THE USE OF SYNCHRONOUS COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION TO IMPROVE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' ORAL ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

Qiongfang Gao

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

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การใช้การสื่อสารผ่านคอมพิวเตอร์แบบประสานเวลาเพื่อพัฒนาความสามารถทางการพูดภาษาอังกฤษของนักศึกษาระดับมหาวิทยาลัย

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Thesis Examining Committee

_____

(Dr. Peerasak Siriyothin)

Chairperson

_____

(Dr. Nattaya Puakpong)

Member (Thesis Advisor)

_____

(Dr. Suksan Suppasetseree)

Member

_____   _____

(Prof. Dr. Sukit Limpijumnong)   (Dr. Peerasak Siriyothin)

Vice Rector for Academic Affairs   Dean of Institute of Social Technology

เชียนฟาง กาว : การใช้การสื่อสารผ่านคอมพิวเตอร์แบบประสานเวลาเพื่อพัฒนา
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ปัจจุบันทักษะการพูดนับว่ามีบทบาทสำคัญมากในการเรียนภาษาที่สอง/ภาษาต่างประเทศ
อย่างไรก็ตามนักศึกษาที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศยังมีความรู้ทางภาษาอังกฤษไม่
เพียงพอที่จะสื่อสารได้อย่างมีประสิทธิภาพกับบุคคลอื่นๆ มีการวิพากษ์วิจารณ์อย่างมากว่า
หลักสูตรการเรียนการสอนในระดับชาติเกี่ยวกับการสอนภาษาอังกฤษระดับมหาวิทยาลัยไม่
สามารถพัฒนาความสามารถในการสื่อสารของผู้เรียนได้ดีเมื่อผู้เรียนต้องนำความรู้ไปใช้ใน
สถานการณ์จริง ดังนั้นเพื่อให้บรรลุเป้าหมายจึงได้มีการปฏิรูปการศึกษาแห่งชาติของประเทศจีน
และมีการเสนอแนะให้ครูผู้สอนใช้คอมพิวเตอร์ช่วยสอนในการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษเพิ่มมากขึ้น
งานวิจัยนี้มีจุดมุ่งหมายเพื่อตรวจสอบประสิทธิภาพของการใช้คอมพิวเตอร์แบบประสานเวลาใน
การสื่อสาร (SCMC) ของนักศึกษาระดับมหาวิทยาลัยที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ
ผ่านเทคโนโลยี Skype และเพื่อศึกษาทัศนคติของผู้เรียนที่มีต่อการใช้คอมพิวเตอร์แบบประสาน
เวลาในการเรียนทักษะการพูดภาษาอังกฤษ การวิจัยนี้มีนักศึกษาจำนวน 60 คนเข้าร่วมในการ
ทดลองเป็นเวลา 12 สัปดาห์ เครื่องมือที่ใช้ในการวิจัย ได้แก่ แบบทดสอบก่อนเรียนและหลังเรียน
แบบสอบถามความคิดเห็น และการสัมภาษณ์ ผลการศึกษาพบว่า การใช้คอมพิวเตอร์แบบ
ประสานเวลาใน การสื่อสารผ่านเทคโนโลยี SKYpe มีผลในเชิงบวกต่อการพัฒนาทักษะการพูด
ของผู้เรียน ซึ่งมีความแตกต่างอย่างมีนัยสำคัญทางสถิติระหว่างกลุ่มควบคุมและกลุ่มทดลอง
เพราะค่าความน่าจะเป็นน้อยกว่า 0.05 (P = 0.001 <0.05) นอกจากนี้ยังพบว่ามีความแตกต่างอย่าง
มีนัยสำคัญเกี่ยวกับความสามารถของผู้เรียนในด้านการออกเสียง (p = 0.000 <0.05) ความ
คล่องแคล่ว (p = 0.000 <0.05) และคำศัพท์ (P = 0.001 <0.05) กล่าวคือการออกเสียง ความ
คล่องแคล่วและการใช้คำศัพท์ของผู้เรียนมีการพัฒนาที่ดีขึ้น นอกจากนี้ข้อมูลจากแบบสอบถาม
พบว่าผู้เรียนมีทัศนคติที่ดีต่อการใช้คอมพิวเตอร์แบบประสานเวลาในการสื่อสาร (SCMC) ในการ
เรียนทักษะการพูดภาษาอังกฤษ

ผลการวิจัยในครั้งนี้สามารถนำมาพัฒนาการจัดการเรียนการสอนทักษะการพูด
ภาษาอังกฤษในประเทศจีน ตลอดจนช่วยให้ผู้สอนและผู้เรียนตระหนักถึงความสำคัญในการใช้

เทคโนโลยีในการเรียนการสอนภาษาอังกฤษ ซึ่งข้อมูลดังกล่าวนี้เป็นสิ่งที่มีประโยชน์ต่อการ
เปลี่ยนรูปแบบวิธีการสอนจากครูเป็นศูนย์กลางเป็นผู้เรียนเป็นศูนย์กลางในประเทศจีน
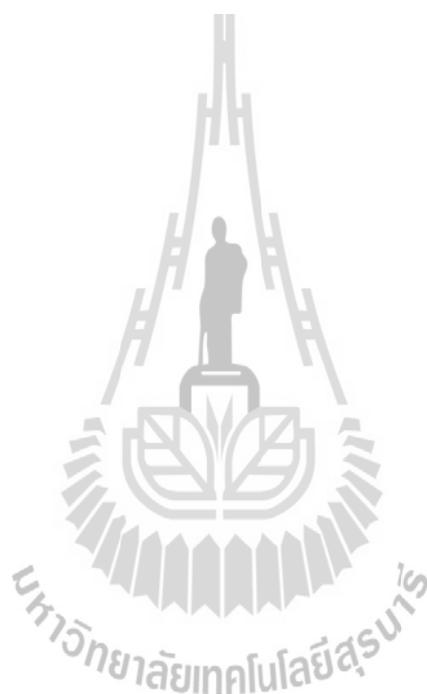
สาขาวิชาภาษาต่างประเทศ   ลายมือชื่อนักศึกษา_____

ปีการศึกษา 2555   ลายมือชื่ออาจารย์ที่ปรึกษา_____

QIONGFANG GAO : THE USE OF SYNCHRONOUS COMPUTER-
MEDIATED COMMUNICATION TO IMPROVE UNIVERSITY
STUDENTS' ORAL ENGLISH PROFICIENCY. THESIS ADVISOR :
NATTAYA PUAKPONG, PH.D., 145 PP.

