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Skype

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Skype

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Definitions and background

Skype, (skype.com) was founded in 2003 and is now available in over 28 languages and most countries in the world (Hargis & Wilcox, 2008). Skype is a web conferencing software program which uses voice over Internet protocol technology (Yanguas, 2010). Functionally, Skype is a video, audio, and text-based communication tool that provides a platform where multiple users can engage in synchronous dialogue (Price & Wright, 2012). This software transforms a personal computer or mobile device into an Internet-based conferencing system with both recording and screen sharing capabilities (Yang, 2008). The basic version of Skype is free to download and use, allowing multiple users in an audio conference or one-to-one connections when using the video option (Kiriakidis, 2012). Skype has gained popularity due to its free access option, high quality audio / picture and its cross internet platform functionality (Yanguas, 2010). The software runs well on Windows, Linux, Mac OS X, or PocketPC (Godwin-Jones, 2005). Skype is also considered to have intuitive navigation for set up and its simplicity of use makes it an accessible tool for less technologically-experienced users (Eroz-Tuga & Sadler, 2009).

Affordances

Skype provides students with “access to a large amount of up-dated information, promote flexible and interactive education, facilitate student autonomy, foster person- alised instruction and enable collaborative teamwork in class” (Garcia-Martin & Garcia-Sanchez, 2013, p.117). More specifically within an educational context, Skype offers a low cost, real-time communication and collaboration tool for students in the form of a virtual classroom (Kilimci, 2010). Functionally, Skype can be used as a teaching tool by having all students connected separately to the teacher or in a group with individual student computers connected to a projector within the classroom and beyond (Gronn et al., 2013). Skype is able to simulate a face-to-face environment of a traditional classroom while still allowing a students or guest speakers to participate at a distance. (Kilimci, 2010).

Skype offers a flexible and accessible global learning context to enhance education (Hwang & Vrongistinos, 2012). The conferencing capabilities and recording option can be used to connect students to subject experts or other students from around the world (Godwin-Jones, 2005). Guest lecturers can share live demonstrations within an interactive context from virtually anywhere in the world with an internet connection (Hwang & Vrongistinos, 2012). Skype is not bound by time or space and can be used to connect users outside of class time in a virtual mentoring capacity (Hwang & Vrongistinos, 2012). With no time limitations, this software can easily be implemented for sharing time sensitive information and can be more effective than using either email or telephone (Garcia-Martin & Garcia-Sanchez, 2013). Skype is used to promote collaboration by providing students with a platform for brainstorming and negotiating when working on projects (Ang et al., 2013). This tool allows collaborators to “research new topics immediately, record notes together and...become more productive and efficient. All the while, colleagues can be talking, typing, and watching one another, taking multi-tasking to a new level”(Hargis & Wilcox , p. 10). In addition, other practical applications for Skype include implementing the audio and video conferencing component to practice oral communication skills (Cararoglu & Basaran, 2010). It is a popular tool to assist with improving English and intercultural communication (Chen & Vannoy, 2013). Students are able to “listen to and speak with the teacher and each other, write on the same window, and see what the others and the teacher write (similar to a chalkboard)” (Kilimci, 2010, p. 107).

Constraints

Since Skype requires Internet access as well as the software download and installation, depending on the user comfort level, the program will require time to set up and navigate (Hargis & Wilcox, 2008). Additionally, Skype requires a reasonably fast Internet connection which may limit access for some schools (Godwin-Jones, 2005). Unfortunately, the speed of the Internet connection will affect the overall sound quality which is dependent on the network service (Gronn et al., 2013). For slow connections, the video can be intermittent and delayed but audio calls are generally good quality (Gronn et al., 2013). Furthermore, although it is possible to link up to five separate audio conference call connections through Skype, the sound quality tends to degrade with more Internet connections in the same conversation (Godwin-Jones, 2005).

While the basic Skype account is free, there are additional equipment costs to consider for basic use including; a web-camera, microphone and headphones which are preferred over speakers to prevent echoes from either the microphone or conversational partner for video conferencing or just a micro-phone and headphones for the audio option (Kilimci, 2010). Overall service quality and options will increase with the premium paid version which permits “up to 10 users for simultaneous video conferencing” (Gronn et al., 2013, p. 261). Although it is also possible to use Skype to call a land-based phone, this SkypeOut option requires a fee for use service (Godwin-Jones, 2005). Skype has also been criticized for the small size of the video chat screen; not being able to see the other parties in multi-user chat; and not being able to see contact list when using different computers and therefore having to add personal contacts for different computer” (Eroz-Tuga & Sadler, 2009). Many educators are using Skype in conjunction with other technology such as white board because of its limited features (Gronn et al., 2013). Unfortunately, there is limited research conducted to determine the viability of using Skype in an education setting (Yang & Chang, 2008). In addition, cultural and demographic considerations should also be considered in further research, Yoo and Huang (2011) found that South Korean students tend to be more apprehensive about using Skype for learning than American students. Further research should also investigate the education implication of using Skype to stimulate more rigours intellectual participation in education (Yang & Chang, 2008).

Links

How to use Skype ^[1]

How to use Skype in the Classroom ^[2]

50 ideas for using Skype in the classroom ^[3]

Tips for using Skype beyond the classroom ^[4]

Help student learn from their peers in other schools with Skype ^[5]

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- [3] <http://www.teachthought.com/technology/50-ideas-for-using-skype-in-your-classroom/>
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