**CHAPTER Ι**

**Introduction**

**The Problem Statement**

Numerous approaches have been developed over the years for language learning and teaching. The Communicative approach can be considered the longest living of all, considering most of the more recent approaches such as the Blended Learning Approach and Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) have evolved from this approach. Yet, one of the main problems that English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers experience is for various reasons not being able to increase the chances of students using the target language within the classroom context. In their research on native language use in adult English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms in the University of Texas with Spanish students who were learning English, Huerta-Macias and Kephart (2009) noted that students tended to switch from their target language (English) to their native language (Spanish) because of the strong emphasis on content as opposed to grammar in the particular class. They then go on to argue that First language (L1) is actually a good reference to use when content plays an important role in the teaching of language. In the context where I teach (EAP – freshman students who score between 50 and59 in the proficiency exam, but have studied a year at the Preparatory School and therefore are given the right to transfer to their departments. These students level of English range between elementary – upper-intermediate), however, the aim is to develop language skills of students in order to be able to cope with their department courses. Our classrooms are made up of a multicultural combination. We have students from a variety of countries like Turkey, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan. Bearing this in mind, in the classroom context, students prefer to sit next to students who share the same first language and therefore use that language more than the target language in the classroom. When approached with the target language, students are not confident enough to use the target language and therefore rely on their respective first languages to express themselves in classroom activities. This has also been observed by students and colleagues I have worked with throughout my career at the Eastern Mediterranean University. Students seem to be learning the grammar, the vocabulary and strategies which help them pass exams, and then eventually pass the Preparatory School Proficiency Exam. However, the students and I feel that they do not become effective oral communicators, which is usually the main desire of language learners.

N. I. Mohammad (2012) believes that it is fair to say the accepted ‘norm’ of language teaching is Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and therefore most of the recent approaches are designed around this core teaching approach. “Thus, it can be claimed that the Communicative approach (CA) brought about the relevant change of teaching method under the name Communicative Language Teaching in which communicativeness became one of the outstanding characteristics of 1970s.” (Demirezen, 2011), Language equals communication and learners begin any kind of learning with the hope to do exactly that. The communicative approach was first put forward in the 1970s in Europe with the development of the European Common Market. There was a vast growing migration all over Europe which increased the need for people to learn a foreign language for work or personal reasons. Its early advocates were British linguists D.A Wilkins and H. G. Widdowson. N. I. Mohammad also adds that the CLT is based on the theory that the primary function of language use is communication (Mohammad, 2012). As mentioned earlier, the importance in terms of using English or any language has shifted to communication in the world in general due to globalization. Therefore, knowing grammar well or knowing lots of words is not enough anymore. “Research into the processes of language learning and acquisition suggests that mere training in structural (grammatical) and vocabulary knowledge will not result in real linguistic competence and language proficiency” (Ruschoff, 2002, p. 11) “Communicative Language Teaching is now seen as an approach that aims to make communicative competence the goal of language teaching and develop procedures for the teaching of the four language skills that acknowledge the interdependence of language and communication” (Zeng, 2009, p. 48). As N.I. Mohammad, 2012 claims, many teachers in places like Bangladesh are influenced by

Prabhu (1987), who argued that grammar was too complex to be taught and Krashen (1982), who claimed that grammar can only be acquired unconsciously through exposure to the target language, so they believe that a special attention should be given to the meaning, not to the form. (Mohammad, 2012, p.212)

Keeping in mind that the trend in language learning is learning through a communicative approach, it made me question the reasons for still focusing on developing reading and writing skills so much as prescribed by the EAP (ENGL 181) syllabi (**Appendix 1**). Skimming and scanning skills are of course necessary skills to acquire, but they do not help establish communication skills. The syllabus clearly misses the element of communication which is mostly desired and required by our students to be successful language users. Another drawback is that students go through an intensive year of English at the Preparatory School before they come to the EAP course (ENGL 181) in which they were not able to score the passing score of 60 and therefore are placed in an unconventional course, EAP (ENGL 181) . As Eaton (2010, p. 15) states, “The focus in language education in the twenty-first century is no longer on grammar, memorization and rote-learning but rather on using language and cultural knowledge as a means to communicate and connect to others around the globe”. However, use of L1 was a recurring problem that I observed in the current EAP classes I was teaching at the time. I realized that students needed speaking activities which promoted communication in natural circumstances. The multi-cultural nature of my classes at the time was an opportunity to give my students reasons for using English more often when communicating with their classmates. Thus, I incorporated group activities (**Appendix 2**) which provided such natural grounds for communication. However, a drawback was with the groups where students shared the same L1 (in the case of my students at the time, Turkish). These groups were not functioning in the group activities as desired. Students were using their first language too much, which hindered the desired objectives to be achieved in my communication activities. The following extract from a recorded classroom activity shows the interaction between students within a group where they were asked to discuss certain aspects of their cities or countries in English.

B: I come from Sinop my brother. Ya sen?

(*What about you?*)

A: Beyarmudu. Ya sen? Sen nerelisin?

(*Beyarmudu. What about you? Where are you from*?)

C: Ben Bakü’den geliyorum.

(*I come from Baku*)

B: English arkadaşlar!

(*Friends*)

C: Eee, I come from Baku, ok? Where you Sinop?

B: Sinop is … is Turkey’nin Kuzeyinde.

(*The North of Turkey*)

C: English, English friends please.

As Rance and Judith (2010, p.23) suggest, “Generally, it is prevailing wis­dom to group learners together who do not share a native language since this fosters maximum communication in English.” However, this is not feasible in the context where I teach. The above extract is just a fraction of the conversation in a group activity where students were grouped according to their different backgrounds (all from different countries preferably). As the desired grouping is not always possible, students from the same country were grouped together. In those cases, the teacher tried to put students from different cities in the same groups in order for students to have something different to say. The activity involved students first taking notes of certain aspects of their country/city and then compare their notes. As it can be understood from the dialogue, student A was from ‘Beyarmudu’, which is a border town in North Cyprus. Student was B from Sinop in Turkey and student C was from Baku in Azerbaijan. Consequently, all students were able to speak a common language, i.e. Turkish. For students A and B, Turkish was their L1, whereas for student C Turkish was a second language (L2) (with considerable fluency)[[1]](#footnote-1). The example dialogue evidently renders that the majority of the task which was required of students was carried out in L1 (Turkish) or the common language. This seems to be the case with most group activities since most of the classes at the university where I work consist of students primarily of Turkish origin. The amount of English students are exposed to outside the classroom where the dominant language is Turkish is very limited and therefore there exists a barrier for developing oral competence.

As with my classes, Yang & Chang (2008) report similar problems in Taiwanese EFL classrooms. According to Yang and Chang (2008, p.721), Taiwanese students do not develop fluent English-speaking skills and they argue that the main reasons for this failure are “limited class time and unequal access to interaction in a traditional classroom setting”. They also claim that any outside practice cannot be monitored by their instructors who cannot then give students effective feedback and/or corrections and guide them (Yang & Chang, 2008). I would like to point out that the similarities between the Taiwanese case and the situation in North Cyprus in terms of students’ lack of access to the target language is striking. Of course, non-Turkish speaking students are at an advantage of having no choice but to speak English inside and outside of the classroom and therefore their oral skills tend to develop faster. However, most of the students who come to the Eastern Mediterranean University are either from Turkey or North Cyprus where L1 is Turkish. For this reason, students need other alternatives to be exposed to the Turkish Language (TL). Supporting in-class learning with outside learning is desired, but not attainable considering the community. An effective alternative to expanding the opportunities of exposure to language is through technology.

Technology is an inevitable and vastly developing concept in today’s world. Synchronous Computer Mediated Communication (SCMC) was first applied to students with hearing difficulties at Gallaudet University (Batson, 1988). The new generations are experts of these technologies and therefore seek opportunities to display their knowledge and skills in this area.

Students are harnessing their creativity to express themselves and demonstrate what they know using technology. The challenge for the twenty-first century teacher will be to find ways to allow them to do that. In today’s world, students are the creators, not simply consumers, of technology and technology-produced art and projects (Eaton, 2010, p. 14).

With respect to this, it can be argued that technology is a must in the language teaching industry and must be given its grounds for use. Students of language learning should not only be allowed to use technology while learning languages, but be encouraged to integrate it into their learning process. This can only be done with the guidance of the teacher and/or the institute as a whole. Students now tend to choose their schools according to the developments in technology which is offered by the institute. Therefore, the more advanced technologies used by a school, the more demand there will be on behalf of student enrolment. Like mentioned before, innovative technologies like synchronous tools implementation into the language learning process is a must for the industry. If you can’t beat it, join it!

Technology integrated language learning has been around since the 1950’s therefore must be implemented into the language classroom and learning process. It is what students spend most of their leisure time on outside the classroom. “It is almost inevitable to ignore the necessity of the Internet in educating the new generation who utilize it in every aspect of their life” (Kilimci, 2010, p. 108) .A classroom embarked from the outside world is a classroom relinquished from the real picture. Today’s generations are whizzes at ‘*googling*’ and ‘*yahooing*’ for any information they desire to reach. “By some accounts, students often spend about three hours per school day on the Internet. They may be surfing the Web, checking social networking sites, and chatting or e-mailing friends from their mobile devices or other Internet connections.” (Toffler, 2010, p. 34) “It has additionally been argued by Prensky 2001 and Tapscott 2008, that the brains of learners termed the Net Generation are wired differently; this new generation expect a constant stream of new media to stay alert and focused.” (Prensky 2001; Tapscott 2008). Hence, what once would need a long and stressful process to acquire, is now everyday business for the new generation. The world is merely at their fingertips and they do not hesitate to take advantage of it. They are keen to learn the newest technologies in all of its forms. Then why not interconnect the language classroom with the outside world? Showing the students an apple is an effective way to explain the word ‘*apple*’, but making students a part of the learning by letting them tap in the word and having an image appear on the screen is more intriguing and motivating. My intentions are not to demean the use of realia in language learning in this thesis. On the contrary, I am merely suggesting that the realia of today is technology. It is then the job of the teacher or on a larger scale, schools, to implement technology into their teaching. Synchronous communication (*i.e. Skype, italki, Messenger*, etc…) where authentic text, voice or video speaking can take place is a realia for speaking practice and would only be ignorance not to benefit from. “Recent innovations such as blogs, wikis, and VoIP may be less familiar, but they are powerful media for online language learning” (Antonella, 2006). At an age where many classrooms are using data projectors and use digital course books or in some cases, have interactive whiteboards, going the further step is inevitable. In contrast, some think that these new technologies are threatening the traditional ways of teaching and learning languages in that they are “disruptive technologies” (Jones, 2005, p. 10). These kind of technologies tend to lead to distractions in the learning process and lead learners elsewhere.

Learners can research and find new ways of doing familiar tasks via the internet especially through tools like Skype and Podcasting. They are free, efficient, interesting and most importantly the new generation. Therefore there is an exigent need to investigate ways in which oral proficiency for language learners can be developed in such a way that fits the learners of today. This thesis will suggest a modern approach to developing oral skills by implementing the synchronous tool, Skype into the language learning process.

**Aim of the Study**

This study aimed at assisting language learners through a modern approach. The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of how effective implementing a Skype-pal scheme into the learning process was on improving the oral skills, natural fluency and confidence in communicating of the EAP pre-intermediate level students at the Eastern Mediterranean University.

**Research Questions**

1. What are the effects of incorporating a Skype-pal scheme into the learning process of EAP students?
2. What are the views of the participants and the assisting researcher on incorporating a Skype-pal scheme into the learning process of EAP students?
3. Does the implementation of a Skype-pal scheme with semi-structured tasks improve the oral skills of EAP students?
4. Is there a significant difference in students’ achievements in the post-speaking test after the implementation of the Skype-pal scheme?

**Hypothesis**

If a well-structured Skype-pal scheme, where individual students are paired with students from another country at the same level to perform one-to-one semi-structured discussions, is implemented into the EAP (ENGL 181) learning process, then the EAP students will achieve a successful score on a post-speaking test. Furthermore, it is predicted that these students will develop in terms of oral fluency, confidence and communication skills.

**Significance of the Study**

Among other benefits, this study is significant in that it suggests a natural approach to developing oral proficiency. The research involves incorporating technology into the language process in a more natural occurrence. The learners of today are in a technology era, one of which all forms of communication is practiced through social networks and other internet resources. This study is suggesting the incorporation of social networks into the language learning process. Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has been practiced since the 1970’s, but incorporating the use of social networks into the language learning process is relatively new and needs more indulgence. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate and carry out research into the effects of implementing Skype into EAP classes to develop oral skills. CALL has been around for decades and so has technology. However, technology doesn’t stand where it is. The advancements in technology are difficult to keep up with and thus, language learning and teaching has emerged accordingly.