SCMC/CALL/SKYPE/SPEAKING

Recently, speaking has played an increasingly important role in second/foreign language settings. However, EFL students still do not have adequate English proficiency to communicate effectively with others. Many criticisms claimed that national syllabus for college English teaching cannot improve students' adequate communicative competence to meet the actual needs. Thus, in order to achieve these goals, the national education reform in China highly recommends teachers to maximize CALL in English education. The present study aims at examining the effectiveness of synchronous computer-mediated communication (SCMC) on EFL college students' oral English proficiency via Skype technology, as well as investigating the students' attitudes towards voice-based SCMC in oral English learning. Sixty participants were involved in a 12-week experiment. Three research instruments, the speaking pretests and post-test, attitude survey and interview questions have been employed to collect data. Results show that SCMC via Skype have positive effects on improving students' speaking proficiency. There was a statistical significant difference between control group and experimental group because the P-value was less than 0.05 ($P=0.001<0.05$). There was significant difference in students' proficiency in terms of pronunciation ($P=0.000<0.05$), fluency

(P=0.000<0.05) and vocabulary (P=0.001<0.05). That is, their pronunciation, fluency and vocabulary were greatly improved. Data from students' questionnaires indicated that students had positive attitudes towards the implementation of voice-based SCMC in oral English learning. The findings from this study will contribute to oral English teaching as EFL in China context. It will help speaking instructors as well as college students realize the importance of technology in their teaching and learning. The present study provides valuable information in incorporating technology into classroom in EFL context.

School of Foreign Languages   Student's Signature_____

Academic Year 2012   Advisor's Signature_____

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

CAHPTER

TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The present study aims at examining the effectiveness of synchronous computer-mediated communication (SCMC) on EFL college students' oral English proficiency via Skype technology, in terms of pronunciation, fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, and accuracy, as well as investigating the students' attitudes towards voice-based SCMC in oral English learning. This chapter is an introduction to the rational of the study. Based on what is mentioned above, the research purposes and research questions are presented, and what follow are scopes and limitations of the study, operational definitions of the key terms and summary.

1.1 Rationale

As the main foreign language taught and employed in communication with foreigners, the use of English has dramatically increased in China. The number of English learners in China exceeds 250 million nowadays (Chen & Hu, 2006). However, the students still do not have adequate English proficiency to communicate effectively with others. In China, this situation is called "Dumb English" or "Deaf English".

It could be said that there are three main causes leading to this situation. First, the students lack of an authentic environment to use or practice English. In China,

according to Heyun (2005), it is very difficult for students in general to practice English because of the non-English environment. The big problem with learning English in China is the lack of an English environment. Second, introverted personality of Chinese students may result in low proficiency. Many Chinese students are too shy to speak English in the traditional face-to-face classroom. As Xiong Hua (2005) discovered, introvert students had more advantages in reading, writing and translation than extrovert ones, whereas, students with extrovert characters did a better job on listening and oral English than introvert ones. Third, English is seen as a subject necessary for examination rather than as a means for developing students' communication skills in daily life (Cheng, 2006). Most students learn English just to pass examinations and lectures and activities in class mainly help the students to achieve this goal. Likewise, exam-oriented education is a problem causing high anxiety regarding English learning and resulting in low motivation for students' learning.

However, in China, it is difficult to change the policies of exam-oriented education. China has a nine-year compulsory education system from elementary school to junior high school. During this nine years period, the Ministry of Education of China requires that English education should start from the third grade at the elementary school level. Students take regular English courses, four class hours a week, 18 weeks a term. The result is English has become one of the three core elements in China's college Entrance Examinations. In university or college, two tests

are set for students. Those non-English major students must pass the College English Test Four Level (CET-4) if they want to get a graduation certificate. The purpose of the CET is to examine the English proficiency of undergraduate students. CET consists of three tests: Band 4 (CET-4), Band 6 (CET-6), and the CET-Spoken English Test (CET-SET).

Basically, the test is administered by the National College English Testing Committee. Both of CET-4 and CET-6 focus on the ability of reading and writing. There is no part for speaking. Only the students who get the high score can have an opportunity for CET-SET. The similar test, the Test for English Major (TEM), is for English major. TEM has two levels: TEM-4 and TEM-8. Passing the TEM-4 is a graduation requirement. If English major students cannot pass the TEM-4, they have to take TEM-8 and try to pass it. Briefly, Passing the CET or TEM is very important for Chinese college students. They spend the majority of time to recite text or vocabulary, and to practice hard for English exams. Consequently, students cannot communicate with a native speaker even though they have already learned English for ten or more years.

However, to overcome this problem, China has launched a reform of English education at all levels. One of its major efforts is to maximize modern technology, computer-assisted language learning (CALL) in English education. With the development of CALL, some approaches can deal with the obstacles caused by the lack of an authentic English learning environment and the lack of equal speaking

opportunities. Then, with the development of new telecommunication technology, computer-mediated communication (CMC) provides an innovative way to learn spoken English. Traditionally, learning has been accomplished in the classroom through face-to-face interaction between learners and teachers. CMC now can allow learners to achieve their learning goals through the Internet, regardless of time and geographic boundaries.

According to Li (2008), there are two types of CMC: synchronous computer-mediated communication (SCMC) and asynchronous computer-mediated communication (ACMC). SCMC refers to real-time interaction between people over network. Messages are typed and sent, and received instantaneously. The main softwares of SCMC are Yahoo Messenger and Skype. This is contrasted against ACMC, where there is a significant delay between the time the message is sent and received by the addressee. Email and bulletin boards are the most common examples of ACMC.

In this study, SCMC is the focus. With the functions similar to face-to-face conversations, SCMC can make interlocutors interact with each other and receive instant feedback (Yang & Chang, 2007). There are two forms of SCMC: a text-based form and voice-based form. Many researchers, such as Cheon (2003), Payne and Whitney (2002), Sotillo (2000) and Chun (1994), used text-based communication software as an experimental tool to examine its effect on students' oral proficiency. However, few practical effectiveness of voice-based communication software for oral

proficiency has been sufficiently proved. Thus, this study intends to experimentally examine the effects of oral proficiency training and practice via voice-based SCMC.

