# BORDÓN
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# DISTANCE TUTORIALS WITH SKYPE

## *Tutorías no presenciales con Skype*

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**INTRODUCTION.** The primary objective of this research is to check how to best encourage students to participate in tutorials. **METHODOLOGY.** The study used Skype, a tool with great potential for enhancing oral skills in foreign languages (Coburn, 2010; Eaton, 2010a, 2010b; Motlik, Nolletti and Vlamakis, 2012; Rimando, 2011; Tsukumato, Nuspliger and Senzaki, 2009; Yang and Chang, 2008). This study compared the participation of three groups of English Language I students randomly assigned to face-to-face (F-F) tutorials or distance tutorials with Skype (with or without additional credit). The study also compared the data with those belonging to a group of English Language II students (the English Language I group that had received additional credit). The only difference was that this group no longer received credit for its participation in tutorials via Skype. **RESULTS.** According to the working hypotheses, participation in the F-F tutorial was poor, with a greater participation in the group with tutorials via Skype that received extra credit. **DISCUSSION.** This research is very useful to diagnose the best type of tutorial to be developed in the future with English as a foreign language students (EFL), which is via Skype, as voluntary F-F tutorials do not seem to enhance learning. Nonetheless, the most significant result is students' loyalty to the Skype system, even if they are no longer rewarded for their participation.

**Keywords:** *Tutorial, On-line, Oral English, Foreign language.*

## Introduction

The primary objective of the study was to find a way to improve attendance and engagement in English language tutorials. We wanted to change the system used for foreign language tutorials, which traditionally consists of informing students of tutorial timetables so that they can visit it the teacher in his/her office and ask questions related to the content of the course. Judging by attendance figures, this traditional approach to tutorials does not appear to be attractive to them.

The new tutorial model implemented in this study uses Skype, a communication tool that enables users to make free audio and video calls via the Internet. It also provides the possibility of one-to-one communications or small groups (up to 6 people) and one of its main functions is for learning foreign languages, due to its potential for improving both oral production and comprehension (Bryant, 2006; Coburn, 2010; Eaton, 2010a, 2010b; Godwin-Jones, 2005; Motlik, Nolletti and Vlamakis, 2012; Rimando, 2011; Tsukumato, Nuspliger and Senzaki, 2009; Yang and Chang, 2008). Initial research findings also suggest that Skype could benefit more than the oral component in learning foreign languages; they explicitly mention how it could benefit tutorials as a means of supplementing class work (Depena, 2011; Hong, 2011; Pérez Adell, 2010; Piccolo, 2012; Terry, http://www.teachingdegree.org/2009/06/30/50-awesome-ways-to-use-skype-in-the-classroom). The advantages of Skype for education are so many that many firms and individuals are now offering themselves on the Internet to teach languages using this application (http://forum.Skype.com/index.php?showtopic=117501). Although of less interest for our research, but evidence of the growing importance of Skype in different fields, many companies now conduct job interviews via Skype (http://www.tecnologiapyme.com/recursos-humanos/entrevistas-de-personal-por-skype-una-ayuda-para-reducir-costes-en-la-contratacion-de-personal), making use of free and fast access to video conference capabilities. As this is the world in which students are going to live and work, being accustomed to using it could help them professionally in their future.

The motivation for this study was to examine how Skype could become a powerful tool for students, providing direct and individual contact with teachers, and enabling them to practice their oral skills while presenting their queries about problematic situations. It was believed that a virtual tutorial would be more attractive to students than F-F meetings, largely due to three factors:

- Predisposition. Students are familiar with and used to using the Internet for different purposes, games, social networks, blogs, Wikipedia, etc. They will certainly not be inhibited from querying aspects related to their learning process. Even for the minority that do not feel comfortable using the new technologies, Skype is a simple tool and could reduce stress and anxiety related to their use while increasing their curiosity, a fundamental aspect of learning (Eaton, 2010a, 2010b; Depena, 2011; Hashemi and Azizinezhad, 2011; Saqlain, 2012; Tsukamato, Nuspliger and Senzaki, 2009; Young, 2003).
- Convenience. The fact that students do not have to travel and can present queries from anywhere they wish, even home, is a great advantage. They can benefit from these tutorials and access them from any computer with an Internet connection or a telephone with Wifi.
- Confidence. It is a form of overcoming students' resistance to F-F tutorials, encouraging even the most timid to participate (Saqlain, 2012; Warschauer, 2001). Students often fail to attend tutorials because they are shy, as found in a teaching innovation project dealing with tutorials (Sánchez and Diego, 2009-2010). Although the study asked students to

attend tutorials organised according to a schedule in the lecturer's office, some of the students were reluctant to attend and, when they did, they showed no true interest in the activity. Several of them were asked why and they said that they did not feel comfortable alone with the teacher.

