direction practices towards the target language learning.

One of the advantages of the Skype™ conferences was that I could continue practicing my English with my other classmates and friends without necessarily the teacher's presence.

Excerpt 30. Survey, student 8, April 19th, 2011, translated from Spanish original

I used the Skype™ conferences to study and practice my English with my other classmates. It is a very good way of practicing my speaking in English.

Excerpt 31. Focus group, student 3, October 14th, 2010, translated from Spanish original, first implementation cycle

Student 5 said: "Student 1 and I are using the Skype™ conferences to practice

our English independently. For example, when I cannot come to class, I call student 1 on Skype and she tells me what the teacher has said in class and informs me of the homework for next class, too. We always try to speak in English."

Excerpt 32. Researcher's reflective journal, fourth online session, April 16th and 17th, 2011

Self-directed learning (or SDL) is understood as "any increase in knowledge, skill, accomplishment, or personal development that an individual selects and brings about by his or her own efforts using any method in any circumstances at any time" (Gibbons, 2002, p. 2). In Merriam and Caffarella's words (1999), self-directed learning refers to a process in which people take primary initiative for planning, carrying out, and evaluating their own learning. Merriam and Caffarella (1999) argue that SDL is based on the autonomous, independent individual who chooses to undertake learning for personal growth. Similarly, Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) define SDL as a *goal*, which focuses on "a learner's desire or preference for assuming responsibility for learning" (p. 24).

In regard to the specific learning context where learning takes place, Song and Hill (2007) state that the level of self-direction needed may change in different contexts and that the context focuses on environmental factors and how those factors impact the level of self-direction provided to the learner. More specifically, Song and Hill (2007) claim that the context where learning takes place influences the level of learner autonomy that is allowed in the specific context, as well as how a learner utilizes resources and strategies, and becomes motivated to learn. In this respect, Song and Hill (2007) affirm that online learning lends itself to a SDL experience. Chizmar & Walbert (1999) argue that to succeed in an online learning context learners need to take control in planning their learning pace, monitoring their learning

comprehension (Shapley, 2000), and making judgments on various aspects in their learning process (Petrides, 2002).

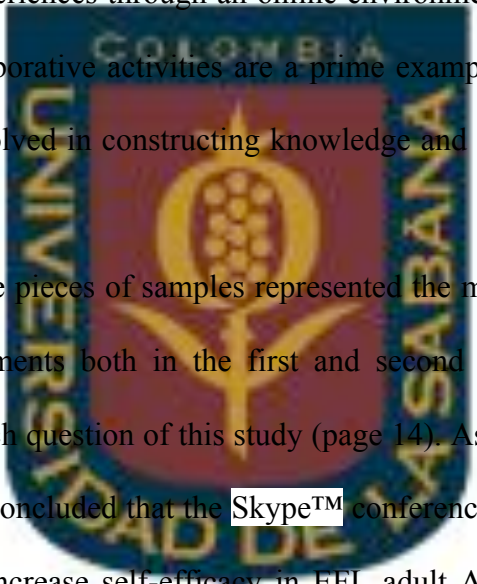
It can be deduced that learners used the Skype™ conference calls to continue practicing their oral language skills with both their classmates and other people in their Skype™ contact list. This independent practice was done without their teacher's presence or direct instruction, which simply shows both the learners' self-motivation for learning and their "desire or preference for assuming responsibility for their own learning." (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991, p. 24). Additionally, learners agreed that they used the Skype™ conference calls as a means to have online encounters with their peers in order to revise material or activities already dealt with during their face-to-face sessions or new material proposed by them, but with the particularity that they did this for their own learning desire. This learners' behavior responds to a condition of self-directed learning in which learners "master" predetermined material at their own pace without the aid of a tutor (Piskurich, 1993). Finally, Mason and Rennie (2006) identify two crucial elements for the development of self-directed learning practices in an online learning environment: the willingness of the student to become self-directed and the approach of the teacher in passing control to the students. As for these elements, the willingness of the student to become self-directed (Mason & Rennie, 2006) was the most recurrent pattern identified throughout the data collection and analysis stages of this study. This can be demonstrated through the following excerpt:

...Yes, I use Skype™ now to practice my English independently with some of my neighbors, friends and other people who also speak English.