Due to the characteristics of SCMC mentioned above, this study adopted Soviet psychologist Vygotsky's sociocultural theory as a learning theory. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and his notion of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) might be closely related to foreign language learning in SCMC contexts. First, Sociocultural theory emphasizes that an individual's mental development can be achieved with meaningful verbal interactions with others in social contexts which involve complex and higher mental functions (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). That is, fewer interactions will result in a slower mental development. SCMC may help address this problem, since it can provide learners with more opportunities to interact with each other.

Moreover, according to Vygotsky (1981), ZPD can clarify how children transit from potential development to actual development. It is the distance between what a child can do with help and what he or she can do without guidance. Through SCMC, learners can interact with each other. They use real-time, online audio and video oral program to show their thinking, to negotiate the meaning of words, and to cooperate with each other to finish their learning activities. During the learning, the lower-level learners can learn a lot from those who have higher levels. When these lower-level learners no longer need help from higher-level learners, the ZPD disappears. They have changed from the actual developmental level to the level of potential development.

In addition, the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach is used as the second learning theory in this study. First, among four skills (listening, speaking, writing, and reading), oral communication is the most complicated skill. Canale and Swain (1980) indicated that CLT approach serves a functional and communicative role for the interlocutors to express and negotiate meanings through interaction with one another. Second, the aim of CLT is to enhance learners' communicative competence. Brown (1994) pointed out that the core of CLT creates opportunities for genuine interaction in terms of group work, authentic language input in real-work context, and meaningful communication in classroom. Third, CLT is one of the theoretical frameworks for Foreign Language in CALL. Recent research employed CLT to investigate discourses within communications in ACMC setting (Meskill & Anthony, 2005). Oral proficiency in voice-based context (Vetter & Chanier, 2006) has been published to incorporate CLT theory and CMC. However, few studies reviewed communications in SCMC setting in the context of China.

Most importantly, the CLT concept, which is compatible with the Vygotskyan's sociocultural model of language learning, is used in the project to allow learners to use the computer as a mediation tool to reach their optimal development level. Both CLT and Vygotskyan's sociocultural model emphasize on social interactions. The rationale of the CLT is teachers should be facilitators to create a student-centered classroom and engage students in authentic-like communications. Similarly, according to Vygotsky, the learning of a new language is embedded in social interactional context.

All activities involved in second language learning, such as teachers discussing among students, students asking questions, and role-play activities, show social interactional characteristics. Considering the characteristics mentioned above, learning activities are designed via Skype technology such as role-playing, group discussions to provide the social and cultural context of spoken English instruction and learning.

Apart from maximizing SCMC in English education, learner attitudes toward SCMC might also play a crucial role influencing effectiveness of SCMC to language acquisition. First, according to AI-Jabri & AI-Khaldi (1997), awareness of user attitudes toward computer is a critical factor in enhancing the acceptance of computers. In other words, users' attitudes will influence achievement. In terms of the participants in this study, SCMC is a new tool in learning for them. They may accept or reject it. Thus, in order to apply SCMC to the oral English teaching properly, investigating learner attitudes is necessary.

Second, many researchers studied that computer has positive effects on learner attitudes. For example, Kelm (1992) observed that the computer-mediated discussion may have reduced anxiety and promoted more equal participation from all students in the class. Beauvois (1992) found that the slower pace of the text-based on-line discussion might have led to an increased language output that resulted in better attitudes toward the language learning.

However, few researchers have studied students' attitudes towards the effectiveness of voice-based SCMC. In order to help instructors implement technology

in teaching effectively, the second purpose of this study is to investigate the students'

attitudes towards voice-based SCMC in oral English learning.

1.2 Purpose of the study

The purposes of this study are as follows:

1. To examine the effectiveness of voice-based SCMC via Skype technology

   on EFL college students' oral English proficiency in the context of China

2. To investigate the students' attitudes towards voice-based SCMC via

   Skpye in oral English learning

1.3 Research questions

1. Do communications through the use of Synchronous Computer Mediated

   Communication (SCMC) via Skype help students improve oral English

   proficiency when compared with a group of students who engage in a

   traditional face-to-face oral English practice? If yes, what field is

   improved in terms of pronunciation, fluency, comprehension, vocabulary

   and accuracy?

2. What are the students' attitudes towards voice-based SCMC via Skype in

   oral English learning?

1.4 Operational definitions of the key terms

1.4.1 Oral English proficiency

It refers to the ability to communicate in English. According to Kost (2004), it includes five categories: pronunciation, fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, and accuracy/structure.

1.4.2 Analytic Oral Proficiency Assessment Scale (AOPAS)

It refers to the five fundamental elements of oral proficiency. It includes five categories: pronunciation, fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, and accuracy. It was created by Kost to measure students' oral English proficiency.

1.4.3 Computer-mediated Communication (CMC)

It refers to all electronic communication between learners and instructors through a computer. It can include both asynchronous text-based communication (e.g. e-mail, bulletin board, and discussion board) and synchronous communication (e.g. Skype, Blackboard, and Adobe Connect)

1.4.4 Synchronous Computer-mediated Communication (SCMC)

It refers to a real time, online telecommunication system which combines text, video and audio functions so that interlocutors can communicate and interact with each other through a computer and the Internet. SCMC can be categorized as text-based (e.g. Yahoo Messenger 3.0 and MSN Messenger 6.0) or voice-based (e.g. Yahoo Messenger 4.0, Windows Live, and the voice function of Skype).

1.4.5 Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

It refers to an approach which regards language as a functional system for communication. The main goal of CLT is communicative competence which enables learners to use language appropriately in the real life situations. Teachers in CLT classroom serves as more of a facilitator to provide real-life materials and situations for learners to engage in learning activities. It is a learner centered environment.

1.4.6 Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

It refers to a variance between what children can do with assistance and what they can do without assistance.

1.5 Significance of the study

As mentioned above, the present study aims at examining the effectiveness of SCMC via Skype technology on EFL college students' oral English proficiency and investigating the students' attitudes towards voice-based SCMC in oral English learning. Therefore, the current study would shed some sights on teaching oral English in various aspects. Firstly, since the implementation of a voice-based SCMC in speaking instructions would be carried out, the findings from this study will contribute to oral English teaching as EFL in China context. Many educators believe in the benefits of mixing traditional classroom instruction with online learning, and more advanced technology are currently coming into existence in China's English classroom. Consequently, a technology-supported learning environment might help better the

student's oral ability and students might become more engaged with designed online activities. So, this will help speaking instructors as well as college students realize the importance of technology in their teaching and learning. Secondly, the results from the study could be of great help in understanding what attitudes the students have toward speaking through computers before incorporating a CALL tool, Skype into the classroom. To sum up, the present study provides valuable information in incorporating technology into classroom in China context. It is a useful exploration on the shift from traditional teacher-centered method to learner-centered teaching methodology.