**Assumptions**

The desired outcome is for learners to perform healthy communication with their partners and have the opportunity to indulge in natural speaking circumstances. It is also assumed that learners will turn from controlled speaking tasks to natural speaking. Real communication takes place in real circumstances and it is the teacher’s duty to provide real opportunities for our students. Synchronous tools are a close-to-real communication experience for our students and should help develop students’ oral proficiency.

Semi-structured tasks were provided for the participants in order to promote conversation and this was aimed at giving pairs topics to talk about. The semi-structured tasks were formulated with the intentions to lead to real and more natural conversation. It was anticipated that the participants would turn to negotiation when trying to make plans and arrangements (which some of the task required). When trying to describe personal pictures, participants were expected to use a wide variety of language functions and structures in order to negotiate meaning. Negotiation skills are an important part of communication and are expected to occur naturally as a course of this study.

**Limitations**

With research that is dependent on a number of things such as technology, computers, software, etc., evidently there are a number of limitations. The main limitation throughout the entire research was internet connectivity. Without a doubt, in many circumstances, there was bad reception due to weather or technical problems of internet companies. This of course, changed the course of the study frequently. Adaptations were necessary in timetabling and eventually the design of the research was reconstructed. The research was originally designed in a controlled manner, where the researcher would be monitoring the students while they were ‘chatting’ with their partners. This needed to be carried out during working hours in order to be able to use central computer labs. Another arising problem in this respect was students’ timetables. It was difficult to arrange lab hours which suited all the students’ timetables and therefore the research evolved dramatically. Similarly, the students from China also had timetabling problems and a 6 hour time difference. Eventually, major adaptations were made in order for the pairs to be able to meet. The first meeting was done with the researcher present and participants were asked to introduce themselves and then arrange regular meeting times. This of course, was excellent speaking practice in itself. It required negotiation skills. Another problem which aroused throughout the study was the speaking tasks (**Appendix 3**). The speaking tasks were not always stimulating enough for the students to carry out natural conversations and in some pairs the conversation turned into question-answer sessions (interviews). In this case, pairs were advised to use the necessary task only as an ignition point and to progress as desired. Thus, semi structured tasks were absolutely vital in the case of discontinuation in communication. Not all participants were able to take initiation in communication and needed the assurance of having set tasks to turn to. Another limitation was the number of volunteers. Because the study was designed around a voluntary basis, an equal number of volunteers from both sides were difficult to maintain. In fact, at first very few students volunteered from the EAP course but many volunteered from the Chinese class. This was resolved with incentive scores and negotiation. The Chinese students were highly motivated, while the EAP students were not so confident and therefore lacked motivation. On the other hand, more students volunteered after the launch and were discouraged when they couldn’t be assigned with a partner. In these cases, the researcher transformed some pairs into groups of three. These pairs/groups were not used in the data collection or analysis sections.

**CHAPTER Π**

**Literature Review**

**English for Academic Purposes (EAP)**

Among other skills, reading academic texts is one of the most important skills that students at tertiary level need to attain (Dreyer & Nel, 2003). Before any output, students are required to accept input and for this they need to understand highly academic and scientific texts. After the receptive skills have been acquired, students need to adopt some productive skills like speaking and writing. These are usually dealt in EAP courses. English for Academic Purposes (EAP) are English courses designed to foster the academic needs of language learners.  “EAP entails training students, usually in a [higher education](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Higher_education) setting, to use language appropriately for study. It is a challenging and multi-faceted area within the wider field of [English language learning and teaching](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_language_learning_and_teaching) (ELT), and is one of the most common forms of [English for specific purposes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_for_specific_purposes) (ESP)” (Wikipedia, 2007). The EAP courses offered at the institute I work (EMU) are aimed at developing students’ academic skills mainly in terms of reading and writing bearing in mind that these are the most important skills requested by their departments. In her article on using current global issues in EAP teaching, Erkaya, 2008 suggests that EAP courses should include current global issues and designed a course using materials from newspapers, internet and English TV channels. After carrying out interviews with both the Electrical Engineering and Computer Engineering departments, Erkaya, felt that none of the EAP course books fitted their needs (reading, listening and speaking for discussions) and therefore designed an EAP course adequate to the needs of the two departments. The course was specifically designed for Electrical Engineering and Computer Engineering students and therefore involved elements from these two fields (Erkaya, 2008).

**Blended Learning**

“Blended learning is a coherent design approach that openly assesses and integrates the strengths of face-to-face and online learning to address worthwhile educational goals.” (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008, p. 10). A course can be considered Blended if 30-79% of its content is blended with an online element. Blended learning has been around as early as the late 1940’s and has developed and expanded throughout the years. Information technologies have conveyed changes to the paradigms of language education. A Blended learning approach is being used in all higher education and private colleges in North Cyprus. At EMU, many Blended learning approaches have been tried throughout the years. For example, the Longman interactive programme and self-designed MOODLEs have been experimented with. Freshman English courses also have a Blended learning element designed by experienced teachers in their syllabuses. The needs and characteristics of the learners should be taken into consideration when designing and implementing a Blended learning approach into your syllabus and therefore, it is usually better to design and use your own approaches rather than adopt other approaches. Designers should also establish learning content and analyze it in correspondence with the pre-determined learners’ characteristics and needs (Musawi, 2011).

Numerous research has been carried out on the effects of implementing a Blended learning element into the learning process of language learners. To mention just a few, in their study on the efficiency of an online programme within their current language programme at the English Preparatory School, Altas and Öngün (2010) found that the integration of Blended activities in their English programmes created positive effects on their students language development (Altas & Öngün, 2010). They found that, stronger and more motivated students benefited more from Blended programmes. According to Lee 2000, computer technologies can improve L2 skills in terms of dictionaries, encyclopedias, pronunciation clips, quizzes, games, and puzzles (Lee, 2000). However, it must not be foreseen that these technologies come with their limitations such as, high costs, connectivity and institutional attitudes.

**Technology in the English language classroom**

There are many factors which influence the use of technologies in the classroom or even the school you work in. Among cultural aspects, the way in which your institute views certain technologies and the confidence of teachers are important influential aspects of the use of technology in any institute (McDonough, Shaw, & Masuhara, 2013). For example, in China Facebook is prohibited, and students use a similar social network named ‘facekoo’. The Spanish use a social network named ‘tuenti’ and ‘orkut’, which was created by google is very popular in India and Brazil (Heller, 2011). In her article published on-line (Veira, 2013) divides uses of technology as ‘*digital natives*’ which refers to people born in today’s technology, for example our children or our students and ‘*digital immigrants*’ which refer to parents and teachers who were introduced to technology later on in their lives. This may also explain the phobias some teachers have towards technology and therefore refuse to use it in their classrooms.

Classrooms technologies started with the audio tape-recorder, language labs, television and videos in the 1960’s. This then was followed by the over-head projector, data projector and the internet. With the introduction of personal computers and laptops, language teaching has evolved drastically. The era of visuals have transformed from flashcards to podcasts, from audio/video cassettes to CD ROMS, from the overhead projector to the data projector, and then the internet. Since the birth of the internet, new technologies have also emerged. For example, e-mailing, chat programmes (like Yahoo or MSN), video conferencing programmes (like Skype or italk) are just a few of many. Of course, with the advancements in technology, language learning has gone the further step too. Videos can be directly downloaded from the net in the classroom. The advantage of this is that if a teacher needs to explain something and the class have difficulty in understanding it, they can find a picture from their local search engine or find a video explaining exactly what the necessary topic. This is especially good for exposure and to more language and in different contexts and styles. The computer is an additional teacher. An even further step was with the development of the interactive whiteboard. The interactive whiteboard combined with the internet has changed the way people view teaching and learning. However, along with its advantages, it brings with it it’s disadvantages. As mentioned before, teachers are among the immigrants of technology and the intelligent whiteboard is one tough cookie. For teachers who are not too comfortable with technology, the intelligent whiteboard is far-fetched. In his study on trying to uncover the negative attitudes towards the use of the intelligent whiteboard with 140 primary school teachers, Kilic, 2012 found that teachers tended to avoid the use of the interactive whiteboard in their lectures due to not having the necessary technical and pedagogical skills to use it (Kilic, 2012).

**Computer Technologies**

CALL, meaning Computer-Assisted Language Learning entered the EFL classrooms around the 1960’s in three different stages: *Behaviouristic CALL*; *communicative CALL*; and *integrative CALL* (Warschauer & Healey, 1998). The behaviouristic CALL was used for ‘repetitive language drills’, grammatical explanations and translations tests. The communicative CALL entered the ELT world in the 1970’s after the rejection of the behaviouristic CALL. The start of personal computers was also an influential factor of the communicative CALL taking over the behaviouristic CALL because it gave language learners the opportunities to work in their own individual space and at their own speed. The communicative CALL focused on communicative aspects of language learning such as *function* over *form*, *discovery* over *lecture*, *implicit grammar explanations* over *explicit grammar explanations*. The integrative CALL entered the ELT classroom in the late 1970’s with the development of the internet and need for a more socio-cognitive element in language learning. Students are introduced to a variety of technologies as an enduring process for an integration of all the skills in language learning (i.e. listening, speaking, reading writing). It can be seen that computers are not a new thing in the use of Language learning and with every new development in technology, there will be a new development in ELT.

Since the birth of web-based chat programmes, numerous research has been carried out on CMC varying from teacher strategies to classroom integration (Yanguas, 2010). Most of these researches have used the interactionist perspective (Blake, 2000; Darhower, 2002; Fernández-García & Martínez-Arbelaiz, 2002; Negretti, 1999; Pellettieri, 2000; Smith, 2003; Toyoda & Harrison, 2002; Tudini, 2003; Warner, 2004; Xie, 2002) and introduced CALL into language learning. While some of these researches proved to improve oral skills of participants, other research proved the opposite. Interesting, most of the research dealing with video-conferencing is related to distance learning and there is very limited research directly related to the integration of synchronous communication tools in the language learning process in order to develop oral proficiency.

**Asynchronous vs. Synchronous Technologies**

Firstly, let’s define asynchronous communication. Asynchronous communication is in some sense similar, but all that different to synchronous communication. While synchronous communication involves real time online communication, like a real conversation simultaneously in written or verbal form, asynchronous communication does not occur in real time but involves online communication. Sending an e-mail is asynchronous because the sender sends the e-mail at one point in time, however the receiver may not receive it at the same point in time (simultaneously). The transferring process is not simultaneous as with synchronous communication which could be best exemplified by *Skype*, or *MSN*. The main difference observed in these two forms of CMC is that synchronous communication is closer to the speaking form of communication, while asynchronous communication is closer to the writing form communication (Abrams, 2003b; Chun, 1994;Kern, 1995; Pellettieri, 2000; Smith, 2003;Vandergriff, 2006; Warschauer, 1996). Asynchronous type of communication is usually used in for enquiring purposes. For instance, students write e-mails to their instructors enquiring about a course, forums are another form of asynchronous communication, watching videos in their own time, while synchronous type of communication is used more for social purposes, for example *facebook* is the most commonly used social network media in Turkey and North Cyprus. It’s most common use is to chat with friends simultaneously or to inform each other about what they are doing at that point in time. Both types of CMC can be modified into the language classroom for different purposes. Some examples of asynchronous uses in the ELT environment are sending homework via e-mails (usually written assignments), teaching e-mailing to students and watching videos with follow-up tasks. These are the most common used types of asynchronous communication tools in the environment that I work in. Although there is not much research carried out on the comparison of asynchronous and synchronous, with the little knowledge at hand, it has been observed that “learners produced more interactive discourse” (Sotillo, 2000) and “more new words” (Perez, 2003) in synchronous communication compared to asynchronous communication. However, Sotillo also found that, learners seemed to create more complex sentences in asynchronous communication.

**Skype**

***What is Skype?*** Skype is just one of the many synchronous communication tools available for audio conferencing worldwide. It was launched in July 2004 in Luxemburg by Niklas Zennström as a free, downloadable voice text communication tool where it is also possible to send and receive files, just like e-mails. It is usually used from computer to computer but with the latest developments, mobile phones can also use Skype. Hence, it can be used from computer to mobile phone, mobile phone to computer and mobile phone to mobile phone. Of course, computers and mobile phones must have Skype downloaded and installed on their hard drives in order to benefit from these services. Being a completely free communication service, Skype has revolutionized tele-communicating as well as video communication around the world. It is also possible to have conference calls with up to 5 people simultaneously. SkypeOut is a sub-programme of Skype, where users pay a minimum amount to obtain a phone line in which they can call non-Skype users. Basically, it functions as a normal landline but with considerably reduced costs.

Skype can run with Windows,, Linux, Mac OS X, or PocketPC. It is extremely easy to install and use as well as safe, considering it requires no personal information for registration. The only thing that is required is a username and a password. Skype can be used in conjunction with ‘Mixxer,’ which is an educational programme designed specifically for people to find partners in order to practice language. This works similar to a blog where everyone can view the blog and choose to create a partnership with whoever they feel fits their purposes. The general Skype page, on the other hand, is more general and you need to have the contact acceptance of the other person in order to be able to start a Skype call.