Excerpt 33. Focus group, student 4, April 21st, 2011, translated from Spanish original

This learner acknowledged that after making part of this research study, she ended up using Skype™ not only to talk to her classmates but also to other people she managed to have in her Skype™ contact list, but more importantly without the presence and instruction of the teacher. Thus, learners admitted that they used the Skype™ conference calls independently in order to help each other in the accomplishment of their own language learning activities and goals and their knowledge building experiences through an online environment. Mason and Rennie (2006) see it this way: “online collaborative activities are a prime example of self-directed learning in that students are actively involved in constructing knowledge and in creating a positive learning environment.” (p. 103).

In conclusion, the above pieces of samples represented the most concurrent patterns found in the data collection instruments both in the first and second cycles of implementation, in response to the second research question of this study (page 14). As evidenced through the above presented excerpts, it can be concluded that the Skype™ conference calls might be considered as an influential CMC tool to increase self-efficacy in EFL adult A1 learners towards the target language learning. Additionally, it was evidenced that the Skype™ conference calls might also help learners increase their online intercultural exchange and increase their self-directed language learning practices in the target language under the same or similar conditions of those specified in this research study.



Universidad
de La Sabana

VI. CONCLUSIONS, PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

1. Conclusions

This research study aimed at responding two main research questions: 1) to what extent does the use of Skype™ conference calls help EFL adult A1 learners at ILUD promote their speaking skill out of classroom settings? And 2) how do EFL adult A1 learners feel about the implementation of Skype™ conference calls as a computer-mediated communication tool in promoting their speaking skill at ILUD out of classroom settings? The analysis and interpretation of data drew the following conclusions in response to each research question.

Firstly, in response to the first research question, it was found that the Skype™ conference calls might be considered an influential CMC tool to promote EFL adult A1 learners' speaking skill, especially for social interaction purposes out of classroom settings. This was evidenced as the participants in this study acknowledged that the Skype™ conference calls helped them practice their language skills and at the same time expand their social relationships, not only with their classmates but also with other people they knew from diverse contexts. It was also evidenced that learners used the language as a means of constructing their social networks which is congruent with Maynard and Peräkylä's (2009) assumption that "it is partly through language that humans "do" the social world" (p. 233). Additionally, it was evidenced that the Skype™ conference calls might also help learners in the reinforcement of both their fluency in the target language and their language course contents out of formal classroom settings.

Secondly, in response to the second research question, it was found the Skype™ conference calls might also be considered as a powerful CMC tool to increase self-efficacy in EFL adult A1 learners towards the target language learning. This was evidenced given that the learners' sense of self-efficacy increased with the result of previous successful experiences (Leaver, Ehrman and Shekhtman, 2005) as they got more involved and participated more of the Skype™ conference

calls. These learners' sense of self-efficacy has also been highly influenced by both their peers and their teacher since they needed other people's words and support to believe that they could accomplish their respective assigned tasks. This external support from others seemed to increase their sense of efficacy towards the target language learning through their participation of the Skype™ conference calls.

Finally, it was evidenced that the Skype™ conference calls might also help learners increase their English practice from out-of-class learning environments since learners acknowledged that through the Skype™ conference calls they tended to have much more time to practice their spoken language skills than during their face-to-face sessions. Learners also admitted that through the Skype™ conference calls they avoided having to commute and spend valuable time and money to reach their traditional language classroom. Furthermore, learners agreed that they used the Skype™ conference calls with the purposes of generating online intercultural exchange with native and non-native speakers of English from other countries in order to develop their communicative ability in the target language, increase intercultural sensitivity and encourage learner independence (Belz, 2003). To wrap up, learners also acknowledged that they used the Skype™ conference calls independently in order to help each other in the accomplishment of their own language learning activities and goals and their knowledge building experiences through an online environment.

2. Pedagogical Implications

Any English language researcher, instructor or learner who decides to implement Skype™ conference calls with the main purpose of promoting social interaction skills and increasing self-efficacy towards the English language learning (main findings of this study), should take into account the following recommendations:

1. The participants of this study suggested that the less the number of people participating in the online Skype™ conferences, the better it is, as they could have more time to speak and practice their English language knowledge and skills. They suggested that the ideal number of people per Skype™ conference would be two or maximum three people. Although, in this study, the Skype™ conference calls were developed with a maximum number of four people per session. This number is not far away from the participants' recommended number.
2. The participants of this study also suggested that the Skype™ conference calls could be implemented through other subject matters in the curriculum with academic and pedagogic purposes. They suggested that teachers and learners from any subject matter from the curriculum could arrange to have Skype™ conferences with different purposes. For example, to deepen on specific classroom contents, to revise and conclude with unfinished classroom topics or simply to provide feedback on any homework or assignment from the face-to-face sessions.
3. The participants of this study suggested that by “adding” the web cam tool to the Skype™ conference calls, they would feel even more comfortable during the online sessions on Skype™. That is, they suggested that having a video conference, which is one of the available features of Skype™, they would increase even more their self-efficacy and confidence at the time of expressing their ideas during the online conferences.
4. It is also recommended to ask students to be half an hour or minimum fifteen minutes before the actual time of the Skype™ conference, so any technical or technological problems can be solved before the actual conference scheduled times.