1.6 Scope and limitations of the study

There are three limitations of this study. First, students of this study were 60 second-year English majors at Tongren University. The selection of the subjects limits the generalization of the findings to other populations of the first-year students at other universities in China. Second, the study depended on the motivation of participants. They may have limited experience and motivation with SCMC. Third, the technology itself could be a limitation. Students might have low computer ability.

1.7 Summary

In China, many criticisms claimed that national syllabus for college English teaching cannot provide students adequate communicative competence to meet the

actual needs. Thus, the national education reform aims at maximizing modern technology in English education. In order to achieve these goals, teachers are highly recommended to use CALL to improve students' oral English proficiency.

However, its effects still remains unclear. Even some studies have reported positive effects of SCMC on language learning, successful models from one context may not produce a desirable result in the context of China. This study then aimed at examining the effectiveness of SCMC on EFL college students' oral English proficiency, in terms of pronunciation, fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, and accuracy using skype, as well as investigating the students' attitudes towards voice-based SCMC in oral English learning. The results obtained are expected to provide more insights into the nature of SCMC for the professional development of instructors who have to apply CALL in their future career.
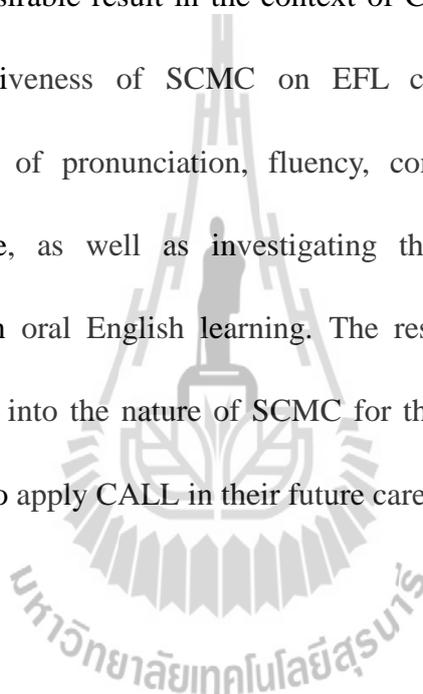
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews the literature related to the present study, which includes Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, the communicative language teaching approach (CLT), the theory and application of computer-assisted language learning (CALL), computer-mediated communication (CMC) and language learning, attitude and CMC, and related research in synchronous computer-mediated communication (SCMC) for teaching foreign language.

2.1 Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory describes learning as a social and cultural rather than individual phenomenon. According to Vygotsky (1978), learning takes place through meaningful interaction with people, and thus the people in the environment are essential to the development of new knowledge.

2.1.1 Social Interactions

Individuals' knowledge and ability are constructed during the social interactions with people around them. According to Ang & Zaphiris (2007), social interaction is useful for understanding how language is acquired, as these skills are learned through interaction, communication and assimilation of others' speech. That is, people acquire language through

social speech. Vygotsky (1978) divided social speech into two areas. First, language arises initially as a means of communication between people and their environments. Second, language is used as a tool to mediate the self as well. Therefore, an important factor in the language acquisition is the social situation in which communication is taking place and language involves in not only functional meaning, but also in social meaning.

Vygotsky (1978) illuminated the role of social interaction in creating an environment to learn language, learn about language, and learn through language. He claimed that all human learning and development was bound up in activities such as purposeful actions mediated by language. However, the process of learning cannot be independent from social interactions and relations. Learning is a mutual influential and interactional process between learners and their instructors, peers, and learning environment. As Vygotsky (1981) mentioned, higher mental functioning, which refer to memorizing, paying attention, thinking, problem solving, and concept information, is embedded in social interactions. That is, individuals acquire their language during the social interactions with people around them. During their early stage, their mental development is constructed by interactions with their parents, relatives and friends. This phenomenon appears on the social area. So higher mental functioning belongs to interpsychological category. During their school stage, their mental function is developed by interactions with their teachers, classmates, and people outside of class. This stage, which happens on the psychological area, belongs to intrapsychological category. In brief, social interactions underlie all higher mental functions.

In interpreting the above principles, one key point is that we need to move beyond comprehension about the language to actual language competence or oral proficiency so that the learners can demonstrate what they can do with the language in real-life situations. However, in terms of improving oral proficiency, oral English teaching has always been a difficulty in the teaching of English majors. In oral English classes in China, teachers should use an interactive approach to develop classrooms. Students are encouraged to articulate how they learn, what problem they are working on, what questions and prior ideas they have, what their plans are to solve the problem or to complete the tasks. That is, language should be involved in not only functional meaning, but also in social meaning.

2.1.2 The Zone of Proximal Development

Vygotsky (1978) believed that techniques of testing only determined the actual level of development, but did not measure the potential ability of the child. According to Vygotsky, learning happens in learners' zone of proximal development (ZPD). The ZPD is one of the key concepts proposed by Vygotsky. He termed the ZPD as

> "the region between what an individual actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the higher level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (1978, p.86).

In other words, the ZPD is an area between what one can perform on ones own and what one can perform with assistance.

More research expands the ZPD concept and language learning to novice-expert interaction (Wells, 1998), collaborative interaction (Donato, 1994; Ohta, 1995; Swain & Lapkin, 1998), and use of gestures for the development of ZPD for language learning and teaching (McCafferty, 2002). In Kinginger (2002), his study focused on the interpretation of ZPD for foreign language teaching in the USA. He claimed that skills interpretation, which was a viewpoint of language learning as the development of skill, derived from two main characteristics of the ZPD. One is that within learners' ZPD, learning tasks should be within learners' level of ability; the other one is adults or more skilled learners should mediate between the learners and the tasks.

In present study, two main important areas are based on Vyogtsky's ZPD. First, it is the rational for grouping the subjects. In order to examine whether communications through the use of SCMC help students improve oral English proficiency when compared with a group of students who engage in a traditional face-to-face oral English practice, two groups are divided into subgroups including at least one or two students with higher oral English proficiency. Students complete the task through problem solving under more skilled students' guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. When students can move away from reliance on other peers toward reliance on themselves, their language ability is developed. That is, their ZPD disappears.