The use of Skype would put an end to the disadvantages of F-F tutorials: inhibition, timidity, need to travel and the anxiety associated to F-F meetings (Eaton, 2010a, 2010b; Depena, 2011; Tsukumato, Nuspliger and Senzaki, 2009; Young, 2003). Therefore, supported by the academic research available and related to this study, we believed that virtual tutorials would encourage student participation and be seen in a positive manner. Therefore, the goal in this research was to learn whether Internet-based tutorials encouraged students to use them irrespective of whether they were associated to extra credit or not.

The expected results in English Language I were:

- low degree of participation in the traditional (F-F) tutorial;
- low/medium degree of participation in the group using Skype;
- high participation in the Skype group receiving additional credit.

The results in English Language II were unpredictable. We did not know what to expect from the Skype group that had received additional credit in the previous semester (that would no longer be given). The students may have realised how beneficial these tutorials could be for their learning and, irrespective of the reward (additional credit), they would continue to use them as before. Another possibility was that they would reduce their use of the technology to communicate with their teacher, now that they were not going to receive extra credit.

## Methodology

### The study

We used an iPad2 for this research on tutorials via Skype. The tutorial was presented to students as an opportunity to approach issues covered in the classroom that required personalised input to be fully understood. We mentioned the things that could be done and the objectives: to provide learning guidance for further work and additional references, answer questions and discuss exercises. The students were told that all this could be done online via Skype, because the application enables instant file transfer and it is even possible to share their computer screens (Eaton, 2010a, 2010b). They were also told that depending on the topic and the time available video conferences could also be arranged for small groups (up to 6 people) to discuss common problems with the teacher. These conversations could be recorded as MP3 files so that the students could listen to them again for revision purposes or to concentrate on a specific section (Bryant, 2006).

This process, which is normally individualised, was expected to provide students with a sensation of sharing and having something in common with their teachers, while teachers could learn about each student's specific interests, circumstances and needs, factors that certainly affect the learning process. It was also expected that this type of tutorial would increase motivation due to the possibility of interacting with other students.

### Description of the activity

The participants, whose tutorials were conducted with Skype, were enrolled in the subjects English Language I (I) taught in the first semester and English Language II(II) taught in the second semester at the University of Salamanca (Spain). The aim was randomly to apply this type of tutorial to two of the three English Language I groups, providing additional credit (C.) in one and not in the other (N.C.). The

third group, also chosen randomly, attended F-F (traditional) tutorials. In English Language II (second semester of the academic year), Skype was used for tutorials with the group that had received additional credit in English Language I, but without extra credit for their participation on this occasion (see the table below). All the groups received two hours of tutorials a week.

TABLE 1. Groups and type of tutorial

| Study groups | I | I | I | II |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Type of tutorial | F-F | Skype N.C. | Skype C. | Skype N.C. |

### Participants

In the F-F tutorials we had a total number of 8 participants (75% females, 25% males) whose mean age was 18.7. In the Skype N.C. (I) group we had 5 participants (80% females, 20% males) and their mean age was 19.1. At this same level (I) we had the group who had used Skype and had received extra credit. The number, as we can see has increased a lot, in this case there were 20 participants (85% females, 15% males) with a mean age of 19.2.

In the group (II) which was not receiving credit anymore we had approximately the same number of participants as in the group who had received extra credit before: 19 (73.68% females and 26.31% males). Their mean age was 19.4.

The same teachers monitored the tutorials in order to systematically follow the same procedure.