3. Limitations

For anyone who plans to implement Skype™ conference calls with academic or pedagogic purposes in their teaching or learning processes, it is crucial to take into account the following limiting situations:

Technical problems: During the development of this research study, it was found that some identified technical problems might impede the effective and adequate use of the Skype™ conference calls. The most common identified problems were related to the use of the microphone and headphones, poor Internet connection as well as frozen computers or not working properly. It is recommended that before starting the actual Skype™ conference calls, Skype™ users should try the *Skype™ test call* which can help them check whether their microphone and headphones or speakers are working properly or not. This way, Skype™ users can guarantee that technical problems related to the use of the microphone and headphones are avoided and not experienced during online Skype™ conference calls. It is also recommended that Skype™ users check that their computers are not frozen and work properly and that their Internet connection is as good as possible since these factors might also hinder the appropriate development of online Skype™ encounters.

Limited number of possible participants of online Skype™ conference calls: During this research study, it was also found that the limited number of participants of an online Skype™ conference call might impede teachers or instructors reach large classes at a single online Skype™ meeting. If anyone plans to use Skype™ conference calls, she/he should consider that to have optimal Skype™ meetings, the suggested number of participants should not exceed a total of four, including the teacher or instructor.

Lack of technological literacy: Additionally, it was found that learners or Skype™ users might lack essential technological literacy skills such as on the use of computers, Internet and the

Skype™ software. This might obstruct the development of Skype™ conference calls satisfactorily. To avoid this, it is suggested that teachers or instructors train learners in the correct use of Skype™ before actually getting to use it and incorporate it into their everyday teaching or instruction. This might guarantee that both teachers and learners do not waste so much time while developing and implementing Skype™ conference calls into their everyday teaching and learning processes.

4. Recommendation for Further Research

For those researchers, teacher-researchers or language practitioners who may think of implementing Skype™ conference calls with any academic or pedagogic purposes, it is recommended to take into account the following aspects:

1. Some of the participants of this study were found to be quite interested in using the chat window of the program more than expected from the initial planning and implementation of the Skype™ conference calls. However, the main goal of the implementation of the Skype™ conference calls was to orally reinforce classroom contents. The researcher of this study was impressed by the fact that some participants felt quite motivated and interested in using the chat window of the program with more frequency than expected. This could be taken into account for future implementation cycles of Skype™, especially to reinforce learners' writing skills. This can be evidenced in the following excerpt, taken

from the researcher's reflective journal:

"They said that they really liked the chat feature of the program since they could type in the word or words they did not know or understand and this way they could learn the spelling and meaning of the word"

Excerpt 34. Researcher's reflective journal, third online session, April 9th and 10th, 2011

2. It would also be quite interesting to explore the students' insights in terms of the implementation of Skype™ conference calls, especially to reinforce vocabulary learning, pronunciation patterns, listening skills or grammatical knowledge and competences in EFL adult A1 learners under similar conditions of those specified in this research study.



Universidad de La Sabana

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IX. FIGURES

Figure 1





	<p>First oral project presentation Assessment criteria</p> <p>Student's name: <u>Daniel Ortiz Camargo</u> Date: <u>March 9th, 2011</u></p>	
Assessment criteria	Grade/Score	Observation
Grammar	14/20	OK. But Please check your pronunciation of some specific words related to family members like: nephew [nέpju:]; Also make sure that you ask and answer questions from the audience next time.
Vocabulary	16/20	
Pronunciation	9/20	
Interaction with the audience	7/20	
Time limit (3 minutes)	12/20	
Total score	58/100	

Figure 2

	<p>First oral project presentation Assessment criteria</p> <p>Student's name: <u>Perly Julieth Rodriguez C.</u> Date: <u>March 9th, 2011</u></p>	
Assessment criteria	Grade/Score	Observation
Grammar	16/20	Nice job in general terms but I recommend you to pay more attention to your pronunciation and interaction with the audience for future speaking tasks.
Vocabulary	16/20	
Pronunciation	8/20	
Interaction with the audience	12/20	
Time limit (3 minutes)	14/20	
Total score	66/100	



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Appendix 1

Encuesta

Querido estudiante me permito agradecerle por haber hecho parte de este proyecto de investigación e invitarle a contestar objetivamente las siguientes preguntas:

1. ¿Había utilizado Skype con propósitos personales antes de esta experiencia en el ILUD?
 Si _____ No _____

2. ¿Había utilizado Skype con propósitos pedagógicos antes de esta experiencia en el ILUD?
 Si _____ No _____

3. La experiencia de utilizar conferencias de audio de Skype en el ILUD fue:
 Útil _____ Inútil _____ Interesante _____ Motivante _____ Positiva _____.
 ¿Por qué?