Skype aims to enhance communication among current contacts and hence, people who are not on your contact list cannot harass or disturb you unless you accept them as with MSN or Facebook. One of the major benefits of Skype is that it is accessible to anyone with its’ face-to-face and texting options. It is a great way to build speaking and/or discussion groups which compliments to in-class language learning and “this a great tool for group discussions and collaborative work.” (Antonella, 2006, p. 270).

***Why Skype?*** Skype is the most widely used synchronous communication tool in the world. The following table represents the comparison of some features of four freely available audio-conferencing tools from (ECML, 2011):

**Table** 1

***Four freely available audio-conferencing tools***

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Audio conferencing tools | Maximum no. participants | Audio technology | Audio capabilities | Sessions recordable |
| Skype | 26 | Full duplex[[2]](#footnote-2) | yes (free for up to two participants; pay version required for conference calls) | yes (by means of call recording software) |
| Google Talk | 2 | Full duplex | Yes | No |
| Elluminate v Room | 3 | Half duplex[[3]](#footnote-3) | Yes | No |
| FlashMeeting | 30 | Half duplex | Yes | yes (sessions automatically recorded) |

I have selected Skype based on these statistics and the fact that it is easy to install and can work with different operating systems. Due to its “widespread popularity and ease of use” (ECML, 2011) Skype is the choice of tool for many language teachers.

***How are teachers using Skype?*** Technology has been incorporated into the classroom for many years. As mentioned before, since e-mailing, technology has been an innovation and interest in language learning. With the developments in technology, the developments of language teaching and learning have also advanced. Synchronous communication tools such as Skype have been the focus of many research papers, which will be mentioned later. Teachers have integrated Skype into their classes for many reasons. Some are showing lectures to their classes, using Skype as an aid to their own subject. Others are setting up structured or non-structured face-to-face sessions for their students and using it for distance learning. It seems like there are a lot of research studies focusing on the use of technology for language learning purposes in the literature. However, this paper will focus on the implementation of using Skype as a tool to develop oral language skills of EFL students because as Yang and Chang (2008) explain, “SCMC also provides excellent opportunities for students to practise their English with flexibility of time and place and for instructors to mentor and evaluate students’ oral proficiency” (p. 721)

Another motivation could be its integration into the curriculum. Many teachers around

the world are actively experimenting with internet telephony in English as Foreign Language (EFL) classes as Skype can be used for communicating and sharing files and can be used as a tool to facilitate small group class projects or small discussion forums. (Antonella, 2006, p. 272)

Moreover, Skype is an authentic way of promoting natural conversations in circumstances where it may not be possible. For instance, in my teaching context where students usually share the same L1, creating a natural speaking context is very difficult and often extremely artificial. CMC provides an authentic speaking context similar to that of a natural face-to-face conversation where speech is visual and spontaneous (Wang, 2004a, 2004b, as cited in Xiao, 2007).

**SCMC in Language Learning**

***Is it really useful?*** Research in the field of CMC in foreign language teaching/learning is nothing new and has been around for quite some time. The comparison of CMC and face-to-face (F2F) goes as far back as the 1990’s where (Chun, 1994; Kern, 1995; Warschauer, 1996) corroborated increased participation and performance by learners in the computer-assisted classes compared to the teacher-fronted classes they were studying at the time. As discussed earlier, different SCMC tools have been integrated into classroom teaching and learning in different ways. Yet, not all of these applications were successful. Yang & Chang (2008) carried out a research using Skype in their classes to examine the effectiveness of students practicing oral English proficiency using voice-based SCMC structured discussions. In their research, they compared two groups (structured and non-structured) where the structured group was given structured topics and tasks and the non-structured group was given no specific topics to discuss or any tasks to do (free) on Skype. A pre-post experimental design was used to determine students’ oral proficiency. Interestingly, no statistically significant differences were found between the structured and non-structured groups (Yang & Chang, 2008). Although this study provides a background on how to structure language activities in EFL classrooms, it does not tell us whether the implementation of a tandem Skype scheme may actually reinforce oral fluency or not.

Further research demonstrating uncertainty of benefits of using SCMC in the foreign language classroom was carried out by Yanguas (2010). The research aimed to compare three aspects of language learning: video conferencing (VidCMC), audio conferencing (AudCMC) and face-to-face (FTF) interaction in their effectiveness of developing oral proficiency. Participants of the study were selected among learners of Spanish. An interchanging difference was seen in different aspects of the study. For example, the VidCMC group seemed to perform better in turn-taking, while the AudCMC group performed better in lexical transformations. Additionally, the FTF group showed a relatively high percentage in negotiation routines (Yanguas, 2010). The research methodology was designed meticulously with careful consideration of selection of participants and structured tasks being used in all three groups. A drawback of this research, however, is that the tasks were not authentic and realistic in all three contexts and therefore, vague results were found. For example, the jigsaw task (**Appendix 3**) may be performed with ease in the VidCMC and FTF context, conversely, not so authentic and somewhat awkward in the AudCMC context. When designing speaking tasks for VidCMC, AudCMC and FTF contexts, authenticity is important in that a task can only be authentic in its authentic context. VidCMC and FTF almost share the same perspective. AudCMC, on the other hand, is totally different. It is similar to having a conversation on the phone. The discourse in such conversations is different in many ways as are gestures. I believe that AudCMC should not have been a part of this research in order to obtain a vibrant scope.

The Open University Project (Hauck & Haezewindt, 1999; Kötter, Shield & Stevens, 1999; Shield, Hauck & Hewer, 2001, as cited in Xiao, 2007) also carried out a study on using SMCS in language learning. Pairs were assigned tasks such as ‘*role-plays*’ and similar familiar tasks. However, this study did not involve visual (video) input and based their study on audio-conferencing which was found to be beneficial for learners, however not as effective as video-conferencing.

***Are there any benefits?*** Studies of L2 have shown that online conferencing develops and improves second language acquisition. In these studies, it seems that (a) students generate more complex utterances in chat-rooms than in face-to-face conversational contexts (Kern, 1995; Warschauer, 1996, as cited in Payne & Whitney, 2002), (b) the ‘shyer students contribute more in an on-line environment, sometimes even more than the ‘talkative’ students ’(Warschauer, 1996; Kern, 1995; Chun, 1994, as cited in Payne & Whitney, 2002), and (c) positive attitudes were fostered towards language learning (Warschauer, 1996; Kern, 1995; Chun, 1994, as cited in Payne & Whitney, 2002).

Tam, Kan & NG (2010) carried out a study to compare negotiation routines between high proficiency and low proficiency students in a CMC context and a face-to-face context. Fundamentally, the research aimed to provide a detailed evaluation of the effect of the synchronous computer-assisted (SCA) environment on the linguistic performance of low proficiency learners by pairing them up with high proficiency learners. (Tam, Kan, & NG, 2010). They found empirical evidence that the SCA environment offers an additional context for communicative language practice, particularly for low proficiency learners. Although the authors pointed out that the implementation of technology, in this case SCA, could not replace face-to-face communication, it was evident that it was beneficial to language learning experiences of the participants.

Positive results were collated from the MERILIN project by the University of Hull and British Telecommunications in 1996, as cited in Xiao, 2007. They carried out research with an Intermediate English as a Foreign Language (EFL) course. Various tasks were assigned to groups of students using video conferencing where the interactions were recorded using a special software.

In his research on using synchronous computer-mediated communication to develop vocabulary of French and Russian learners at tertiary level, (Sahin, 2009) found that with only 6 chat sessions, learners improved their vocabulary significantly.

Another research carried out by Payne & Whitney (2002), which was based on Levelt’s model of language production[[4]](#footnote-4), indicates that SCMC or chatting in a second language can indirectly develop oral proficiency in second language acquisition. Like with Tam, Kan & NG (2010), a quasi-experimental method where a pretest and posttest of two experimental and two sample groups was applied. There was a significant difference between the experimental groups and the sample groups. The experimental groups (using SCMC) had shown a vast improvement in oral proficiency. An interesting and intriguing aspect of this study was that the researchers not only showed that SCMC empirically develops oral proficiency but they questioned the reasons of this improvement and sought to understand the characteristics of normal ‘conversation’ which occurred during these chats.

Xiao’s (2007) research on the effects of interaction with native speakers through internet-based video-conferencing on language learners’ language proficiency has provided evidence that video-conferencing is in fact a valuable source to develop oral skills. In his dissertation, Xiao (2007) aimed to compare an experimental group where participants (non-native) were paired with native speakers of English in an internet-based format to a control group where participants (non-native) were paired with non-native speakers of English in a traditional format (non-internet-based). The period of the study was 10 weeks. A significant difference was found in the interactional pattern of participants in the experiment group compared to the participants in the control group (Xiao, 2007). Results collated from the interviews and questionnaires following the experiment demonstrated that the internet environment created s more comfortable and spontaneous environment for students to interact with native speakers. Xiao also conveyed in his study that learners developed their language proficiency in terms of fluency and accuracy. Having the opportunity to interact with native speakers in an on-line context proved to increase and develop oral proficiency of EFL learners. Yet, this result can also be expected from face-to-face interaction with native speakers considering it would incorporate a force factor in communication weather on-line or face-to-face. The problem is, how can we create such circumstances in contexts that are less fortunate? Where native-speakers aren’t present or even possible to obtain? Essentially, the research methodology seemed tainted in the sense that comparing two groups where one group was paired with native-speakers wasn’t a fair comparison due to the obvious benefits of interacting with native speakers. The research results were in some sense, obvious.

**ELT and Technology in Turkey and North Cyprus**

Technology has been an important part of language teaching in Turkey and North Cyprus for decades. Since technology has been introduced into the world in many areas such as agriculture and industry, education has also been influenced by the needs and demands of society. According to (Keating, 2005), schools are merely following the needs and demands of the society. As with the industrial and agricultural revolution, education has also made a breakthrough with technology. However, as with many places, Turkey too found to transaction very difficult to maintain due to the need for sever changes to the curriculum with the integration of technology. According to Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2007, the reason for schools slow acceptance of technology can be due to the robust opposition of teachers towards technology. (Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2007). The fear of change has and still is an aspect of teaching that will be cause for conflicting opinions for innovations for years to come. With its advantages, change also comes with it’s drawbacks and this create concern among teachers. Will the change facilitate learning or will it just be another distractor for the learners and extra work for the teachers? These are the views of some if not many of my colleagues. “While many studies have demonstrated the advantages of using computer **technology** in foreign **language classrooms**, many post-secondary foreign **language** (FL) teachers still remain reluctant to **use technology** in instruction” (Kauze, 2011). Technology implementation also depends on cultural aspects. Some cultures are more open to change, whereas some view change more cautiously. The Turkish Cypriot culture (especially in the environment that I work), like the comfort of stability. This is viewed in not only the field of education, but also other aspects of the culture (*i.e.* political, career, Law, etc.). This comes from North Cyprus being a small island. Therefore it is difficult to find much research carried out in this field.

The implementation of a Blended learning approach starts from the very beginning of entrance to EMU. Learners are primarily introduced with online supplements at the English Preparatory School where they are required to fulfil language tasks online which are assessed. This continues in the departmental English courses with MOODLE. The MOODLE is a software programme where students register as a class and carry out certain tasks in order to be rewarded 10 points. These online tasks are related to the courses and departments they are in. The main problem with these type of integrated tasks, is that many teachers are not confident with using technology and therefore this creates problems. In their research on the perspectives of language teachers using technology at the English Preparatory School, EMU, Guneyli, Ozgur & Zeki, 2009 found that the majority of teachers stated that they used computers mainly for administrative purposes, while the minority used computers in the classroom for teaching purposes (Guneyli, Ozgur, & Zeki, 2009). The findings showed that the majority of teachers relied on traditional teaching methods, while the minority preferred more innovative approaches.

Blended learning is not only an important aspect of tertiary education in North Cyprus, but also a vital element in private Secondary schools. Many private High Schools are using online portfolios starting from Primary school and continuing on to Secondary school.

**Conclusion and discussion**

It has been discussed for years and decades that the best way to learn anything is “doing” it. The classroom context is not always the real thing and the closest we can get to providing exposure to authentic language for our students is the internet environment. Among other synchronous communication tools Skype is recognizably the most world-wide used for synchronous communication. With its increasing popularity, quality and the fact that it is absolutely free and easy to register into, Skype is a recommended tool to use in language learning. Whatever tool is used, the essential factor is to use SCMC to enhance and develop oral skills in respect to creating an authentic environment for students to contribute to their learning. All the research carried out on using SCMC in language learning has enlightened us only to a certain degree. There are many unanswered and un-researched areas of SCMC in the field of language teaching which have yet to be resolved. Of course, the obvious question would be ‘will SCMC take over traditional methods of teaching in the future?’ Who knows, maybe. Nonetheless I believe that students always need access to an expert, the teacher, who is educated and trained in their field to guide them because learning a language is challenging and should not be dependent on one source.