### Description of Tutorial Sessions

In English Language I, the Skype-based tutorials began four weeks after the start of the academic year, so that all the students had time to create a Skype account. They were told that this should be done as soon as possible, but it took a long time for different reasons, the most common of which were that they did not yet have a computer or Internet connection or they did not know how to create the account. Tutorials therefore took place on nine occasions. In English Language II, we continued with the group that had received extra credit in the first semester, but with no extra credit on this occasion. They began two weeks after the semester had started to ensure the same number of tutorials as in the first semester, so that the comparison would be based on the same student options. The end result was 9 days of tutorials.

The tutorials with F-F tutorial group could have started earlier, but they were delayed in order to compare the results with those of the Skype meetings. However, they were encouraged to ask questions before or after class. At the times allocated for these tutorials, the student was able to lead the tutorial in his or her own benefit. He/she could say what they wanted to do, providing that it was related to class activities and explanations. Interesting activities that were supplementary to the textbook (e.g. using riddles, listening to funny stories, etc.) were prepared. They were used to generate additional interest in students with regards to their oral skills. The idea was that students could become actively involved in the activity and also encourage others to participate. We believed that, when their peers told them what they were doing, other students would feel that they were missing something interesting by not participating.

In both the F-F and Skype-based tutorials, both subjects (English Language I and II) used an active oral communication method with comprehensible input (Sánchez, 2006). The topics, chosen from the text book (Haines and Stewart, 2008), were: Sexes, Compulsion, Talents, Appearances, Foreign parts, Mind, Free time, Media, Innovation, Society and Communication.

In addition to thematic content, work was done on the grammatical aspects to which these topics necessarily lead. An attempt was made for students to use the inductive method at all times, discovering the underlying grammatical rule by themselves. Also suitable tones, degree of formality (*Marco común europeo de referencia para las lenguas: aprendizaje, enseñanza, evaluación*, 2002) and dialect or language differences (British/American English) perceived in the materials were discussed.

We were aware that the students were limited with regards to lexical resources. Therefore, common vocabulary was used in the tutorials to remedy their basic shortcomings. In this respect, we emphasised Word building, Collocations, Terms to produce a dramatic effect, Expressions with time, Expressions for contrast and Adjectives with similar meanings.

At no time was the oral aspect ignored, as it was the most important objective of the Skype-based tutorials, a tool that is useful for oral improvement (Coburn, 2010; Eaton, 2010; Rimando, 2011; Tsukumato, Nuspliger and Senzaki, 2009; Yang and Chang, 2008). Emphasis on oral practice was the reason why permission was denied when a student asked to present questions in writing via chat.

### Data Collection

Each student's participation (day, time and type of tutorial) was entered in the student's file. Each connection on different days was counted as participation. In the group that received credit for participating, up to 9 points out of 100 was added to their final marks. One point was added every week that they participated. This calculation considered that each academic year comprises 15 weeks of teaching and that these tutorials did not take place until after at least, the fourth week. Some of the tutorials also fell on local holidays, so the largest possible number of tutorials was 9.

### Quantification

At the end of the course we calculated participation in the tutorials: number of connections (in Skype tutorials) or attendance to the teacher's office (in F-F tutorials). We did not count as participation in the tutorials questions such as dates, exam formats, etc. The goal was for students to become used to contacting the teacher for academic reasons, and to ensure that weekly tutorials were used for content-related questions.

We recorded the type of query involved in order to identify students' problems and be able to do something about them during class time.

Quantification of participation enabled us to first find out whether Skype tutorials were used more than F-F meetings. Secondly, we could discover whether students' interest in such tutorials was due to the additional credit involved, as this would certainly affect future decisions with other groups and on other levels. Thirdly, we could verify whether the custom of using Skype-based tutorials would lead students to realise how beneficial this contact with their teacher was, irrespective of extra credit or not.

## Results and discussion

Participation in all the groups was compared. The following figure (figure 1) shows the number of students (8) who visited the teacher's office to ask about different aspects of the course content.

In the group that attended tutorials with Skype, without receiving additional credit, there were 5 participants, while there were 20 in the group that did receive extra credit. In some cases (2) the same student attended on different days. However, different queries were involved, so we considered only the number of times that students logged on to a Skype session (figure 2).