4. ¿Cómo te sentiste utilizando conferencias de audio a través de Skype?

 ¿Por qué?

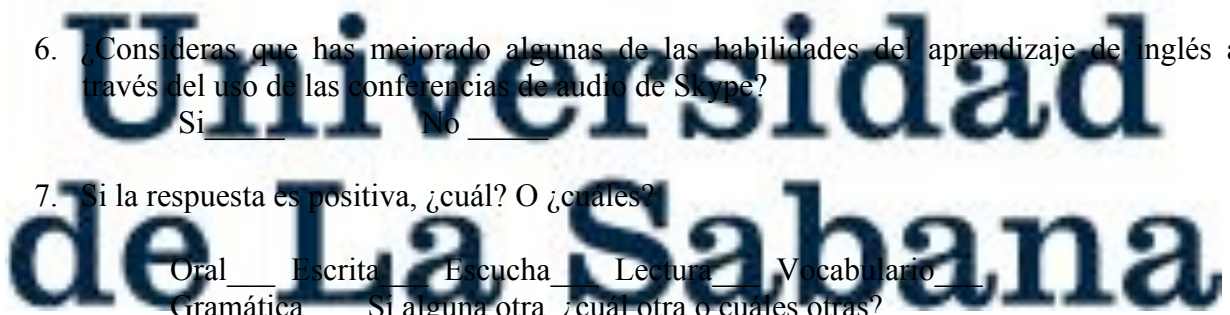
5. Qué opinas del trabajo realizado extra clase con las conferencias de audio de Skype?

6. ¿Consideras que has mejorado algunas de las habilidades del aprendizaje de inglés a través del uso de las conferencias de audio de Skype?
 Si _____ No _____

7. Si la respuesta es positiva, ¿cuál? O ¿cuales?
 Oral _____ Escrita _____ Escucha _____ Lectura _____ Vocabulario _____
 Gramática _____ Si alguna otra, ¿cual otra o cuales otras? _____

8. ¿Crees que tu habilidad de expresión oral ha mejorado luego de haber hecho parte de este proyecto?
 Si _____ No _____
 ¿Por qué?

9. ¿Crees que la utilización de las conferencias de audio de Skype trae algún beneficio para el aprendizaje del inglés?
 Si _____ No _____



¿Por qué?

10. ¿Crees que la utilización de las conferencias de audio de Skype trae algún beneficio para la práctica de inglés?

Si _____ No _____

¿Por qué?

11. ¿Consideras que las conferencias de audio de Skype se podrían utilizar para reforzar contenidos de otras asignaturas?

Si _____ No _____

¿Por qué?

12. ¿Considera que la utilización de las conferencias de audio de Skype tiene alguna desventaja para el aprendizaje de inglés?

Si _____ No _____

¿Por qué?

13. ¿Te gustaría continuar utilizando este tipo de herramientas tecnológicas en el aprendizaje de inglés como lenguas extranjera?

Si _____ No _____

¿Por qué?

14. ¿Qué recomendaciones harías para una futura implementación de conferencias de audio de Skype en la enseñanza de inglés?



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¡Muchas Gracias!