In addition, learning tasks in this study are designed based on the concept of ZPD. As reviewed above, ZPD is the next stage of learning, and it implies the area that

students' ability is ready to develop. In order to learn, the interactions between the learners should be within learners' ZPD. First, the contents for interactions are taken from learners' textbooks such as topic about asking hometown, introducing hobbies, discussing opinion to internet and so forth. Second, the forms of interactions are common for learners. Learners are quite familiar with the activities, such as topic discussing, role playing, debating and so on. In conclusion, the learning tasks designed in this study do not challenge learners but is based on their ZPD. 0

2.2 Communicative Language Teaching Approach

In the area of teaching English as a foreign language, the idea that language is a tool for communication has resulted in a widespread implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) all over the world. CLT was brought to China in the late 1970s by international English language teaching specialists working in some Chinese universities (Yu, 2001). CLT is based on the idea that learning a foreign language is not to master its structures and forms, but to develop learners' communicative competence. According to Canale and Swain (1980), CLT is a teaching methodology which can make interlocutors interact and communicate with other people through communication activities which are meaningful and characterized with genuine communication such as its basis in social interaction, creativity, unpredictability of utterances, and its authenticity.

2.2.1 Basic Features of CLT

CLT focuses on language activities which require learners to do in class what they will have to do when communicating with people outside (Nunan, 1989). According to Nunan, there are three features of CLT. First, it emphasizes on interaction. Second, authentic texts are introduced into the learning situation. Third, teaching is learner-centered and responsive to learners' needs and interests.

In addition, according to Berns (1990), there are pedagogical principles of CLT approach to language teaching. First, language teaching is considered to be a tool to communicate. That is, language is seen as a social tool which speakers use to make meaning. Speakers communicate about something to someone for some purposes of orally or writing. Second, diversity is accepted as part of language development and is used similarly with second language learners and users as it is with first language users. Third, a learner's competence is considered in relative, not absolute, terms of correctness. Fourth, more than one variety of a language is recognized as a viable model for learning and teaching. Last, culture is recognized as playing an instrumental role in shaping speakers' communicative competence.

Based on these characteristics, teachers in foreign language classroom should try to provide students with enough opportunities to express, interpret, and negotiate meaning through interaction.

2.2.2 Teaching Communicative Competence

Communicative competence plays very important role in language teaching. As Hymes (1972) pointed out, communicative competence involves knowing the language code and what to say to whom, and how to say it appropriately in any situation.

According to Richards (2005), communicative competence includes four aspects of language knowledge. First, learners should know how to use language for a range of different purposes and functions. Second, learners should know how to vary their use of language according to the setting and the participants. For example, learners should know when to use formal and informal speech or when to use language appropriately for written as opposed to spoken communication. Third, learners should know how to produce and understand different types of texts. For example, they should know types of narratives, reports, interviews, conversations. Fourth, learners should know how to maintain communication despite having limitations in one's language knowledge. That is they should know how to communicate through using different kinds of communication strategies.

Because CLT focuses on communicative competence, any instructors who apply CLT in their teaching should provide students with real-life situations. In other words, students' spoken exchanges should be authentic and meaningful.

2.2.3 CLT Activities

Teachers have to change their attitudes that besides wanting to pass the exam, students also come to English class with various purposes such as increasing their score of English subject and preparing for job promotion. Consequently, students want to improve their language competence not linguistic competence. In order to improve their communicative competence, various activities should be provided for students.

Littlewood (1981) claimed that communicative activities should provide students with more opportunities to develop links with meaning that will later enable them to use this language for communicative purposes. According to Littlewood, communicative activities achieve the following purposes in the classroom.

First, communicative activities can provide whole-task practice. For example, students can learn speaking skills rather than part skill to implement various sets of skilled performance through various sorts of communicative activity. Second, communicative activities can improve motivation. Engaging in activities can motivate students to communicate with other peers and help them assess whether they have achieved their learning goals. Third, communicative activities allow natural learning. Namely, communicative activities provide a natural context for students to use language for communication with others. Fourth, communicative activities create a context which supports learning. For example, they provide opportunities for students to participate and build positive relationships among other learners and between learners and teacher.

2.2.4 CLT in this study

As reviewed above, an important application of CLT is the focus on the oral English. This study aims at examining the effectiveness of synchronous computer-mediated communication (SCMC) on EFL college students' oral English proficiency. However, English education in China is practiced in a non-English-speaking environment. Thus, CLT is adopted as a teaching approach in this study.

First, CLT is related to the learners' oral English. CLT is learner-centered and emphasizes communication and real-life situations. Since CLT has its own features, like interactions, learners can communicate each other in daily life. They use English as a tool to communicate even with native speakers. In this way, learners can improve their speaking skills, which is a purpose of the present study.

Second, the call for the adoption of CLT is not accidental. It is used as a new way of changing the traditional grammar-translation method. In order to get a good result on final examination or a diploma, too much time and attention spends on grammar, vocabulary and sentence structure (Yu, 2001). This led to the "Dumb English" or "Deaf English". Thus, the researcher transformed the old teaching method into CLT to meet the demand of the present study.

Third, CLT can be a guide for the researcher to design the online learning tasks in this study. In China, most students are passive, and they are too shy to speak English. Without motivating learning tasks, they may keep silent. To solve this situation,

CLT provides many types of communicative activities including social formulas, dialogue activity, community-oriented tasks, problem-solving activities, and role-plays.

2.3 Computer-Assisted Language Learning

CALL has received considerable attention over past twenty years to enhance foreign language teaching and learning. The rationale of CALL is currently due to the advent of technology that has made CALL possible to meet the needs of foreign language learners in different contexts (Levy & Stockwell, 2006).

In the past, computer was simply used as a substitute for a teacher to provide students with teaching materials. Nowadays, technologies are also used as communication tools which can provide a platform for using language more effectively and allow students to engage in communicative tasks in authentic and diverse context (Lee, 2009).

Warschauer (1996b) has divided CALL into three distinct phases: behaviorist, communicative and integrative. Behaviorist CALL was designed to provide immediate positive or negative feedback to learners on the formal accuracy of responses (Warschauer & Kern, 2005). The rationale for the use of computers during this time includes three aspects. First, repeatedly presenting the same material to students can be a major benefit for their learning. Second, the computer, unlike a teacher, can implement drills repeatedly and give feedback immediately. Third, the computer can allow students to learn at their own pace (Warschauer, 1996a).