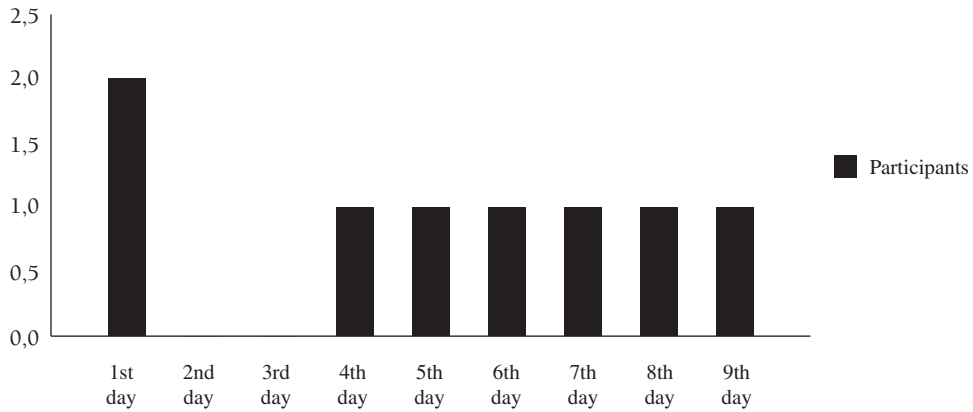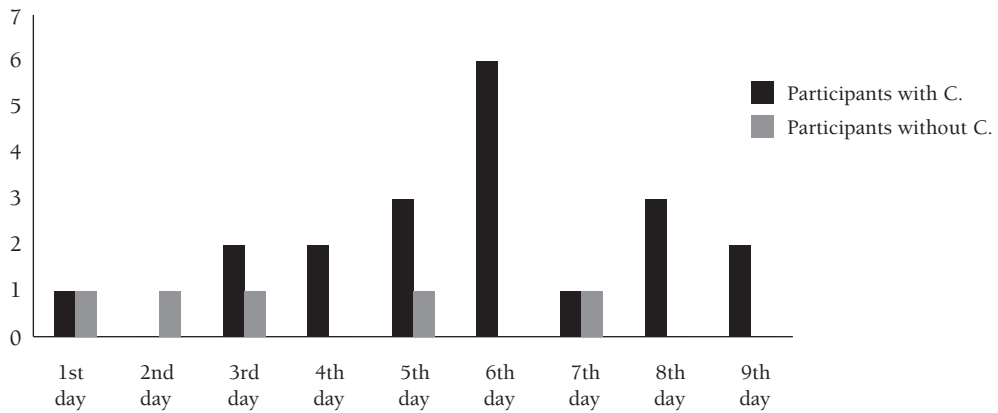FIGURE 1. English Language I. F-F tutorials (attendance)



FIGURE 2. English Language I. Skype tutorials with and without credit (attendance)



In English Language II, we continued with the group that had received extra credit in the first semester, but with no extra credit on this occasion. The end result was 19 connections (figure 3). One of them was a group connection, as the questions were related to an oral presentation that they had to make together, but it was counted as a single connection (3 people). As in the first semester, some people repeated on different days (2), but this is not counted as our interest lies in the number of times that they exchanged information with the teacher.

Following is a figure (figure 4) with the total number of connections, with which we can compare the three types of tutorials in English Language I:

1. F-F. (I).
2. Skype N. C. (I).
3. Skype C. (I).

And English Language II with Skype and no extra credit [Skype N. C. (II)].

The results of this research clearly show that students can become accustomed to making use of computer tools (Skype) for tutorials. Evidently, the offer of extra credit initially encourages students in order to gain points