**CHAPTER III**

**Methodology**

**Research Design**

A case study involving a group of seven participants from North Cyprus and seven Participants from China were studied to maintain insight into the influence of using the synchronous communication tool Skype to improve oral proficiency of EAP course students whose level of English range from low pre-intermediate to intermediate. The ‘case study’ was the best option for this study, given that the aim of the research was to analyze multiple aspects and views of the implementation of a Skype-pal scheme to improve oral proficiency of language learners, rather than just results obtained from tests or questionnaires. Like Nunan mentioned in his book *Research Methods in Language Learning* “case studies are ‘hybrid’ because they not only focus on a specific aspect of research, but rather a mixture of approaches of gathering and examining data.” (Nunan, 1992). In the case of this study, multiple features of data was collated and analyzed in a qualitative manner. Furthermore, considering the fact that this was an action-research, the ‘case study’ was the most preeminent method for research. With consideration to the fact that the participants were on a voluntary basis, the ‘case study’ approach was the most suitable for the study.

Stenhouse, 1983 (cited in Qi, 2009) identifies four types of case study; the first is *neo-ethnography* which is when the researcher is also a participant. The second is the *evaluative* which is when a single or group of participants are studied in depth. The third is *multi-site* which iswhen a team of people work in depth to gather data from different sites and may consist of an integration of other methods, such as the ethnography method. The fourth is *teacher research* which is for larger groups, such as an entire class or school where teachers are used as assisting researchers. This type of research is somewhat similar to experimental research in that some kind of manipulation occurs to an experimental group which is then compared to the findings of a controlled group. However, a ‘case study’ research doesn’t aim to compare a controlled group with a manipulated group, but rather analyze behavior and views of participants in depth. One of the primary problems regarding this method of research is reliability and validity. It is easy to discuss the reliability of a T-test or an ANOVA score. It is less likely to question the validity of statistical data like with experimental research. Justifications of numbers are concrete, while the justification of observations and interviews may seem subjective and abstract. Yet, Yin, 1984 (cited in Qi, 2009) believes that reliability and validity are equally complex and vital in case studies. He proposes four aspects which promote validity and reliability for case studies:

1. Construct validity (establishing correct operational measures for the concepts being studied)

2. Internal validity (establishing a casual relationship, whereby certain conditions are shown to lead to other conditions, as distinguished from spurious relationships)

3. External validity (establishing the domain or population to which a study’s findings can be generalized)

4. Reliability (demonstrating that the study can be replicated with similar results) Yin, 1984 (cited in Qi, 2009)

Keeping in mind that the focus of the study is to obtain insight into the implementation of the synchronous tool Skype into the language learning process in order to develop oral skills of language learners and then subsequently suggest improvements to the language curriculum of the institute which I fork for.

**The Case**

A group of 7 volunteers were selected from the chosen course of EAP, and were all given a level test to specify what their levels were in terms of language structure (grammar, vocabulary and reading) (See **Appendix 4**). This was for the purpose of pairing participants according to their language competence. Inadequate pairing would and in some cases did cause miscommunication and could change the course of the study. The volunteers were then individually put through a B1 level City & Guilds spoken examination by the researcher (**Appendix 5**). Tables 2 and 3 represent the participants’ fake names and gender, level test scores, spoken examination scores and also provides a brief description of the students’ profile.

The next step was to gather volunteers from China where a colleague of mine was working at the Zhejiang Gongshang University for one semester teaching English to freshman students. The same process was carried out with the volunteering participants. An identical level test was administered approximately at the same time as with the EAP EMU participants. Following this, the identical B1 level City & Guilds spoken examination used for the EAP EMU participants was used for the Chinese participants. The moderation and standardization of the criteria (**Appendix 6**) for the B1 City & Guilds spoken examinations was done via Skype with my colleague to ensure reliability. The following table represents the Chinese participants’ level test scores, spoken examination scores and also provides a brief description of the students’ profiles.

Considering the participants were on a volunteer basis, age, gender and level were very difficult to adjust. However, the best was made of the situation at hand and pairing was established with careful consideration of students’ test scores and profiles in collaboration with my colleague in China. This was necessary for the smooth running of the study.

**Participants** There were 14 participants in total and all participants were accepted into the study on a voluntary basis. The following two tables represent the seven EMU EAP participants (Table 1) and the seven Chinese participants (Table 2).

**Table 2:** ***EMU******EAP participants***

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Name of participants** | **Participant’s profile** | **Level test** | **City & Guilds B1 spoken examination** |
| John / M | He is from Palestine. His spoken English is at a minimum level with a low range of vocabulary but is able to transfer message. He is shy and speaks in a low voice. His writing ability is rated at a pre-intermediate level. | 65 T  22 B  23 E  14 P  6 I | 6/10 |
| Tony / M | He is from Oman. He is native speaker of English with a rich range of vocabulary and grammar. His writing is as good as his speaking. However, his main concern is, he is extremely shy and therefore lacks communication skills. He specifically volunteered with the aim to improve his communication skills and confidence. | 92 T  25 B  23 E  23 P  21 I | 8/10 |
| Andy / M | He is from Turkey. He is a poor communicator with very limited vocabulary and grammar. His writing is at a low pre-intermediate level. However, he is eager to communicate. | 40 T  15 B  12 E  8 P  5 I | 4/10 |
| Matt / M | He is from Turkey. He is a slow but average communicator. He has limited vocabulary and grammar. His writing is at a pre-intermediate level. He is eager to communicate and is able to transfer the message most of the time. | 50 T  19 B  14 E  10 P  7 I | 5/10 |
| Sandra / F | She is from Turkey. She is a poor communicator, but is confident. She manages to transfer the message with a little struggle. Her vocabulary and grammar skills are at an average but mainly in writing where she is rather good. She is at a low intermediate level. | 44 T  17 B  14 E  8 P  5 I | 4/10 |
| Sam / M | He is from Turkey. A very confident communicator, but has trouble in expressing his opinion. Likes to explain things for clarification but tends to have grammar problems. Vocabulary is limited but supports this with his confidence in clarification. He is a creative writer, but with grammar problems. He is a low intermediate in writing. | 59 T  19 B  17 E  13 P  10 I | 4/10 |
| Suzanne / F | She is from Turkey. She is confident, but has some grammar problems. Her vocabulary is limited and she is a pre-intermediate level in language. She is able to transfer the message, but sometimes with difficulty. Her writing is simple, but creative at a low pre-intermediate level. | 66 T  22 B  20 E  15 P  9 I | 4/10 |

**Table 3:** ***Chinese participants***

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Name of Chinese participant** | **Participant’s Profile** | **Level test** | **City & Guilds B1 spoken examination** |
| Lois / F | Her language and vocabulary are at a pre-intermediate level. She is a good writer but has problems with spelling. She can express her-self with minor hesitation, but she is shy and reserved. | 68 T  22 B  20 E  16 P  10 I | 6/10 |
| Green / F | A strong communicator with high confidence. She is eager to improve her communication skills and volunteered for the sole purpose of practice. Her grammar and vocabulary levels are at an intermediate level. She is a creative writer with minor spelling mistakes. | 88 T  25 B  22 E  23 P  18 I | 8/10 |
| Constance / F | A good communicator with some grammar problems. An average range of vocabulary. A good writer but has many spelling mistakes. She has confidence problems and aims to improve her communication skills in this study. | 67 T  22 B  20 E  17 P  8 I | 5/10 |
| Renesmea / F | Very eager to communicate. She can transfer her message with ease, but has limited vocabulary. Her language and writing skills are at a low intermediate level. Spelling mistakes are notable. | 70 T  23 B  20 E  17 P  10 I | 6/10 |
| Carol / F | Confident communicator. Has some grammar problems but manages to transfer the message. Limited vocabulary but can use them well. She is a creative writer with spelling mistakes. | 69 T  23 B  22 E  18 P  6 I | 6/10 |
| Lydia / F | She is a confident communicator with a wide range of vocabulary. Her language is at an intermediate level and can express herself with ease. However, she has notable pronunciation problems which enable effect understanding at times. | 74 T  25 B  22 E  20 P  10 I | 5/10 |
| Coco / F | She is extremely shy with adequate vocabulary. Her language is at a high pre-intermediate level and can express herself adequately. She has some pronunciation problems which causes communication breakdown at times. | 68 T  25 B  21 E  14 P  8 I | 5 / 10 |

B, E, P and I from the ‘Level test’ column stand for the number of correct responses the student scored from the specific level. So, if a student scored 25B, this means that he or she scored 25 Beginners items correctly. If a student scores 22E, this means that he or she scores 22 Elementary items correctly. Each level had 25 items which makes a total of 100. The ‘T’ in the ‘Level test’ column represents the total score out of 100.

T – Total E – Elementary I – Intermediate

B –Beginner P – Pre-intermediate

**Data Collection**

Data was collated from a variety of resources. With the consideration that the study was based on a qualitative research, most of the data was gathered from one on one interviews, close observations of participants while interacting on Skype and the analysis of student journals. A comparison of pre and post spoken examination results were also analyzed and compared.

**Instruments**

***Observations*.** EMU participants began their Skype sessions in an assigned computer lab in the university on different days of the week according to their timetables. However, due to China being six hours ahead of Cyprus time, they worked from their dormitories from their personal laptops. With careful consideration of time difference and student timetables, arranging appropriate meeting times for both participants was maintained. EMU participants needed to be online at noon, which meant during school hours, whilst it was required for the Chinese participants to be online at later hours due to the time difference. This was not a constraint for the first few sessions. However, after the second week, it became a genuine obstacle to sustain regular meeting times. What is more, in several occasions, participants were abandoned online. They came online, but their partner did not meet them. The only solution apparent at the time was to allow all participants to work from home, from their personal laptops in their own times. The sessions commenced in a home to home manner. Participants switched on as soon as they found the opportunity and once they found their partner on-line they performed their tasks. Considering all uncertainties, the few observations that were carried out will be discussed in Chapter III in the Findings section.

***Pre/Post speaking tests.*** The B1 level City & Guilds spoken examination (**Appendix 5**) was used before any pairing was established. Hence, the exact same examination was subsequently used after the duration of the project. This examination consisted of four sections and was carried out by the researcher on an Interlocutor-Candidate (I-C) basis. In the first section the participants were required to answer some personal questions from a range of areas within a limited time frame. Task two was a role-play where the interlocutor read out a situation and the candidate responded accordingly. This task was repeated for a second time. Task three was a negotiation discussion task where the candidate and the interlocutor were required to ask and answer questions to make a mutual decision on a given subject. The fourth and final task required the participants to talk on their own. They were required to talk on a given topic for about a minute. The same spoken examination was carried out with the Chinese participants with the assisting researcher acting as the interlocutor.

***Interviews.*** In the view of the fact that, the research was grounded in the vicinity of a qualitative approach, the interviews were the heart of the research. The interview questions (**Appendix 7**) were carefully formulated considering all aspects of the study. They were designed to create natural speech through natural circumstances. The EMU participants’ interviews were held and recorded by the main researcher while the interviews with the Chinese participants were carried out by assisting researcher with the respect that they would feel more comfortable with this researcher. All interviews were then transcribed and analyzed by the main researcher.

***Student journals.*** All Participants were asked to keep journals with some basic questions in mind throughout the Skype process. They were asked to record the date and time of their sessions and answer the following questions briefly:

1. What did you learn about your partner from this session?
2. Were the tasks interesting? Why/why not?
3. What difficulties did you face (if any)?

These journals were then collated and coded in terms of common occurrence by the main researcher.

**Validity & Trustworthiness**

The B1 City & Guilds Spoken examination was a valid means of measurement in respect that it is an internationally recognized examination. Being an official center for the City & Guilds examinations, the Eastern Mediterranean University staff is equipped to administer these examinations. It is therefore safe to say that, the administration of the pre and post spoken examinations were valid. To strengthen the argument further, both researchers standardized by grading pre-recorded (via video) international exams both before the pre and post examinations. This again, ensured the validity of the administration of these tests.

With the consideration that the study was dependent on qualitative data, student journals were a valid form of analysis. In accordance to these, the analysis of transcribed interviews, were also a valid source of measurement.

**Reliability**

Both researchers were in close contact via Skype and held regular online meetings to ensure the smooth running of the project. For example, at times when students would not or could not meet, the researchers would make the necessary contacts to ensure full participation on behalf of the participants. This necessitated that the researchers had to stimulate participants to go online at times, this was vital for the smooth running of the study. Participants would get discouraged when their partners did not go online.

Participants were paired according to their language competence to ensure interaction would take place. This was done through many methods such as, a level test, a pre-spoken examination, profile checks which were obtained by their class teachers. These findings were closely discussed by both teachers/researchers and hence, pairing was maintained in a reliable manner.