This rational is still applied to today's numerous drill programs such as vocabulary and grammar exercises. However, the disadvantages of this structural approach to CALL were several. According to Warschauer and Kern (2005), it provided little excitement among teachers and learners. Only one possible response was acceptable, and repeated drilling on the same material was the objective of the programs.

As the communicative approach gained recognition, around the 90's, communicative CALL arose, focusing more on using forms or structures of the English language rather than on the forms themselves. As Moras (2001) said, communicative CALL was a shift from the drilling format to skill practice through games, reading and text construction. First, the activities focus more on using forms to communicate rather than on the forms themselves. Second, communicative CALL encourages the students to generate original utterances rather than merely to manipulate prefabricated language. Besides, communicative CALL does not try to judge and evaluate everything the student does.

Based on these mentioned principles, many CALL programs were developed. According to Taylor and Perez (1989), one program of communicative CALL, which named computer as workhorse, empowered the learner to use or understand language. Examples of computer as tool include word processors, spelling and grammar checkers. Even though communicative CALL has advantages, it still has limitations. People cannot negotiation their meanings because it is a closed system.

Later, integrative CALL has revolutionized communication. Learners no longer interact with computers but with other humans. Learners participated in structured activities to integrate and use speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. Much of the theory underlying integrative CALL is derived from the Vygotskyan sociocultural model of language learning (Fotos & Browne, 2004) in which interaction plays a central role in the creation of meaning. Integrating learning activities include e-mail, role-playing games, and simulation games. Nowadays, people largely use web-based activities instead of language-learning software and CD-ROMs. So, this study will use Skype technology, which belongs to integrative CALL, to examine the effectiveness of synchronous computer-mediated communication (SCMC) on EFL college students' oral English proficiency.

2.4 Computer Mediated Communication

Under the environment of CALL, CMC appeared. The term CMC was first used by Hiltz and Turoff (1978). In their study of computer conferencing, they used it as a mode of electronic communication. Different researchers have used different definitions for CMC. Herring (1996) defined CMC as the "communication that takes place between human beings via the instrumentality of computers" (p. 1). According to Yang & Chang (2007), it refers to the use of computers or networks of computers as input, storage, output, and routing devices to transmit and receive messages among spatially separated participants. In one word, CMC is a generic term that incorporates

all forms of communication between individuals and among groups via networked computers.

According to Chang (2007), there are two types of CMC: asynchronous computer-mediated communication (ACMC) and synchronous computer-mediated communication (SCMC). In ACMC, like email, users cannot receive feedback immediately while they can interact with each other immediately in SCMC.

Studies have suggested that learners participating in CMC feel more involved in the development of ideas, in determining the path of discussion that topics take, and in the selection of topics (Kelm, 1992; Kern 1995; Ortega, 1997). Students who might be too shy to speak to the instructor or other students face to face may find it easier to communicate online (McComb, 1993). Thus, CMC could be seen as the complement to face-to-face communication. In CMC learning environment, learner-to-learner exchanges appear to be more interactive than actual environment (Blake, 2000; Darhower, 2000; Kern, 1995; Warschauer, 1997).

2.4.1 Asynchronous Computer-Mediated Communication

According to Murray (2000), ACMC is used to describe network-based interaction where there is frequently a considerable delay between the reception and response to a message. Bulletin board systems (BBS) and email are ideal tools for setting up an asynchronous learning environment. Both of them have become an effective medium for English language teaching and learning. However, according to Barile and Durso (2002), ACMC had a time lag between sending a message and

receiving a reply. Although the messages via these softwares are not immediately responded, ACMC is still good for vocabulary, sentence structure learning and grammar, but not for language speaking（Zhang, 1996).

2.4.2 Synchronous Computer-mediated Communication

Murray (2000) described that SCMC refers to real-time interaction between people over either local or wide-area networks. There are two types of SCMC technology: text-based SCMC and voice-based SCMC.

According to Chang (2007), SCMC has experienced three developmental phases. The first development offered synchronous typing communication without a message permanence function. Daedalus InterChange by Daedalus Inc. is the example of this early stage. It can function with many-to-many written discussion environment. The second phase can function with one-to-one and one-to-many text-based chatting. Message Sending Network (MSN) or Yahoo Messenger is the examples of this phase. However, current technology offers real-time text, audio, and video communication, document transmission, and message permanence. The third phase of SCMC is offered not only one-to-one, one-to-many, but also many-to-many online text and voice networking. The current voice-based SCMC is getting more important in English language teaching and learning such as AOL Instant Messenger, voice function of Yahoo Messenger, Windows Live Messenger, Pal Talk, iVisit, and Skype. Table 2.1 shows the comparison of major SCMC softwares available.

Table 2.1 Feature comparison of Major SCMC Softwares (As cited in Chang, 2007)

	Instant Messenger	Yahoo Messenger	Windows Live Messenger	PalTalk	iVisit	Skype
Platform	Windows, MacOS8&9	Windows	Windows XP	Windows	Windows Macintosh	Windows Mac OSX Linux Pocket PC
Audio Chat	1 to 1 Half- or Full- duplex	Multi-party Half-duplex	1 to 1 Full-duplex	Multi-party	Multi-party Half- or Full-	Multi-Party Full-duplex
Video	√	1 to 1	1 to 1	Paid Version only	Multi-party	×
Audio Chat rooms	Pre-established	Pre-established User established	×	Pre-established User established	Pre-established User established	×
User Directory	Partly functional	√	√	×	×	√
Other Features	File transfer URL embedding	File transfer Shared files User aliases	File transfer Remote assistance Shared apps and whiteboard	Mic request Access control	Audio-vidieo recording Playback Access control	Skype in and out File transfer Access control Instant message
Free or not	√	√	Free (video version is not)	√	√	√

Among all voice-based SCMC software, Skype seems to provide a better quality of sound over high-speed Internet or wireless connections (Levy & Stockwell, 2006). Skype seems to be the best-designed software (Chang, 2007).

> "In terms of compatible platforms, Skype adapts to all platforms, such as Windows, MacOSX, Linux, Pocket PC, etc. In Audio chat function, Skype is more complete than others. It is only one, at the present, which provides muti-party conversation and full duplex interaction. Besides, Skype is free software "(page 38-39).