Appendix 2

ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT - LESSON PLAN SAMPLE
ICELT LESSON PLAN FORM

Name of teacher: Yeferson Romaña Correa		Candidate Number:	
Institution: ILUD – Instituto de Lenguas de la Universidad Distrital			
Date of Observation: DAY MONTH YEAR 19th 03 2011		Time of observation 6:00 – 7:00 p.m.	Length of class 1 hour (60 minutes)
Class/grade: A1 EFL Young Adult Elementary Learners		Room: Online Skype conference	
Number of students: 3		Average age of Students: 23	
Number of years of English study: Mixed. None formal.		Level of students (please delete) Elementary Intermediate Advanced	
Lesson Number (please delete) 1 2 3 4		Observer:	
<p>Main Aim(s):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ To talk about the participants’ own life including basic information about them and their families. <p>Subsidiary Aims:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Development of online learning practices making use of computer-mediated communication (CMC) tools. <p>Personal aims: (please include at least one aim related to the development of autonomous learning environments)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ To encourage a nice and relaxing online learning environment. ➤ To encourage an equilibrium of interaction patterns during the lesson development. <p>Note: Aims are to be written as performance-based objectives, which go from covert to overt behaviours (See Wenning, 2008 at http://www.phyilstu.edu/pte/310content/objectives/stperfoobjectives.html)</p>			
<p>Assumed knowledge:</p> <p>Write a description of the language/skills/competences that students already know/have that will serve as a basis for new language/skills input.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Learners know the vocabulary related to family members and jobs/professions, in English from previous lessons studied in the course. ➤ Learners are familiar with the ways to express their names, ages, origins, professions etc, and those of their family members in English. 			

Description of language item / skill(s)

During this first online Skype conference session, the main activity that the participants will develop is an English interview in which they will talk about their own life including basic information about them and their families

This is the questionnaire that the participants will answer during this first online Skype conference session:

Personal Identification Worksheet**Information about Me:**

- 1 Name
- 2 Age
- 3 Birthdate
- 4 Gender
- 5 Current Address
- 6 Home Country
- 7 Family Members
- 8 Employer
- 9 Job Title
- 10 Height
- 11 Weight
- 12 Hair Color
- 13 Eye Color
- 14 Hobbies
- 15 Favorite Food

Information about Others:

1. What is your name?
2. How old are you?
3. When were you born?
4. What is your gender?
5. What is your address?
6. Where are you from?
7. Do you have brothers/sisters? Parents? Grandparents? Children? Etc...
8. Where do you work?
9. What do you do?
10. How tall are you?
11. How much do you weigh?
12. What color are your eyes?
13. What color is your hair?
14. What are your hobbies?
15. What is your favorite food?



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Taken from:

<http://www.apsva.us/15401081182015517/lib/15401081182015517/volunteerwebpages/topic01/piworksht.pdf>

Skill(s) and sub skill(s)**Skills:**

- Participants will be able to talk about their own life including basic information about them and their families

Sub skills:

- Participants will be able to interview their classmates about their own life including basic information about them and their families.

(For CLIL) Follow the “4C” framework (<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/think/articles/clil-%E2%80%93-how-do-it>; <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/think/articles/clil-a-lesson-framework>)

Materials :

Describe all the materials that you are going to use in the lesson, and attach copies/photocopies with their corresponding rationale and proper referring citation.

- Computers with internet connection
- Headphones and microphones
- Copies

The participants will be given a copy with the questions that they will answer during the online Skype conference. This worksheet has been taken and adapted from the following internet source:

<http://www.apsva.us/15401081182015517/lib/15401081182015517/volunteerwebpages/topic01/piworksht.pdf>



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Rationale

<u>Anticipated problems</u>	<u>Planned solutions</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The participants of the study may find it difficult to fully understand the teacher's instructions in the target language for each activity. ➤ The participants of the study may have technical difficulties related to their Internet connection, headphones or microphones not working properly etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ I will grade my talk or language for instruction so that I can guarantee that the participants of the online Skype conferences fully comprehend the instructions for each activity during the online session. ➤ I will ask the participants of the online Skype conferences to sign in 10 minutes before the actual time of the conferences so we can solve any technical problems that may affect the conference development.

How do the anticipated problems and planned solutions relate to the above needs analysis?

The anticipated problems and planned solutions relate to the above needs analysis in the following way:

- In the needs analysis above, it was stated that the participants of this study seem to have been poorly exposed to language input, especially in the spoken language. This might eventually turn into a difficulty for the learners to fully understand the teacher's language of instruction during the online Skype conferences. The planned solution for this is to grade the teacher's language of instruction during the online Skype conference session to guarantee that the participants fully comprehend the instructions given.