To enable reliability in this study, the researcher chose and used an internationally recognized spoken examination, the B1 City & Guilds Spoken examination. The scoring of the pre and post speaking examinations were carried out by the same examiners (with a set criteria), which was standardized before both examinations by both examiners. This again, created a reliable foundation for the test scores.

All interviews were carried out in the same room by the same researcher in order to discard any atmospheric effects. Interviews were recorded and transcribed for proof of analysis. Participants’ journals were analyzed on a no-name basis and coded by the main researcher and the researcher 2 to generate reliable analysis.

A paired T-test was carried out to calculate the differences of the pre and post speaking examination test scores in order to enhance the study in statistical terms.

In order to main trustworthiness in this study, considering that I was the English teacher of EMU participants at the time of the research but not in any kind of relationship with the Chinese participants, the assisting researcher was used in the interviews to create an equal setting and atmosphere during the interviews and the administration of the pre and post speaking examinations. In this way, the Chinese participants also had the equal treatment of being tested and interviewed by their own teacher like with the EMU participants.

**Procedures**

The study was conducted for the duration of a semester. There are 18 weeks in a semester, 4 weeks for mid-terms and final exams which leaves 14 weeks for tasks. In total, four months-worth of data was collected and analyzed. Once the necessary pre-data was collected and the pairing was established, both the EMU EAP participants and Chinese participants were asked to add the researcher on Skype. The adding process took longer than desired and enabled a healthy kick-off. As participants added the researcher on Skype, the researcher assigned pairs and had them add each other. Groups were established for each pair in which the researcher could send mutual messages to pairs or the entire group as required. Launch occurred a week before the mid-term exams and therefore only an introduction session was required before midterms. Some pairs managed to start earlier than others and therefore had more contact hours than others. As pairs were allocated the procedures of the study was as follows;

* Computer labs were reserved for the purpose of the study.
* The first four sessions were in the university computer labs and were monitored and observed by the researcher. Unfortunately, due to the six hour time difference, this wasn’t possible for the Chinese participants.
* Participants were only required to meet and introduce each other for the first meeting, (short 15-20 minute meeting). In this session, students were required to set up regular meeting times, preferably twice a week.
* Pairs faced problems with setting up convenient times to match their Chinese partners. Therefore, the researcher collected all timetables and suggested each pair with convenient days and times, sincerely considering the six hour time difference. This timetabling process prolonged the study undesirably.
* Once the first meeting sessions were carried out, all pairs were grouped on Skype and the researcher informed each pair that they were required to keep short journals throughout the study. The necessary guidelines mentioned in the Methodology chapter under the Instruments section, were sent to each pair through Skype.
* After close observation and discussions with EMU EAP participants, it was decided for all pairs to continue their sessions from home on their personal computers. They felt uncomfortable video conferencing in a computer lab with other students close by.
* Observations continued in an online environment. The researcher was constantly online, in close contact with all participants and assisted when necessary.
* Tasks were sent through Skype to individual pairs as required (**Appendix 3)**. Some pairs meet more frequently than others. Some pairs preferred to talk about other things and therefore used the tasks later on in the study.
* This continued until the end of the semester, just before the final exams.
* The researcher carried out the B1 City & Guilds spoken examination during the last week of classes with the EMU EAP participants and scored each participant according to the criteria used in the pre-test.
* Standardization with assisting researcher was established as with the pre-test and the same process was carried out by assisting researcher with the Chinese students in China simultaneously.
* Participants’ journals were collated after the final exams, before they left for their countries.
* Interviews were carried out at the beginning of the new semester by the researcher on different occasions by appointment. The interviews followed each other in a period of one week and all took place in the same location.
* All data was composed and analyzed by the main researcher and the assistant researcher where necessary. Close observations of the EMU EAP participants were made by the main researcher. Whereas, a minimal amount of observations were made by the assistant researcher in China with the Chinese participants due to the Chinese participants having done the process from home (dorms), and therefore, close observations were not possible. There were other outside limitations that enabled close observations of these participants, some of which involved the assistant researcher (my colleague) being unaccustomed to the country, transportation, internet access, time and administrative aspects. However, minimal observations and constant feedback was accomplished. The spoken examinations were carried out and scored by both the main researcher and the assistant researcher. After standardization meetings (via Skype) both researchers carried out and scored their own students. The interviews were correspondingly performed by both researchers, each interviewing their own students. This data was principally analyzed by the main researcher but also shared with the assisting researcher for feedback. Only the EMU EAP participants held student journals in which the main researcher analyzed.
* A paired T-test was carried out to calculate the differences between the pre and post test scores.

**CHAPTER IV**

**Findings**

**Introduction**

This study was divided into two semesters where the first semester was dedicated to the action research in which the researcher closely observed and remained in the background unless interference was necessary. The second semester was dedicated to data collation and analysis. Four main sources of analysis were collated in this study. All data was reviewed and analyzed by the researcher with the necessary help of the assisting researcher (researcher 2).

**Effects of incorporating a Skype-pal scheme into the learning process of EAP students**

***Interviews***: Genuine insight was concluded from the participant’s interviews and therefore it can be said that these interviews are indeed the heart of the data analysis chapter. Very interesting and diverse results were collated from the interviews. In order to maintain a variety of data from the study, different perspectives were interviewed and analyzed. All of the EMU participants were interviewed with the same set of questions (**Appendix** 7). However, not all the Chinese participants were interviewed due to communication reasons. The assisting researcher needed to return to Cyprus due to contractual reasons and therefore face to face interviews were not possible. However, eventually most of the Chinese participants were eventually interviewed via Skype by the assisting researcher. Finally, the assisting researcher was interviewed with a different set of questions (**Appendix 8**) by the main researcher. This section will be divided into three parts; EMU participants, Chinese participants and the teacher of the Chinese participants.

***EMU Participants.*** The interviews with the EMU participants were carried out by the main researcher. Each participant was given an appointment within the same timeframe to enable inconsistency among the responses. All interviews were recorded with the same device to maintain equal sound quality and distractions which were thenceforth transcribed by the researcher. All interviews lasted approximately 20 minutes. The items in the interview will be discussed individually to retain a logical order in this section:

1. Did you enjoy the process? Why? Why not?

All EMU participants presented positive responses to this item. The most common reason was that they were particularly excited to meet someone from a completely diverse culture. It was interesting to note that the majority of participants enjoyed the fact that their partners were from China. The Chinese culture seemed to be a common attraction for the EMU participants. In fact, six out of seven participants discretely stated that the reason they volunteered for the project was that their partner would be from China. Two participants out of seven stated that speaking with someone from a different culture, as well as the opposite sex, was a motivational aspect for them. Another common response was that after the first few sessions with their partners, nearly all EMU participants felt very comfortable in interacting and in time, comfortable with the language. They pointed out that, making verbal mistakes were an obstacle at the beginning and created communication breakdown, but after a few sessions, these fears disappeared. Six out of seven EMU participants mentioned that they believe their communication skills have developed and they interact with their teachers and professors in their departmental courses with more ease now. Three participants out of the seven believe that their grammar and vocabulary skills have improved as well. Interestingly, two participants out of the seven indicated that their relationships with their friends have improved too. They claim that they are more comfortable when meeting new friends and relate this to the study. Tony claims that he can now approach people with less hesitation.

1. Were you able to meet twice a week on a scheduled time? Why? Why not?

Out of the seven participants, three met regularly and four did not meet the required two times a week. Two participants met more than twice a week. Occasional stand-ups were also noted in the interviews. Two participants claimed that their partners were not on-line at the specified hours and therefore, they couldn’t accomplish regular meetings. Another two participants stated that they were on-line every day after school, but their partners rarely came on-line. Consequently, three participants did not have regular meeting times, as arranged, and went on-line whenever they had free time. This stimulated more chat time than the arranged twice a week. To summarize the responses for this question, it can be said that 60 % of the EMU participants were able to meet for the minimum amount with the similar reason of not finding their partner on-line.

1. Did you meet more than the necessary amount?

As stated before, three EMU participants stated that they met more than the required two times a week. This meant that these pairs were able to interact more than the other pairs. This is an outcome that was desired when designing this study. It was hoped that students meet more than the necessary amount on their own free will. If three pairs out seven met more than the required amount, this means that 40-45% of the pairs met more than the necessary amount on their own free will.

1. Were you able to speak for minimum 30 minutes? If no, why?

Five out of the seven EMU participants specified that they spoke for 30 minutes or more for each session. The remaining two participants stated that they couldn’t speak for 30 minutes and in fact, both of these participants claimed that they couldn’t understand their partners.

1. Were the tasks interesting? Why? Why not?

One participant out of the seven EMU participants believed that the tasks prevented real interaction due to the fact that they were in question-answer format. This made the tasks less interesting because, the questions killed the natural aspect of communication and led to one person controlling the conversation.

Tony: *“It was like. I ask the question and Green answers, all the time. She was just giving short answers. I think she felt uncomfortable with me asking questions all the time”*

However, the participant also added that the tasks were interesting because some of them necessitated research into their own country and culture which created grounds for discussion. The further six participants thought that most of the tasks were suitable because they facilitated interaction. Four participants especially liked task three where each participant was required to send pictures, describe and discuss them. However, most participants stated that some of the tasks, especially task five, where they were required to talk about their hobbies and abilities, were boring and did not facilitate interaction what so ever.

Matt: *“I can swim, I can ride a bike, I can play football. It was like robot talking”*

They mentioned that these types of tasks were cliché.

1. Were you able to understand your partner? Why? Why not?

Technical problems occasionally prevented communication and with this in mind, it can be said that many communication problems had risen among many of the pairs. Other than the technical drawbacks, some pairs commented on the pronunciation difficulties they faced. It was a common response that the EMU participants had difficulties in understanding the Chinese students due to their pronunciation. When I asked for an example,

Sandra: *“My partner always say ‘work it’. Later I understand she mean ‘worked’. We laughed about this, but she was embarrass.”*

Another example,

Sam: *“My partner was good speaking, but sometimes I don’t understand her. For example, she say ‘moster’ many times ( I like swimming moster). But I unserstod she mean ‘most’.*

However, they managed to overcome these problems sometimes by texting and sometimes by referring to on-line dictionaries. Interestingly, two participants stated that when communication was blurred, they would rephrase or use descriptive language.

1. How well do you think you performed the tasks? Why?

Five participants believed that they performed extremely well because they had time to prepare for the tasks.

1. What did you like best about the Skype project?

All participants gave similar responses to this question. The most common response was that they all enjoyed meeting someone from China. All participants were keen on learning about the Chinese culture. Some of the EMU participants were keen on talking about their own cultures and as pairs they compared their cultures. One pair even claimed that most of their sessions consisted of describing and comparing their cultures and countries. They discussed everything from politics, to religion, from eating habits to behavioral aspects and that there were many things that they have not yet discussed. Some participants enjoyed doing something other than reading and writing for a class and emphasized that the absent teacher factor played an important role in the success of the project. They felt that in class (f2f) sessions were informative and proved limited practice for real-time speaking. On the other hand, this project gave them the opportunity to use and expand on what they are doing in the classroom. One participant even added that, nothing is as it seems. This participant claimed that he was excellent at language, grammatically and lexis wise, however, he believes was not an efficient communicator. Two participants liked the aspect of involving technology into their learning process. Another two participants said that they were very excited every time they switched on their computers and went on-line to speak with their partner.

1. What did you like least about the Skype project?

Two EMU participants particularly disliked the fact that their pairs spoke too fast and they believed that this prevented their success rate. They claimed that their partners did not have *good English*. Thus, they felt that the pairs needed to be better balanced. One participant least liked the fact that they had specific tasks to do which created restrictions. This participant felt that the sessions should have been unrestricted. Another participant stated that the project was too unconfined. This participant believed that too much freedom was left in the hands of the participants and that’s why he was unsuccessful. This participant believed that the sessions should have been in complete control of the teacher to generate equal speaking opportunities for the participants. This participant believes that the post-speaking test results were not fair because not all participants were able to meet at the same rate as other pairs. Some participants felt that the project was good in general, but wasn’t organized well enough due to the fact that their partners wouldn’t always be on-line at the agreed times.

1. What could I do next time to make it better?

Some participants stated that the project could be improved if there was a force factor which forced participants to be on-line at the specified times. Two participants thought that the project was just fine the way it was and did not have any recommendations. Another two participants believed that it would be better if the whole class would take part in such a project and not just volunteers. These participants added that the project wasn’t as successful due to the fact that it wasn’t a compulsory task for the whole class. An interesting term that reoccurred for this question was ‘control’. Most of the participants felt that implementing a force factor would create more control.

11. Would you recommend using Skype in this way to your friends to develop their speaking skills?

All participants said yes. There were no negative responses for this question.