In conclusion, Skype seems to be the best software for learners to practice their oral English. Thus, the present study uses it as a tool to examine the effectiveness of SCMC on EFL college students' oral English proficiency in the context of China.

2.4.3 CMC in this Study

As reviewed earlier, a good example of an effective application of CMC is the use of computers in certain situations such as in the learning of English as a foreign language (EFL). In such EFL settings, learners have restricted opportunities to use the target language outside the classroom. E-mail and chat gives non-native speakers more chances to interact with other speakers of the target language outside of the classroom.

The natures of CMC, as reviewed earlier, help communication in English to occur freely. Avoiding the use of CMC in today's language teaching is seen as a setback because it could facilitate teachers and learners in creating communication opportunities, which is the primary goal of CLT. There are some reasons why CMC needs to be incorporated into EFL settings in the present study.

First, in the EFL settings, like China, university teachers hold on the views that social interactions can make students acquire their English. However, the amount of teacher-learner and learner-learner interaction is still quite restricted within the classroom setting, as indicated by Kitade (2000). Firstly, as reviewed in chapter 1, Chinese students are required to grasp more grammar foundation because of exam-oriented education system. Thus, teacher-learner and leaner-learner interaction is limited. Another issue is the patterns of interaction in the classroom are not always authentic and may not prepare learners for the situations they are likely to face in the real world.

However, CMC can be compensated for this situation. According to Warschauer (1996a), learners' shyness, limited comprehension of the discussion at hand may lead them to keep quiet during the face-to-face interaction and speak up only in the CMC discussion. In addition, another important point made by Warschauer is that the language in the electronic discussion was more informal and complex than the face-to-face interaction. CMC may benefit learners by providing an ideal environment in which to practice using language that is informal and complex, lexically and syntactically.

Second, CMC provides corrective feedback to each other so that students could get improvements. In many EFL settings, like China, students might be reluctant to talk again if they are corrected frequently during their conversations. Similarly, in face-to-face interaction, it is difficult for students to self correct an ungrammatical

sentence which they produced a few minutes ago. However, CMC overcomes all these problems well. Students could go back to their own typed speech and correcting their own speech, or they were able to read their conversations on the screen when they typed it out, or they could listen to their recorded conversations. In this case, students can review their conversations, examine their mistakes and see if any corrective feedback was provided by their teachers or partners. As Smith (2003) said, CMC can be advantageous to students because it is not as intrusive as recording face-to-face interaction.

Third, CMC helps shy and reluctant students communicate freely and more confidently. In China, the reason resulting in the failures in the implementation of CLT is the fact that many students are shy and reluctant to engage in communicative activities provided by teachers. Unlike face to face communication where embarrassment or failure is obvious, CMC makes it possible for students to plan appropriate communication and to hide their embarrassment.

Finally, CMC provides both teachers and students with variety of authentic teaching and leaning materials. Most Chinese students said that they felt bored with the traditional textbooks. CMC provides teachers with interesting and challenging communicative materials and activities. It is a helpful tool for teachers to succeed in implementing CLT.

In brief, CMC functions well for oral English language teaching, especially in EFL settings. As reviewed before, CMC has two types: ACMC and SCMC. As for ACMC,

there are some studies about its implications. However, there are few studies about the

implications of SCMC. Thus, the present study aims at examining the effectiveness of

SCMC on EFL college students' oral English proficiency in the context of China. In

addition, in order to effectively apply SCMC to speaking class, investigating the students'

attitudes towards SCMC is also important. The next paragraph will discuss the reasons.

2.5 Attitude and Computer-mediated Communication

Attitude has recently received considerable attention from both first and

second language researchers. There are many definitions of this term. Among them,

Triandis (1971) accepts that it is a manner of consistency toward an object. To Brown

(1994), attitude is characterized by a large proportion of emotional involvement such

as feelings, self, relationships in community. Gardner (1985) claims that attitude is an

evaluative reaction to some referent or attitude object, inferred on the basis of the

individual's beliefs or opinions about the referent. Briefly, the operational definition of

attitude toward SCMC in this study means an evaluative reaction to some referent or

object. It is students' knowledge, belief, liking and intent for future use of technology.

Macnamara (1973) mentions about two types of attitudes: integrative and

instrumental attitude. An integrative attitude is a desire to know and become friendly

with speakers of a language while an instrumental one is a desire to better oneself

materially by means of the language. And he adds that an integrative attitude is more

likely to lead to success than an instrumental one. Brown (1994) gives an example of

Canadian's positive attitude toward French. He empathized that positive attitude could lead to high integrative motivation to learn French.

In terms of CMC, it can improve learners' attitudes and motivation towards language learning (Beauvois, 1994; Kern, 1995; Jaeglin, 1998). According to Kern (1995), students reported that they felt freer to communicate because they felt that CMC provided a less formal atmosphere, and even lowered their communication anxiety. Many attitudinal studies have confirmed the positive attitudes of language learners towards asynchronous computer-mediated communication (Akbulut, 2008; Almekhlafi, 2006; Hanna & de Nooy, 2003；Holmes, 1998; Klassen & Milton，1999; Mahfouz & Ihmeidah, 2009; Smith & Sauro, 2009; Son, 2007). In addition, Beauvois (1997a) suggested that CMC discussion brought a positive effect on her intermediate students producing French as well as positive attitudes toward the instruction of using CMC in language learning.

There are several reasons explaining why investigating on students' attitudes towards SCMC in this study are important. First, according to Fishbein & Ajzen (1975), a person's behavior is predicted by his/her attitude towards that behavior. Second, AI-Jabri & AI-Khaldi (1997) stated that awareness of user attitudes toward computer is a critical factor in enhancing the acceptance of computers as well as understanding current user behavior and shaping future behavior. The two points mean that if a person accepted SCMC with positive attitude, they would like to use it actively. Otherwise, they would reject it.

Even though many studies have explored learners' attitudes toward CMC and its effects on learners' performance, few studies investigated learners' attitudes towards the use of voice-based SCMC. In the context of China, investigating 17 Taiwanese students in a writing class, Huang (2005) found that almost 60% agreed that SCMC discussions were useful. 78% of the students admitted that they used ideas produced during the CMC discussions in their essays. Thus, the second purpose of this study was to fill this gap in investigating the students' attitudes towards voice-based SCMC in oral English learning.