Stage	Aim	Procedure Teacher and student activity	Time and interaction
<u>Warmer</u>	Set the context for speaking about the participants' own life including basic information about them and their families.	The researcher tells the participants that they have to say four statements about themselves or their families. For example, I have two babies; My father is from the pacific coast; I love hip-hop music; and My mother's name is Juana. The idea is that the rest of the participants in the online conference have to guess which of the statements they think is a lie and why. The researcher models the activity first for the participants. Then, they tell their partners their four statements and the rest of them have to guess which one is the lie and why.	S – S T –SSS 10 minutes
<u>Language presentation and practice</u>	Create the need for the target language. Use the language items learned through the five sessions to talk about the participants' own life including basic information about them and their families.	The researcher starts by saying to the participants that they are going to be answering questions about their own life including basic information about them and their families. The researcher tells the participants that everybody in the online Skype conference will take turns to ask one question to their peers. At the end, the participants will have the chance to add any other questions they want to ask to their peers about their own life and their families.	S – S T –SSS 35 minutes
<u>Close-up</u>	Create the need for the target language.	The Researcher tells the participants of the online Skype conference that they are going to play a guessing game. For that, the participants will pretend to be famous local, national and international people. The idea is one of the participants in the conference plays to be a famous person. Then, the rest of the participants will ask questions to that person with the intention of finding out whom that person is pretending to be. The researcher models the activity first for the participants. At the end, the winner participant will be that one who guesses the mayor number of famous people represented by their peers.	S – S T –SSS 15 minutes

Appendix 3

Taken from:

<http://www.apsva.us/15401081182015517/lib/15401081182015517/volunteerwebpages/topic01/piworksht.pdf>

Personal Identification Worksheet

Information about Me:

1	Name	
2	Age	
3	Birthdate	
4	Gender	
5	Current Address	
6	Home Country	
7	Family Members	
8	Employer	
9	Job Title	
10	Height	
11	Weight	
12	Hair Color	
13	Eye Color	
14	Hobbies	
15	Favorite Food	


Information about Others:

1. What is your name? _____
2. How old are you? _____
3. When were you born? _____
4. What is your gender? _____
5. What is your address? _____
6. Where are you from? _____
7. Do you have brothers/sisters? Parents? Grandparents? Children? Etc...

8. Where do you work? _____
9. What do you do? _____
10. How tall are you? _____
11. How much do you weigh? _____
12. What color are your eyes? _____
13. What color is your hair? _____
14. What are your hobbies? _____
15. What is your favorite food? _____

Appendix 4

Post-online Skype conferences: Reflective question

Date: _____	Skype session number: _____
Participants' name: _____	
<p style="text-align: center;">How did you feel in the Skype conference today and why? (Remember: answers are allowed both in Spanish and English)</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">Universidad de La Sabana</p>	

Appendix 5

CONSENT FORM¹⁴

Title of research project

Promoting Speaking Skills among EFL Adult Elementary Learners through Skype conference calls and chat out of Classroom Settings at ILUD (Instituto de Lenguas de la Universidad Distrital “Francisco José de Caldas”) of Bogotá

Name of researcher

Yeferson Romaña Correa



1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. Yes _____ No _____

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason. Yes _____ No _____

3. I agree to take part in the above study. Yes _____ No _____

Name of participant: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Name of researcher: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

¹⁴ Adopted from: Norton, L. S. (2009). *Action research in teaching and learning: a practical guide to conducting pedagogical research in universities*. New York: Routledge.

Appendix 6

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET¹⁵

Título del estudio

Promoting Speaking Skills among EFL Adult Elementary Learners through Skype conference calls out of Classroom Settings at ILUD (Instituto de Lenguas de la Universidad Distrital “Francisco José de Caldas”) of Bogotá

Invitación

Usted es cordialmente invitado a hacer parte de este estudio de investigación. Antes de tomar una decisión, es importante que comprenda el propósito central de esta investigación y lo que implica la misma. Por favor, dedique el tiempo necesario para leer cuidadosamente la siguiente información y consulte al investigador si tiene alguna duda o desea mayor información.

Preguntas de investigación:

Este estudio busca responder las siguientes preguntas de investigación:

- ¿Hasta qué punto las conferencias de voz y chat de Skype ayudan a aprendices de inglés como lengua extranjera de nivel elemental a promover su habilidad de expresión oral fuera del contexto salón de clase?
- ¿Cómo se sienten los aprendices de inglés como lengua extranjera de nivel elemental acerca de la implementación de las conferencias de voz y chat de Skype como una herramienta de comunicación mediada por el computador?

Objetivos de Investigación:

Este estudio de investigación persigue los siguientes objetivos fundamentales:

- Determinar el efecto de las conferencias de voz y chat de Skype en promover la habilidad de expresión oral de aprendices de inglés como lengua extranjera de nivel elemental fuera del contexto salón de clase.
- Analizar la actitud y opinión de aprendices de inglés como lengua extranjera de nivel elemental hacia la implementación de las conferencias de voz y chat de Skype como una herramienta de comunicación mediada por el computador.