***Chinese Participants.***

1. Did you enjoy the process? Why? Why not?

Six out of the seven Chinese participants gave positive responses to this question. Like with the EMU participants, they believed that it was interesting to meet someone from half way across the world. They too were intrigued by the diversity in cultures. However, One Chinese participant provided a negative reply to this question with the justification that their partner was never on-line and this was due to the lack of discipline of the project. This participant also added that after a few attempts, she finally stopped trying and eventually gave up.

1. Were you able to meet twice a week on a scheduled time? Why? Why not?

Three of the Chinese participants stated that they were able to meet for the required amount. Two out of these three participants claimed that they met more than twice a week and related this to their flexibility of their timetables. As with the EMU participants, four Chinese participants stated that they couldn’t meet for the recommended two sessions a week. Interestingly, although the EMU participants claimed that this was due to their partners (the Chinese participants) not being on-line regularly, the Chinese participants claimed the same thing. They too, claimed that their partners (the EMU participants) were not on-line at the agreed times and considering the 6 hour time difference, they could not meet.

1. Did you meet more than the necessary amount?

Two participants stated that they were able to meet more than twice a week. As stated above (Q. 2), these participants related this to their timetables and added that they had a good bond with their partners.

1. Were you able to speak for minimum 30 minutes? If no, why?

An interesting contradiction was that although some of the EMU participants claimed that they couldn’t speak for a minimum 30 minutes, all the Chinese participants claimed that they spoke for more than 30 minutes.

1. Were the tasks interesting? Why? Why not?

The Chinese participants were generally more critical than the EMU participants. All participants commented on the tasks. Two out to the seven Chinese participants felt that most of the tasks promoted interaction, especially the tasks which were related to culture. Three out of the seven Chines participants stated that some tasks were to guided and enabled real communication. These tasks led to question-answer format and eventually became boring. When doing these tasks, these pairs tended to stroll off into different topic areas. One of the two claimed that this eventually led to distrust in the tasks which then led to free talk most of the time.

Carol: *“I think the tasks were not very good because they not what I want to ask. They are like an exam.”*

Nevertheless, the participant did not feel this was a negative aspect. The remaining two Chinese participants stated that the tasks were interesting and promoted interaction. They especially like tasks three and 6.

Renesmea: *“I like showing pictures of my city. It’s so interesting that my partner knows nothing about China. I feel like I am explaining my city to a baby.”*

1. Were you able to understand your partner? Why? Why not?

Two out of the seven Chinese participants stated that they had no problems in understanding their partner. They added that the only problems they faced were technical, but these were overcome. On the other hand, five out of the seven Chinese participants stated that they faced many communication breakdowns with their partners. Some related this to language deficiency and others to pronunciation. Most of these five participants turned to texting on a regular basis.

Constance: *“He’s English is very bad. We texted and then I started to understand him.”*

Two of the five participants claimed that the first sessions were worse, but they eventually got better. However, one participant claimed that the communication was so bad that she eventually became distant and lost motivation. Another participant claimed that her partner would stutter so often that she thought her computer got stuck. This, fortunately, did not discourage the participant and communication continued. In fact, this participant claimed that her partner in time became better or related this improvement to becoming better acquainted to each other.

1. How well do you think you performed the tasks? Why?

All of the Chinese participants felt that they understood and performed all the tasks with ease. They added that the tasks did not take up too much time and therefore they needed to adapt quite often. Some of the participants related this to the fact that the EMU participants couldn’t expand on their responses as much as they did.

Coco: *“She is lovely, but she doesn’t speak a lot. She answers me and I speak most of the time.”*

Consequently, two participants stated that they often skipped the tasks due to their partners having difficulty in performing them.

1. What did you like best about the Skype project?

All the Chinese participants stated that they were very excited at the beginning of the project because they wanted to improve their oral proficiency and the idea of doing this through such a programme was motivational. Most of the participants especially liked the fact that they were chatting with someone from a different country. Some of the Chinese participants were excited to meet a teacher (the researcher) from another country via Skype. One participant did not respond to this question.

1. What did you like least about the Skype project?

Most of the participants commented on the time difference. Being 6 hours ahead of Cyprus time was the biggest drawback of this project according to most of the Chinese participants. In addition, three participants stated that they least liked the fact that they faced communication breakdowns at times. They felt that there were mis-matches with the pairing. Another three participants disliked the fact that they couldn’t find their partner on-line at the time they agreed and had to re-arrange many times throughout the project. This irritated them often. One participant thought the weakest aspect of the project was the way the tasks were set. The participant claimed that the tasks were sent late occasionally and this limited their interaction. This participant added that the tasks were not all interesting and this disappointed her.

1. What could I do next time to make it better?

Four participants thought the project was fine the way it was. One participant felt that the project would be better if the meeting times were arranged by the teacher to maintain discipline. Another participant felt that the tasks needed to be bettered. A different participant believed that speaking to someone of the same gender would make it less frustrating and they would find more to talk about.

11. Would you recommend using Skype in this way to your friends to develop their speaking skills?

All of the Chinese participants provided positive responses to this question. Some even said that they have tried to find other friends from other countries after starting this project.

**Improvements in oral skills of EAP students**

***Assisting Researcher.*** An interview was arranged once the assisting researcher returned to EMU Cyprus. Ten questions (**Appendix 8**) were forwarded to the assisting researcher. Unlike the interviews carried out with the participants, this interview was not recorded. Nevertheless, detailed notes were taken and analyzed. The analysis of the interview will be organized according to the question items.

1. How well do you feel your students (the Chinese participants) performed in the project in general?

The assisting researcher believed that her students (the Chinese participants) held a professional approach towards the project, especially at the beginning, but gradually, as their studies intensified and their projects began to build up they lost interest. She continued by explaining that the utmost priority for the Chinese people is success. Being a very populated country, finding a good job is difficult and therefore, doing well is a must for students. The assisting researcher related the lack of participation between midterm week and certain periods throughout the semester to their intensive study schedules. However, the assisting researcher’s general comment on this item was positive.

1. Do you feel your student’s oral proficiency improved? Why? Why not? What aspects specifically?

A positive response was given for this item. The assisting researcher explained how the Chinese participants face difficulties with pronunciation and at the end of the semester there was notable improvement in the pronunciation of many of the participants. She further explained with an example of a problematic participant who pronounced the word single as /ˈsɪŋ.ɡl̩e/ and garage as /’ɡar.ɑːʒa/. The assistant researcher realized that this participant had bettered the pronunciation of these and similar words. She also explained how many of the Chinese students she was working with couldn’t pronounce some of the common English phonemes such as /æ/ or /uː/, however these were not as disturbing and she did not realize if there was a change in this sound after the study. The assisting researcher felt that the project gave the Chinese participants the opportunity to use English outside the classroom. In addition, their test score rose, which was additional proof of the effectiveness of the project. When asked if she felt that their spoken test scores were influenced in any way by the project, the assisting researcher was very positive in her response. In addition to classroom practice, the assisting researcher felt that the project was an influential factor in the improvement of their spoken exam scores.

1. Did you note any other improvements other than oral proficiency?

Once again, the assisting researcher gave a positive response to this question. She felt that the confidence level of her students increased and their communication skills improved greatly. They also gained general knowledge about different cultures and traditions which was an bonus for them.

1. What verbal feedback did you note from your students?

They were very excited at the beginning of the project but faced many connectivity problems throughout the project. Some participants were happy with their partners, but others complained about the level of English of their partners which demotivated them. An interesting observation from the assisting researcher was that the Chinese participants tended to turn to texting rather than video conferencing many times due to the time barrier. She noted that Chinese people are self-conscious about the way they look and because they met with their partners at night, they sometimes did not feel assertive enough to switch video chat on.

1. What were your students’ attitudes towards the study in general?

The assisting researcher noted all positive responses from her students. There were no negative responses in general.

1. What was/is your attitude towards this study?

A positive attitude was obtained from the assisting researcher. The content of the study is student centered and a modern approach to learning language.

1. What aspects of the study do you feel worked best? Why?

The tasks were nicely thought and whole idea of the study is very useful.

1. What aspects of the study do you feel did not work so well? Why?

There were monitoring problems. The assisting researcher believed that if the participants were monitored in a more controlled way, even better results could have been obtained from the project. Another problem was the time difference. Six hours is a big difference and considering the Chinese students sometimes have classes at night, this made it more difficult to keep regular appointments with their project partners. Internet connectivity was also a considerable problem, but it was dealt with and therefore, was not as important as the other problems.

1. Would you use this scheme in your next classroom?

Definitely! The assisting researcher (2) stated that she was very pleased with the outcomes of the study and believed she could use it again with minor adaptations (which she recommended) in her following classes. She added that, considering all the difficulties related to time differences and students often not being able to find one another online, there were still many beneficial effects which she observed from her students. For example, she noted that there were visible improvements in their confidence level and some actually made more friends online joining starting this project.

1. What would you change about the study if you were to participate in it again?

Useful feedback was provided for this question. The researcher suggested using worksheets where participants would answer questions and these worksheets could be collected in class regularly to enable a control mechanism. In this way the project would be monitored to a certain degree. Another useful suggestion was to have controlled meetings at the beginning in which the researcher would physically monitor participants for a certain time.

**The views of the participants and assisting researcher on incorporating a Skype-pal scheme into the learning process of EAP students**

Two types of observations were carried out in this study. The first was *physical observations*, where the researcher was physically present during the Skyping sessions. The subsequent type of observation was the *non-physical* *observations*, where the researcher was not physically present during the Skyping sessions. In the case of the non-physical observations, the observations were monitored on-line, where the researcher kept in contact with the participants in a scheduled manner through Skype. Meeting days and times were arranged by pairs and informed to the researcher. In this way, the consistency of sessions were monitored and dealt with as necessary. The subsequent type was a variation of the first type due to unavoidable circumstances. For example, arranging suitable times in labs for each pair both from EMU and China was very challenging and rescheduling was necessary most of the time. Another restriction with the first type of observation was the atmosphere. EMU participants were doing the sessions in labs, while the Chinese participants were carrying out the sessions from the comfort of their dorm rooms. This did not create an equally comforting environment, and therefore, from the feedback received from all the EMU participants, the second type of observations was arranged.

When discussing my observations as the researcher, I would like to discuss my findings under the two categories mentioned above *physical observations* and *non-physical observations*.

***Physical Observations.*** Within the short period of the physical observations where the researcher was present, many things were observed. The first thing that was noticed in all the pairs was that they all started by writing (texting) rather than video conferencing as required by the project. All pairs were nervous in their first meetings and some pairs took longer to switch on video conferencing. The pair which switched on video conferencing the quickest was Tony and Green. After texting some basic information like, ‘*what’s your name’* and ‘*how old are you’* they finally came to a mutual agreement to go on video. The researcher did not intervene at all in the decision making process to go on video. This pair was very confident and easy flowing. Both participants had a good level of English and were opting to develop their communication skills. Although Tony was a native speaker of English, constant stuttering was observed in Tony and occasional silent gaps were common with Green. However, they seemed to overcome these obstacles with the help of the tasks which were assigned for the subsequent sessions. No set task was assigned for the first meeting except for getting acquainted. In contrast, other pairs needed more time to adapt to meeting someone new, let alone from half way across the world. The notion of meeting someone from an entirely different culture was very intriguing and curiosity building for all participants, but at the same time frightening. John and Lois needed 3 sessions to switch to video conferencing. They retained to texting for three sessions and the researcher finally felt the need to intervene. Video conferencing was switched on and started by the researcher. After a few minutes this pair moved into their comfort zone and was able to start on task one. Andy and Constance were late starters. It took this pair longer to start due to technical problems. However, once they did manage to meet, again by texting, things progressed. This pair too needed time to start video conferencing. Like with John and Lois, they needed a push to switch to video. With that push, they, too progressed into their comfort zone. Matt and Renesmea were an interesting pair to observe. They too started by texting but Matt was eager to switch to video and managed to persuade his partner, who was shyer, to turn to video. Matt was a slow and nervous communicator. He tended to stutter a lot and therefore communication become frustrating between the pair. Observing this pair was interesting because, what was a slow start, surprisingly transformed into two highly confident good communicators. In the first session, both participants used short utterances (just a response to the question), while in the third session, they used longer utterances. Matt’s stuttering reduced and Renesmea’s shyness disappeared. Below are two fragments of conversation between the pair. The first fragment is from the second video conference between the pair and the second fragment is from the fifth:

***Fragment 1 – second session***

Matt: Hello. *Long gap* How are you? *Very slow*

Renesmea: I’m fine. *Long gap* How are you? *Very quiet voice*

Matt: *silent* Fine. *Long gap* I am study for exam tomorrow. *slow*

Renesmea: Aha. You have exam? *Gap* What exam?

Matt: *silent* It’s mathematics. *Gap* Do you know mathematics?

Renesmea: Yes. I have mathematics too. I don’t like it. Do you like mathematics? *Quiet*

Matt: *silent* Yes. My department is computer engineering. *Gap* I must learn mathematics.

Renesmea: Yes, you must learn it. *Gap* I am learning English this semester.