FIGURE 3. English Language II. Tutorials with Skype without credit (attendance)
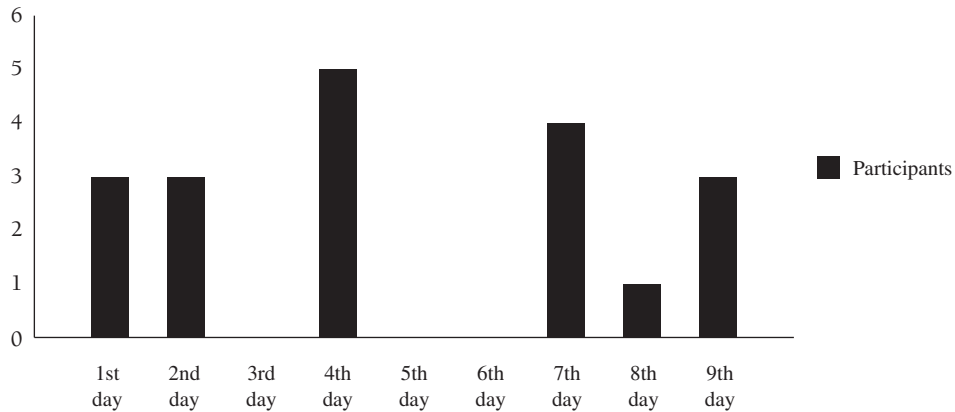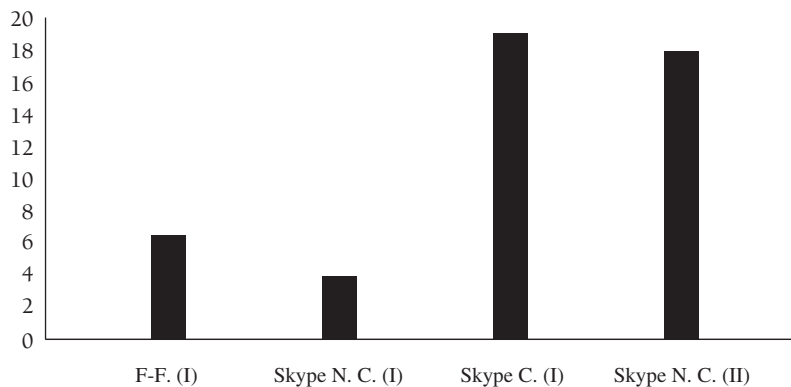


FIGURE 4. Comparison between groups and subjects



towards their final marks, the computer tool alone does not make them participate. We also found that, once they become used to the tool, the extra credit is no longer necessary for them to contact their teachers via Skype. Loyalty to the system was generated among the students. In the first semester, the percentage of connections to Skype tutorials without credit was 25% of the connections with extra credit. The percentage of F-F meetings was 40% of the students who participated in English Language I with extra credit. In the second semester, unexpectedly, the number of contacts was 95% of the English Language I students who had previously received extra credit in the subject.

Other results were obtained from the comments and the records kept by the teachers who taught the same group that used Skype in the two English Language subjects (C. and N.C.) and their exchange with the students.

- Students also often used self-correction strategies: 35 times in Skype tutorials, 2 in F-F tutorials (Karpicke and Roediger, 2007). With indirect questions students were, consciously or unconsciously, able to reach the correct answers by themselves.
- Better student-teacher relationship. This was probably because more students participated in these tutorials. This fostered

- student confidence, which affected the degree of participation and created a good atmosphere in general.
- Change in student attitudes. They initially preferred e-mail, but eventually preferred the use of Skype.

In view of the results of this research, many teachers will be interested in using Skype in their tutorials. We have been concerned with starting to use Skype at the university level, although the tool can be used in many different ways, depending on the needs of each teacher and his/her students.

## Conclusions

This research is used to diagnose the best type of tutorial to be developed in the future with students starting a degree in English Studies, which is via Skype, as voluntary F-F tutorials do not appear to work in favour of learning. As initially students do not appear to be enthusiastic with Skype, additional credit should be offered until they become accustomed and loyal to the method. It is important for students to get used to the method and create a need for them to contact the teacher. Making it mandatory is not advisable, as there is a risk that students will do so without the intrinsic motivation required for learning. Whether it is by providing additional credit or encouraging students to participate in subsequent semesters, or

even years, there should hopefully be no need to provide further encouragement once they become loyal to the method, as shown in this research. Continued and regular use of this type of tutorial without limiting its use to before or after examinations, as is often the case with F-F meetings, should be promoted.

The evidence for the usefulness of this type of tutorials could be found in: a) the larger number of self-correction strategies recorded by teachers, b) and in their final marks, since the ones who participated in tutorials with Skype got better marks. Therefore, we can claim that Skype might contribute to successful language learning outcomes, but this is something that needs further research specially in this field in which the existing academic work is scarce.