¹⁵ Adopted from: Norton, L. S. (2009). *Action research in teaching and learning: a practical guide to conducting pedagogical research in universities*. New York: Routledge.

¿Por qué ha sido usted escogido para participar de este proyecto?

Es objetivo fundamental del instituto formar hablantes con niveles competitivos y de espontaneo dominio de lenguas extranjeras. Por esta razón, este proyecto de investigación pretende fomentar la habilidad de expresión oral, específicamente en la lengua inglesa, a través de la utilización de las conferencias de voz y chat de Skype fuera del contexto del salón de clase. Inicialmente, se pretende implementar esta herramienta de comunicación mediada por el computador con los aprendices de Inglés como lengua extranjera de niveles elementales, pero con la aspiración de extender esta iniciativa en todos los niveles que ofrece el Instituto de Lenguas de la Universidad Distrital – ILUD.

¿Tiene usted que hacer parte de este proyecto de investigación?

Usted es totalmente libre de decidir si desea no hacer parte de este proyecto de investigación. Este proyecto de investigación comprende sesiones tanto presenciales como virtuales. Las sesiones presenciales se llevarán a cabo durante tres semanas, dos sesiones por semana, cada una de dos horas. Esto para un total de 12 horas presenciales. Las sesiones virtuales se llevarán a cabo en horarios que no interrumpan las jornadas laborales de los participantes a través de la herramienta de comunicación mediada por el computador, Skype. Las sesiones virtuales tienen el propósito de reforzar los contenidos estudiados dentro del salón de clase, haciendo primacía a la promoción de la expresión oral de los participantes. Estas sesiones virtuales se llevarán a cabo en grupos pequeños de tres a cuatro personas, dependiendo la disponibilidad horaria de los participantes. Las sesiones virtuales completaran una intensidad horaria mínima de 13 horas, para completar un total de 25 horas, mínimo requerido para la implementación pedagógica de este proyecto de investigación.

¿Cuáles son las implicaciones de hacer parte de este proyecto?

En la tercera y última semana de la implementación de este proyecto de investigación, se le solicitará a los participantes completar dos instrumentos de recolección de datos: Una encuesta y un grupo focal. La encuesta es un instrumento de recolección de datos que persigue recoger información que permita responder las preguntas de investigación de este proyecto. Es una corta encuesta en donde los participantes expresarán su actitud y opinión acerca de su participación del proyecto. Por otro lado, el grupo focal, no es más que una entrevista en grupos de 4 o 5 participantes con el investigador del

proyecto, donde los participantes responderán a las mismas preguntas de la encuesta, pero esta vez en grupos pequeños y de forma oral. Estas conversaciones serán grabadas en formato de audio para su mejor análisis y tratamiento durante la investigación.

¿Cuáles son los posibles beneficios de hacer parte de este proyecto de investigación?

Se espera que su participación de este proyecto de investigación le permita fortalecer sus conocimientos en su proceso de aprendizaje de la lengua inglesa, y por ende promover su habilidad de expresión oral en la misma. Otro posible beneficio tiene que ver con que su participación voluntaria de este proyecto de investigación le exime de pago alguno por los materiales utilizados o la instrucción recibida durante la implementación del proyecto.

¿Cuáles son los posibles riesgos de hacer parte de este proyecto de investigación?

No se alcanza a predecir ningún riesgo eminente al hacer parte de este proyecto de investigación. Lo único es el tiempo que usted dedique para su participación del proyecto, que podría utilizar en otras labores personales y/o académicas.

¿Será su participación de este proyecto mantenida en confidencialidad?

Los resultados obtenidos a través de este proyecto de investigación serán expuestos a la luz pública y presentados en conferencia al comité de investigación de la Universidad de la Sabana y comunidad educativa en general. Su identidad NUNCA será revelada con nombres propios en ninguno de los resultados obtenidos, lo que se hará público son las palabras que usted utilice para describir su actitud y opinión sobre la implementación de las conferencias de voz y chat de Skype en su propósito de promover la habilidad de expresión oral en Inglés fuera del contexto del salón de clase.

Contacto para mayor información:

Si usted desea mayor información sobre este proyecto de investigación, por favor contactar a:

Yeferson Romaña Correa, investigador del proyecto.

Teléfonos: Local: 361 81 16; Celular: 320 342 43 68.

E-mail: tapias143@hotmail.com

¡Muchas gracias por el tiempo y atención prestada a este documento!