Matt: Aha emmmm, *Gap* What is your department? *Very quiet*

Renesmea: Sorry, I don’t understand you.

Matt: *silent*

***Fragment 2 – fifth session***

Matt: *Long gap* Hello.

Renesmea: Hello. How are you? *Quiet*

Matt: Today I am very tired. *Short gap* 7 lessons today. I had presentation today.

Renesmea: Emmmm. How was your presentation? What lesson did you do presentation?

Matt: Good. Presentation good. *Short gap* Management lesson. I not sleep last night because this presentation. I was very worried and stress. Ohhhhh, finish!

Renesmea: Congratulations. I’m very happy for you. I did not have lesson today. It is holiday in China. I studied all day and cleaned and cooked. Tomorrow I have a quiz.

Matt: Hmmmm. What quiz?

Renesmea: Vocabulary quiz. I am very nervous. I want to get 10 points. *Silent* What did you talk about in presentation?

Matt: Nervous? *Short* *gap* What is nervous?

As it can clearly be seen, the first fragment shows more gaps and silent periods. The second fragment however, although some gaps and silent phases can be observed, is clearly improved. Shorter utterances transformed into longer utterances, which reflects higher confidence in oral outcome. Participants used longer explanation in their fifth meeting and were able to expand on their sentences.

Suzanne and Coco were also quick beginners. As with all the other pairs, they too started by texting basic information to each other. They however, like Tony and Green switched to video on their first meeting. This pair had a difference compared to the other pairs. Both participants were female. Since the study was based on a voluntary basis, gender matching was not deliberate. All participants from China were girls, while participants from Emu were mixed, four girl and 2 boys to be precise. With Suzanne and Coco, it was clearly observed that the gender factor created a more comfortable atmosphere. When comparing this pair to the other pairs (mixed gender pairs), it can be seen that the mixed pairs all found it difficult to start video conferencing and experienced many silent gaps while communicating. With Suzanne and Coco, once the video was switched on, they both seemed to click. Interaction was natural and both participants were taking charge of the conversation. Physical observations of the remaining two pairs were not attained. Sam and Lydia joined the study shortly after the decision to carry out the sessions from home was made. Therefore, notes on this pair will be discussed in the non-physical observations section. As with Suzanne and Coco, Sandra and Carol were the second pair that were both of the same gender. However, physical observations were not attained due to Sandra being a late joiner to the project. The transfer from physical observations to non-physical observations was with the request of some of the EMU participants. Tony, in time started to feel uncomfortable in the lab and requested to continue from home. This request was noted and shared with many of the EMU participants who seemed to share the same views. The common concern was that they did not feel comfortable and safe when talking in a lab with other students around them. With the consideration that the Chinese participants were carrying out the sessions from their dorms, it was not only fair, but also a necessity for the well-being of the study to accept this request of the EMU participants.

Many beneficial observations were obtained from starting the sessions in labs where the observer was able to physically monitor the sessions. Therefore, it could safely be said that, starting in this way was an advantage to the study as a whole.

***Non-physical Observations.*** The remaining sessions were carried out in a non-physical manner where the observer was not physically present during the sessions, but was constantly monitoring in an on-line manner and having informal conversations with both the EMU participants and the Chinese participants through Skype or occasionally f2f with the EMU participants. Therefore it was possible to collate unofficial data through informal means from the non-physical observations. Because, the sessions had turned from being in a lab during working (school) hours to going on-line from dorm rooms, rearranging meeting times and days was necessary. Pairs struggled with rearranging timetables again and a lot of time was lost in the process. This was a huge drawback for the study. The time difference factor also played a big role in the rearrangements of sessions. There is a six hour time difference between Cyprus and China, China being six hours ahead of Cyprus. This means that, when it is 5 in the evening in Cyprus, it is eleven at night in China. With the consideration that participants are full-time students and could only go on-line after school hours, this made it extremely problematic to arrange suitable meeting sessions for both participants. Due to this, three out of six of the pairs could not arrange two meeting sessions per week and only managed to meet once.

Tony and Green managed to arrange two meeting sessions per week and without losing time, continued with their sessions. After performing three of the assigned tasks, this pair requested to progress independent of the tasks with the justification that they limit their interaction. Tony felt that the tasks formed a question-answer foundation and restricted natural interaction. After collecting feedback from all pairs, it was agreed to give pairs more freedom with the sessions. Tasks were still set as standby tasks for ‘*I have nothing to say*’ circumstances but pairs were set free for their sessions. In this way, pairs were not limited to the task, but still had something to refer to when necessary. From some unofficial chats with Tony in class, it was interesting to note that this pair transformed from *very shy* to *extremely talkative*. They were especially intrigued by each other’s cultures and tended to talk about this mostly. They did not refer to the tasks so often and tended to talk about their day each time they meet.

John and Lois on the other hand, did not manage to meet as frequently. Timetabling was difficult and this in time lead to lack of communication. Another problem observed with this pair was that they finished their sessions earlier than expected. Connection time ranged between 15 to 20 minutes in which they generally asked and answered the necessary questions and did not expand much on the topic areas. This, in time became their routine. Like John and Lois, Andy and Constance did not manage to arrange two meetings per week. In fact, this pair could not meet regularly and some weeks they did not meet at all. Interaction was slow with this pair and on most occasions they only met for 8 to 10 minutes. On the contrary to John and Lois, this pair did not fulfill the tasks. They generally talked about each other’s day, hobbies or country. They seemed to repeat the same topics every time they met. Conversely, EMU Matt and Renesmea managed to arrange two sessions a week, and in fact, met more than the arranged time. During the physical observations, this pair showed to be very interesting and continued to do so in the non-physical observations. They too, did not really perform the task. They tended to discuss daily issues and their lessons most of the time. Their sessions were short, but constant. They tended to talk about their classes and their university life. Sandra and Carol had a lot of technical difficulties and couldn’t meet much during the study. This pair met the least out of all the pairs. They only managed to do four of the tasks and did not move beyond them. At the times they did meet, they interacted for 30 to 40 minutes and like with EMU Matt and Renesmea, spoke mainly about their classes and universities. Sam and Lydia only met twice. Sam had health issues and had to return to his country, Turkey for treatment. Arrangements were made for the pair to continue, however this was unsuccessful. Suzanne and Coco was also a very interesting pair. Like with Matt and Renesmea, this pair managed to meet more than twice a week at times, but at other times couldn’t meet at all for a whole week. This pair at times referred to the assigned tasks, but most of the time tended to talk about daily issues like their classes and their love life. This was the only pair which discussed private issues. Technical problems occurred quite frequently at the beginning of sessions, but in time this was resolved. Another interesting aspect about this pair was that they were on and off line most of the evening throughout the night, sometimes at different times, sometimes at the same time. They did not arrange specific meeting times and met when both were available.

***Student journals***: Not all participants managed to keep journals and therefore data from this aspect of the study was limited. Five of the EMU participants held journals, while two didn’t. Regrettably, it wasn’t possible to obtain journals from the Chinese students. Consequently, this section cannot be considered completely valid however, provides some insight to the study regardless. Two of the journals collated from the EMU participants were very brief. The main context was information about when they met with their partners and what they talked about in a few words. There wasn’t substantial context on personal feelings or opinions. On the contrary, three participants divided their journals according to the questions provided by the researcher and tried to answer as best as they could. There were three recommended questions for the journals mentioned in the methodology chapter. The responses will be discussed in the order of the items below.

1. What did you learn about your partner from this session?
2. Were the tasks interesting? Why/why not?
3. What difficulties did you face (if any)?

For item number one, one participant gave detailed information about what new information was learnt about their partner in most of the sessions. The other two briefly mentioned basic information in list form. Subsequently, the most reoccurring notes were details about their country, city and culture. All participants took careful notes on these aspects. Again for item number two, one participant gave detailed information about the tasks, how they worked well and why he thought they did not work so well. Interestingly, this participant took notes of nearly all the responses received from his partner for all the tasks and underlined certain facts, like preparing for a quiz. This participant particularly liked the tasks related to cultural aspects (Tasks 1, 2, 3,4 and 5). The other two participants just replied with a sentence giving a positive response to this item. For item number three, one participant gave detailed information on certain difficulties faced throughout the process. The main problem this participant faced was pronunciation. It was claimed that the participant’s partner had pronunciation problems especially with words like ‘click’, ‘speak’, or ‘talk’ and he claimed that his partner spoke funny like she shouts or she’s singing. He also added that his partner uses the *ing* form everywhere whether correct or incorrect. Another participant stated that there were frequent connectivity problems, but otherwise there were no other problems. The final participant did not respond to this item

**A significant difference in students’ achievements in the post-speaking test after the implementation of the Skype-pal scheme**

***Pre/post speaking examination***: The B1 level City & Guilds spoken examination (**Appendix 5**) was administered to all the participants before pairing was formed by their instructors. Similarly, the identical spoken examination was repeated by their instructors toward the end of the study. The results of the pre-spoken examination was given in the Methodology chapter, but will be listed here again for comparison purposes.

In order to find out whether the differences between pre-test and post-test results of both groups were statistically significant, a paired t-test was conducted. The differences between pre-test and post-test scores of the Chinese EAP students were found to be significant at .005 level (P= .05). The pre-test and post-test results for the same group also correlated at .708 (r. 708, p.050). Although there was a very high correlation between the pre-test and post-test results of EMU EAP students ( r.970, p. 001), the paired t-test results were not statistically significant ( p= .465). Descriptive statistics for both groups are shown in Table 6.

**Table 4**

**Pretest Posttest Correlations for Chinese and EMU Students**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | N | Correlation | Sig. |
| CHN Posttest & Pretest | 8 | ,708 | ,050 |
| EMU Posttest & Pretest | 6 | ,970 | ,001 |

**Table 5**

**Pretest Posttest Paired T-Test for Chinese and EMU Students**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | t | Sig. (2-tailed) |
| CHN Posttest & Pretest | 8 | 1,25000 | ,88641 | 3,989 | ,005 |
| EMU Posttest & Pretest | 6 | ,33333 | 1,03280 | ,791 | ,465 |

**Table 6**

**Pre/Post Spoken Examination Results**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Participant’s name | Pre-spoken exam | Post spoken exam | Difference |
| John (Lois) | 6 | 6 | 0 |
| Tony (Green) | 8 | 10 | +2 |
| Andy (Constance) | 4 | 3 | -1 |
| Matt (Renesmea) | 5 | 6 | +1 |
| Sandra (Carol) | 4 | 4 | 0 |
| Sam (Lydia) | 4 | 4 | 0 |
| Suzanne (Coco) | 4 | 6 | +2 |
| Lois | 6 | 7 | +1 |
| Green | 8 | 9 | +1 |
| Constance | 5 | 6 | +1 |
| Renesmea | 6 | 7 | +1 |
| Carol | 6 | 6 | 0 |
| Lydia | 5 | 6 | +1 |
| Coco | 5 | 8 | +3 |

As it can be seen from the above table, a distinguished progress has been rendered by most of the pairs. The pairs which could not meet regularly have shown no improvement or as with one participant, a decrease in their speaking scores. These scores are only a fraction of what the study has benefited. The increase in Tony’s score can be related to his increased confidence in communication. Likewise, the decrease in Andy’s score can be associated to the inconsistency he had shown to the study. Nevertheless, his partner Constance displayed an increase in her spoken exam score. This proves that not all pairs benefited in the same way. It is significant that the participants who functioned consistently in the study have shown some sort of improvement in their speaking score, whereas, participants who did not show the same consistency, showed no improvement. Therefore, it can safely be said that the study has shown a substantial difference in the speaking text scores of the participants who participated satisfactorily. The most significant progress was noted in Coco’s post test score. Her score has upgraded by 3 points, which is an immense difference in an internationally recognized B1 level spoken examination. Of course, this could be related to a number of things. The study is a manipulation of their English courses. That is to say, all participants are enrolled into a freshman language programme offered by their universities, which has supported their language competence along with the manipulation of the study. Therefore, it should be taken into consideration that the language courses they are receiving from their institutes have contributed to their oral proficiency. Another aspect which needs consideration is, these examinations are a measurement of spoken language at a specific time and occasion, not an accumulation of instances. Therefore, it may not be fair to say that these examinations are a true representation of the participant’s oral proficiency. With this in mind, Coco’s significant improvement may be a product of the language syllabus with the manipulation of the study or that the pre-exam was an instance where she couldn’t perform as well as the instance of her post-exam. The pie chart below represents the percentage of change in the post test scores.

**Figure 1**

**Change in the Post Test Scores**

Four out of fourteen participants showed no change in their post exam scores (blue). Nine out of fourteen showed improvement in their post exam score (red), while one participant’s post test score decreased (green). This chart clearly demonstrates that there is a significant level of improvement among the fourteen participants.

**CHAPTER V**

**Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations**

**Discussion**

Several findings have been made and conclusions can be drawn from the data collated of this research. In this chapter, the findings are discussed in correlation to the research questions presented at the beginning of the study.

