

THE ROLE OF SKYPE-MEDIATED CHATS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS

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Abstract

Of the four language skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing), foreign language speaking skill perhaps has attracted the most attention in relation to the application of CALL (computer-assisted language learning) technology and language teaching approaches. The current study investigates the role of Skype-mediated chats on foreign language learners' communication skills and the influential factors of its effectiveness. It also examines the learners' perceptions of the effectiveness of Skype-based chats on their four language skills and cultural understanding. The participants were 20 non-native speakers of Chinese who studied advanced Chinese subjects at a university in Australia and 20 Chinese postgraduate students majoring in Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages in China. The native and non-native dyads conducted a one-hour conversation weekly over ten weeks via Skype with different interlocutors. The data collected from questionnaire surveys, group interviews, and assessment tasks were analysed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Results show that Skype-based chats significantly improved the learners' communication skills, particularly listening and speaking skills (e.g. fluency and complexity). It was found that individual factors (motivation, anxiety) and technological issues (cyber connection situations) influenced the learners' perceptions of the effectiveness of Skype conversations. The paper also provides suggestions for language teachers and practitioners on how to successfully employ the technological tool to enhance students' foreign language speaking skills.

Keywords: CALL Technology, Foreign Language Speaking Skill, Skype-Mediated Chats.