Appendix 7

PARTICIPATION CONFIRMATION FORM

No.	Participants' names	Telephone	Mobile phone	E-mail address
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				
11				
12				
13				
14				
15				



Researcher's name:
 Yeferson Román Correa
 English and French teacher
 Instituto de Lenguas de la Universidad Distrital
 Universidad de la Sabana

Universidad de La Sabana

Appendix 8

Sample post-survey, filled in by one of the participants of the study



DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND CULTURES

MASTER IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING
AUTONOMOUS LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Encuesta

Querido estudiante me permito agradecerle por haber hecho parte de este proyecto de investigación e invitarle a contestar objetivamente las siguientes preguntas:

1. ¿Había utilizado Skype con propósitos personales antes de esta experiencia en el ILUD?
Si _____ No X
2. ¿Había utilizado Skype con propósitos pedagógicos antes de esta experiencia en el ILUD?
Si _____ No X
3. La experiencia de utilizar conferencias de audio y chat de Skype en el ILUD fue:
Útil _____ Inútil _____ Interesante _____ Motivante _____ Positiva X.
¿Por qué?

SE OMITE EL PROCESO DE ESTAR VIENDO LO ESCRITO Y MOTIVA A USAR EL LEXICO Y AUMENTAR EL MISMO DE AHÍ QUE SEA UNA EXPERIENCIA POSITIVA PUES INVITA DE MANERA TACITA A IMPLEMENTAR MAS VOCABULARIO

4. ¿Cómo te sentiste utilizando conferencias de audio y chat a través de Skype?
¿Por qué?

MUY BIEN Y EN MUCHOS CASOS EVITA LA PENA DEL HABLAR EN PUBLICO

5. Qué opinas del trabajo realizado extra clase con las conferencias de audio y chat de Skype?

6. **ES UN RECURSO MUY UTIL PUES BRINDA HERRAMIENTAS Y SEGURIDAD DEL TEMA QUE SE VA A RATAR ASI COMO ACLARAR DUDAS DEL TEMA**

7. ¿Consideras que has mejorado algunas de las habilidades del aprendizaje de inglés a través del uso de las conferencias de audio y chat de Skype?
Si X No _____

8. Si la respuesta es positiva, ¿cuál? O ¿cuáles?

Oral _____ Escrita _____ Escucha X Lectura _____ Vocabulario X
Gramática _____ Si alguna otra, ¿cuál otra o cuáles otras? _____

9. ¿Crees que tu habilidad de expresión oral ha mejorado luego de haber hecho parte de este proyecto?
Si X No _____



DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND CULTURES

**MASTER IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING
AUTONOMOUS LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS**

¿Por qué?

**BRINDA UN ESTADIO EN EL CUAL MEJORA LA EXPRESION ORAL
Y HACE SENTIR MAS SEGURIDAD EN LA EXPRESION**

10. ¿Crees que la utilización de las conferencias de audio y chat de Skype trae algún beneficio para el aprendizaje del inglés?

Si No

¿Por qué?

**ADICIONAL DE SER UNA HERRAMIENTA REFORZAR EL
CONOCIMIENTO BRINDA CONFIANZA A LA HORA DE
EXPRESARSE EN INGLES**

11. ¿Crees que la utilización de las conferencias de audio y chat de Skype trae algún beneficio para la práctica de inglés?

Si No

¿Por qué?

**SI LA IMPLEMENTACIONY MEJORAMIENTO DEL IDIOMA DE
MANERA ORAL OBLIGA A IMPLEMENTAR MAS VOCABULARIO**

12. ¿Consideras que las conferencias de audio y chat de Skype se podrían utilizar para reforzar contenidos de otras asignaturas?

Si No

¿Por qué?

**SI ESTE ESQUEMA ES PRACTICO A OTRAS ASIGNATURAS POR LA
VERSATILIDAD DE LA HERRAMIENTA**

13. ¿Considera que la utilización de las conferencias de audio y chat de Skype tiene alguna desventaja para el aprendizaje de inglés?

Si No

¿Por qué?

14. ¿Te gustaría continuar utilizando este tipo de herramientas tecnológicas en el aprendizaje de inglés como lenguas extranjera?

Si No

¿Por qué?

**SI CLARO LA VERSATILIZAD DE LA HERRAMIENTA PERMITE
QUE SE INVITE UN PROFESOR O INSTRUCTOR DE IDIOMA
NATIVO SIN NECESIDAD DE DEZPLAZARSE O TENER UNA
LOGISTICA MAS AVANZADA Y MEJORA SUSTANCIALMENTE LA**