**The effects of incorporating a Skype-pal scheme into EAP courses.**

There is clear evidence that the Skype-pal scheme had many positive effects on the learning process of the EMU EAP participants. Firstly, the most vibrant effect was evident from the post-spoken examination test scores. These scores displayed an overall increase in oral proficiency and are discussed more thoroughly in the related section. Secondly, data gathered from the interviews from both the participants and the assisting researcher, established that participants not only improved in their oral proficiency, but also showed a development in their confidence levels and communication skills. In the study carried out by Xiao who compared an experimental group of 10 participants to a control group of 10, found that using video conferencing to speak with native speakers helped build up their confidence of speaking English (Xiao, 2007). Of course, the fact that Xiao’s study consisted of pairing non-native speakers to native speakers of English was an influential aspect and might not be a good example in the case of my study. However, the relevance is that, like in Xiao’s study, my study also improved communication skills and confidence levels of participants, but with the additional advantage of benefiting both sides of the coin. Both participants, EMU and Chinese, gained and benefited from my study, whereas, mainly one member of each pair benefited from the study in question. In his study about combining online exchange with the TBI (Task-Based Instruction), Lee distinguished that an online environment triggered with set tasks enhances learners’ communication skills adding that this kind of environment triggers a lively atmosphere in which participants respond to real-time conversation about topics related to their classroom topics (Lee, 2002).

**Views on incorporating a Skype-pal scheme into the learning process of EAP students**

Another important benefit of the scheme is that it has improved participants quality of friendship and has enabled them to become more social. It has been reported in the interviews that some participants feel that their social life has improved due to the confidence built they through using video conferencing to meet and speak with new and different people. According to the sociocultural theory in second language acquisition, language learners’ cognitive development is influenced by their social interactions and environment (Lantolf, 2000). So basically, the more learners interact in the target language in natural circumstances, the more they learn. Hence, participants from my study believe that not only have their confidence towards using the language improved, but the study has also contributed to their success in their studies in general. It has also been summarized by Swaffer (1998), that “networked exchanges seem to help all individuals in language classes engage more frequently, with greater confidence, and with greater enthusiasm in the communicative process than is characteristic for similar students in oral classrooms” (Swaffar, 1998, p. 1). Confidence in language use also transferred to the outside world, where the participants felt they were able to interact more freely. Students from the study claimed that they were better communicators in their usual relationships after starting this project. The project gave the participants, who are language learners, the opportunity to practice what they learnt in the classroom, in an instinctive and modern approach. The authenticity of the tasks and need to feed their curiosity about the world was probably the most motivational aspect of the study. Using two exceptionally divergent cultures was the highlight of the study considering all participants talked mostly about the culture clashes and traditions of their countries. O’Dowd 2004 also carried out similar research with the difference of pairing two entire classes. O’Dowd, 2004 also used similar tasks in his study. In one case he had the classes send each other films from their culture and after they had watched them, discuss them. This was similar to task three from my study, where participants sent each other pictures from their country, culture or anything which they thought was important. This led to a great deal of interaction and exchanges regarding cultural aspects. O’Dowd’s study showed that learners were curious about different cultural aspects. For example, they questioned each other’s choice of film and asked about the importance of the film for their culture (O'Dowd, 2004). This was the case with task three in my study. The participants from both EMU and China were curious to know why they choose that specific picture and how it identified their culture. It can therefore be assumed that culture curiosity was one of the best topic areas to initiate interaction. The original aim of the study was to analyze the effects of the incorporation of a Skype-pal scheme into the language learning process of EAP participants. However, an inevitable additional benefiter was the Chinese participants. The findings clearly showed that the Chinese participants were stronger in terms of language, communication and discipline. They did not show the same difference in their post-speaking test scores as the EMU participants. However, the study shows that they benefited in other aspects like, confidence, social skills and knowledge of the world. When speaking with the assisting researcher on an unofficial basis, she consistently mentioned that the Chinese society view education more serious than our (Cypriot society). Being successful is the most important aspect for individuals and families. She relates the absence of the Chinese participants throughout the study during certain periods of the semester to this. She explains further by indicating that China is a highly populated country and therefore extremely difficult to find a good job. For this reason, she said “*it is very important that they do well at school*” in order to have a successful career in China. Due to this, Chinese students are very ambitious in their education and everything is a race for them. The assisting researcher ties the higher level of English to this. Briefly, the effects of incorporating a Skype-pal scheme into the learning process of the fourteen participants can be summarized as a good facilitator for confidence building and developing social skills as well as the effects the study produced on the oral proficiency of participants.

**The implementation of a Skype-pal scheme with semi-structured tasks to improve oral skills of EAP language learners**

Data collated from the observations, participant interviews, student journals, assisting researcher interview and the pre and post spoken examination scores all indicated an improvement in oral proficiency of participants. Firstly, the post-spoken examination test scores evidently showed that there was progress in the oral proficiency predominantly with the EMU participants. This was expected considering their partners were better in terms of language. As Xiao found in his study with pairing non-native speakers with native speakers, the non-native participants’ confidence level increased due to the accomplishment of communicating with native speakers. In the case of my study, the Chinese participants were not native speakers of English, however, they were foreign for the EMU participants and the stereotype for the Chinese is that they have better technologies and are more advanced than many other communities. The pre/post spoken examination test scores distinctly answer ‘yes’ to this research question. In Tam, Kan, & NG’s, 2010 study, where they compared two groups, a F2F (face to face) environment and a SCA (synchronous computer assisted) environment, no big significance was found. However, they concluded that learner’s communication language ability can be promoted with technology (Tam, Kan, & NG, 2010). They also claim that the synchronous environment offers an additional framework for students to practice communicative language particularly for lower level students. This view is supported by Kern who states that an online environment where the teacher is absent creates more production time for learners, than the classroom where the teacher is present (Kern, 1995). The absent teacher aspect of the study was an advantage according to a number of the participants in this study. After students overcame their shyness and anxiety, they claimed that the absent teacher notion made them feel more confident. Again, in support of this notion, Felix put forward that Language courses which integrate technology into their lessons in addition to f2f interaction, facilitate language learning due to the face that it enables students to work independently at their own pace (Felix, 2003)

Although this research question was primarily intended for the EMU EAP participants, I would like to discuss the enhancements of the oral skills of the Chinese participants. The development of pronunciation of some of the Chinese participants was evident according to the assistant researcher. Certain sound groups are difficult for Chinese learners of English due to dissimilarities. The Chinese language is not composed of an alphabet system like English, but of a system called logographic which consists of pictures which represent words or utterances. For this reason, many Chinese learners of English tackle reading and writing problems during the course of their lives. While spoken English relies on syntax, stress and intonation, the Chinese language, Mandarin also uses stress as a key element in spoken language but it is mainly a tone language. Stress in the Chinese language (Mandarin) represents the meaning of words. The same picture ‘word’ can be used for different meanings depending on the stress. ‘ma’ for example can mean ‘*mother*’, ‘*bother*’, ‘*horse*’ or ‘*scold*’ depending on the stress (Foreign Teachers Guide to Living and Working in China, 2010). While the English language consists of 20 vowel sounds, monophthongs and diphthongs, the Chinese language consists of fewer which create barriers for Chinese students. For example, /i:/ in ‘sheep’ and /i/ in ‘ship’ are two sounds that Chinese learners find difficult to pronounce. Final constant sounds are also an obstacle for Chinese learners due to the fact that they don’t exist in their language. They either add or deduct a syllable to or from the end of the word. For example, they may pronounce the word ‘pilot’ as ‘pilota’ or ‘pilo’, adding the /a/ sound to give it another syllable or simply take away the last syllable. It was an interesting manifestation that the assistant researcher noted some of these pronunciation problems with her students in the interview carried out by the researcher. The assisting researcher also added to her comments that some of the Chinese participants seemed to have improved in some of these problematic areas towards the end of the semester. She gave explicit examples of pronunciation corrections in some of the Chinese participants which have been mentioned in the Findings Chapter.

Question 5 from the participant interviews aids in the discussion of this research question. The question examined weather or not the participants thought the tasks were interesting and then asked for clarification to their responses. As mentioned in the findings chapter, one student felt that the tasks limited real interaction and felt that they didn’t need the tasks to initiate conversation. However, it must be taken into consideration that the participant who provided this feedback, was a strong language user, but had low self-esteem. It must be noted that not all participants/pairs were as competent in the language and therefore felt the tasks were necessary and suitable.

**Skype-pal scheme and achievement in speaking**

When comparing the pre-spoken exam sores with the post-spoken exam scores, like discussed in research question number II, it can be seen that there is a significant improvement in the participants post-spoken examination scores. Before we conclude this research, let’s go back to the hypothesis to discuss and compare the findings accordingly.

If a well-structured Skype-pal scheme, where individual students are paired with students from another country at the same level to perform one-to-one formulated discussions, is implemented into the EAP (ENGL 181) syllabus, then the EAP students may achieve a successful score on a post-speaking test. Furthermore, it is predicted that these students may develop in terms of oral fluency, confidence and communication skills.

In the light of all the collated data, it can undoubtedly be claimed that the desired results were obtained from the implementation of a Skype-pal scheme into the EAP (ENGL 181) syllabus. Volunteer students from the EMU EAP course were paired with volunteer freshman students from China. A detailed profile was comprised of each participant where their language levels, expectations from the study and pre-speaking exam scores were taken into consideration for the pairing of participants. Of course, the study was based on a volunteer basis and therefore, desired pairing was not perfect, but maintained as best as circumstances provided. Pairs were provided with suggested semi-structured tasks for the duration of give or take a semester (considering there were many gaps where pairs could not meet throughout the semester). A post-spoken examination was carried out with each participant and scores were compared to the pre-speaking examination. Interviews were carried out with both the participants and the assisting researcher to gather views and attitudes towards the study. All this application proved that the Skype-pal scheme is additional exposure to spoken language in an environment where language students group up with students from common backgrounds. The study provided evidence from three perspectives that the implementation of a synchronous tool into the language syllabus is beneficial in many respects; (a) it develops oral proficiency; (b) it promotes confidence as a language user; and (c) it develops communication skills.

**Recommendations**

In order to attain more concrete facts and figures to support this research, a larger scale research of whole class trial for a longer period would present a stronger argument and engender grounds for implementing the suggested scheme into the curriculum for the EAP course. Yang and Chang’s, (2008) study on using synchronous computer mediated communication (SCMC) in the video-conferencing form with structured tasks compared to non-structured tasks to develop oral proficiency showed no significant difference between the two (Yang & Chang, 2008). However, they claim the group with the non-structured tasks indirectly improved more in oral proficiency. They also believe that the study needs to be carried out within a longer timeframe for healthier data due to the fact that oral proficiency is not something that can develop over a short 15 week semester. In her qualitative research, Lee (2007) determined, mainly from interviews, that ‘well-designed’ and ‘motivating’ tasks were essential as well as guidance for successful results in using video-conferencing to improve oral proficiency. In her experimental study on analyzing four different aspects of incorporating SCMC into the language learning context, Yamada (2009), found that incorporating a videoconferencing element into the language learning process promoted consciousness and relief compared to incorporating a text-mediated manipulation within the timeframe of one year (two semesters). Again, it can be seen that healthier results can be obtained within a longer period of time. Therefore, the following step would be to design a course with the integration of the Skype-pal scheme in collaboration with a corresponding school in another country in which results can be collated and analyzed for a longer period of time.

A further recommendation, also mentioned by the assisting researcher would be to incorporate worksheets for participants to fill out during sessions in order to add purpose to the meetings. Adding to this recommendation, a portfolio could be devised where participants could keep record of each session; *date, topic of conversation, new vocabulary learnt* and even a journal section for all participants (both sides) could be included so everything could be kept in one complete document. I have not come across any research where a portfolio was used with participants, however, there was one paper which suggested the use of a ‘Skype Tandem Portfolio” (Antonella, 2006) to use in online exchanges. The original Portfolio was created by Katia Carraro for the Sprachlabor Wirtschaftsuniversität Vienna (**Appendix 9**). The original portfolio designed by Katia Carraro seems more basic and user friendly.

In conclusion, after reviewing and analyzing the data collated from the observations, participants’ interviews, assisting researcher interview, pre-post spoken examination test scores and the student journals it, is evident that the integration of a Skype-pal scheme into the language learning context develops the oral proficiency, communication skills and social confidence of participants.

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1. Utterances made in Turkish are underlined with the translations in italics beneath each line. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. **Full duplex** means two-way simultaneous conversation like the *telephone*. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. **Half duplex** means speakers can only speak one at a time by pushing a button like the *walki talki*. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. A model developed by Williem J. M. Levelt in 1989 for depicting L2 or bilingual language production processes. For a more detailed explanation of this model, refer to (Payne & Whitney, 2002, pp. 10-12) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)