We definitively are in favour of using virtual tutorials, but an even more innovative way to encourage voluntary participation to get students used to using technology could be to partner students with English-speaking peers in other locations around the world. The habit of using this kind of technology could be used afterwards to carry out Skype tutorials in an easier way.

We found a serious limitation in the use of an iPad for this type of tutorial. A different type of computer (desktop or laptop) is recommended, as the iPad produces an echo that makes communication in a foreign language more difficult.

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## Resumen

*Tutorías no presenciales con Skype*

**INTRODUCCIÓN.** El principal objetivo de esta investigación es encontrar una manera de fomentar la participación de los estudiantes en las tutorías. **METODOLOGÍA.** En la investigación se usó Skype, herramienta de gran potencial para estimular la destreza oral en los idiomas extranjeros (Coburn, 2010; Eaton, 2010a, 2010b; Motlik, Nolletti y Vlamakis, 2012; Rimando, 2011; Tsukumato, Nuspliger y Senzaki, 2009; Yang y Chang, 2008). En el estudio se comparó la participación de tres grupos de estudiantes de Lengua Inglesa I asignados aleatoriamente a tutorías presenciales o no presenciales con Skype (con y sin crédito adicional). En el estudio también se compararon los datos con los de un grupo de estudiantes de Lengua Inglesa II (el grupo de Lengua Inglesa I que ya había recibido crédito anteriormente). La única diferencia es que este grupo ya no recibió crédito por su participación en las tutorías con Skype. **RESULTADOS.** De acuerdo con las hipótesis de trabajo, la participación presencial fue escasa, con mayor participación en el grupo que hizo la tutoría por Skype y que recibió crédito adicional. **DISCUSIÓN.** Esta investigación es muy útil para diagnosticar el tipo de tutoría que se debe emplear con los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL), que es a través de Skype ya que las tutorías tradicionales no ayudan a que se produzca el aprendizaje deseado. No obstante, el resultado más significativo es la fidelización de los estudiantes al uso de Skype, incluso en ausencia de recompensa.

**Palabras clave:** *Tutoría, On-line, Inglés oral, Lengua extranjera.*

## Résumé

*Tutoriels en distanciel avec Skype*

**IINTRODUCTION.** L'objectif principal de cette recherche est de trouver une manière d'encourager la participation des étudiants aux sessions de tutoriels. **MÉTHODOLOGIE** éthologi. Dans cette recherche, il a été fait usage de Skype, outil possédant un grand potentiel pour stimuler la compétence orale pour les langues étrangères (Coburn, 2010; Eaton, 2010a, 2010b; Motlik, Nolleti et Vlamakis, 2012; Rimando, 2011; Tsukumato, Nuspliger et Senzaki, 2009; Yang et Chang, 2008). Une étude comparative a été faite de la participation de trois groupes d'étudiants de Langue Anglaise I assignés aléatoirement à des tutoriels présentiels ou distanciels avec Skype (avec et sans crédits additionnels). Les données ont également été comparées avec celles d'un groupe d'étudiants de Langue Anglaise II (le groupe de Langue Anglaise I qui avait déjà reçu des crédits antérieurement), l'unique différence étant que les étudiants de ce groupe n'ont plus reçu de crédits pour leur participation aux tutoriels sur Skype. **RÉSULTATS.** En concordance avec l'hypothèse de travail, la participation en présentiel fut faible, avec une plus grande participation dans le groupe qui a suivi les tutoriels par Skype et qui a reçu les crédits additionnels. **DISCUSSION.** Cette recherche s'avère très utile pour diagnostiquer le type de tutoriel qu'il est souhaitable d'employer avec les étudiants d'Anglais Langue Étrangère (EFL), et oriente vers un apprentissage au moyen du logiciel Skype, car les tutoriels traditionnels ne favorisent pas le type d'apprentissage désiré. Néanmoins, le résultat le plus significatif est la fidélisation des étudiants à l'emploi de Skype, même lorsqu'ils ne sont plus récompensés pour leur participation.

**Mots clés:** *Tutoriel, On-line, Anglais oral, Langue étrangère.*

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