2.6 SCMC for Teaching Foreign Language

The use of SCMC was regarded as "chat" in foreign language education. Many studies (Blake, 2000; Pellettieri, 2000; Smith, 2003; Sotillo, 2000) support that SCMC does facilitate negotiation of meaning interaction. It can be an effective method for improving interactive competence, and then it would gradually transfer to the student's speaking competence.

2.6.1 SCMC for improving Oral English Proficiency

In the context of English teaching in China, though students focus more on grammar, they might now pay attention to communication and interaction as well (Liu, 2004). Researchers, such as Kern (1995), Sotillo (2000) and Cheon (2003), have found that SCMC discussions provide learners with opportunities to be engaged in meaningful interaction. Among them, Kern (1995) compared electronic and

face-to-face discussion of the same length in his university French class. He concluded that there are significant differences in terms of production between electronic discussion and face-to-face discussion. Students could produce two to four times more sentences through SCMC than in the face-to-face discussion. To Kelm (1992), his Portugues students' accuracy is greatly improved in SCMC sessions. He noted that his students could reduce certain grammatical errors at a rate of 80%. In addition, Chun (2003), a Korean researcher, used MS Chat 3.0 as the experimental tool in his research about viability of SCMC in secondary EFL classroom in Korea. She concluded that the use of SCMC has significant advantages over face-to-face interaction.

Apart from above mentioned, several studies evaluate the amount of student participation between face-to-face discussions and computer mediated discussions (Chun, 1994; Kelm, 1992; Kern, 1995; Sullivan & Pratt, 1996; Warschauer, 1996). All studies found a greater amount of students' participation. Total amount of student participation in electronic discourses ranged from 85% to 90% (Sullivan & Pratt, 1996), 86% to 88% (Kern, 1995). In face-to-face discourse, student participation ranged from 35% to 37% in one class (Sullivan & Pratt, 1996) and 35% to 60% in a second class (Kern, 1995). Furthermore, Sullivan and Pratt (1996) found that 100% of the students participated in electronic discourse and only 50% in the face-to-face.

Results from these studies have indicated two advantages of SCMC for improving speaking skills. First, students tend to produce more language through SCMC than in traditional face-to-face classrooms. Second, shy students participated as

much or even more than those students who normally study in classroom. However, it might not apply to China context. Thus, this study aims at examining its effectiveness on EFL students' oral English proficiency in the context of China.

2.6.2 Skype for Improving Oral English Proficiency

As reviewed before, Skype could be the first creation of the third phase of SCMC. It offers not only one-to-one, one-to-many, but also many-to-many online text and voice networking.

Recently, research on Skype involves a variety of languages including Spanish (Volle, 2005; Lee, 2008), Italian (Tudini, 2003), French (Lamy 2004; Huack, 2007) as well as English used in some Asian countries such as Taiwan (Chang, 2007), Japan (Tsukamoto, Nuspliger & Senzaki, 2009), Malaysia (Maclean, 2009) and Vietnam (Hong, 2006). These studies involve audio or audiographic exchange over the Internet, either between students and language teachers, between students and native speakers. The results from these studies show that there is a growing awareness that student attempt to improve their oral language proficiency through Skype (Lamy, 2004).

Besides, according to Coburn (2010), three Norwegian institutions of higher education use Skype in foreign language learning for distance learners. Ostflold College uses Skype for the teaching of oral French to low to upper-intermediated students. At Norwegian University of Science of Technology in Trondheim, Skype is used to teach oral Spanish and French to lower-intermediate and beginner students. In

addition, many Norwegian schools participated in EU-funded and other language development projects with Skype. It could be said that in the future, the trend of using Skype to help developing learners' oral proficiency is likely to accelerate.

Results from these studies have indicated that there were some advantages of using Skype for improving speaking skills. First, it allows no more than four people to communicate. In communicative language teaching, the proper number is three to four (Qingshan & Tianyou, 1996). Thus, the limitation does not restrict the present research needs. Second, the software is free. According to Liang and Hsiao (2000), the easier we access the media, the more people would like to use it. Third, time and place are unbounded. Using Skype, we can communicate with others in different countries. In education, learners can be anywhere and anytime. Students do not need to learn in classrooms. Fourth, the sound can be recorded. Software such as PowerGramo and RSkype can record and save learners' activities, and teacher can evaluate student activities for later analysis and learning. After several times repeatedly listened to the records or received the feedback from teachers, students could correct their pronunciations and sentence structures.

In general, by providing an easy, inexpensive way to communicate with people around the world, Skype opens the door to a wide range of activities that can improve students' engagement and comprehension. In the present study, teaching with Skype is expected to enhance students' oral English proficiency.

2.7 Summary

In this chapter, some general concepts related to the present study were reviewed. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and the CLT approach were presented. The theory and application of CALL and studies on CMC including ACMC and SCMC were illustrated. After understanding how these underlying theories interact with each other for this study, attitude and CMC were reviewed. In the final section of this chapter, some related studies in SCMC for teaching foreign language were reviewed.

As a conclusion, there are few studies on the use of SCMC for spoken English teaching and learning in the context of China. The present study aims to fill this gap by examining the effectiveness of SCMC on EFL college students' oral English proficiency via Skype technology in the context of China.
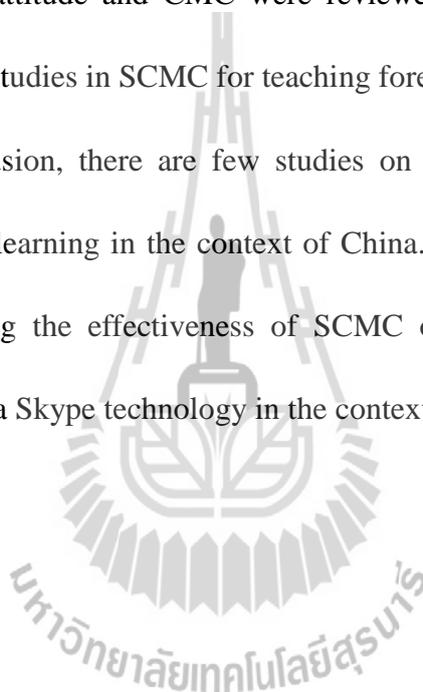
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This study aimed at examining the effectiveness of synchronous computer-mediated communication on EFL college students' oral English proficiency via Skype. The methodology employed in the present study will be introduced in this chapter, including the subjects, the instruments, variables, experiment procedures, data analysis and pilot study.

3.1 Subjects

The subjects of this study will be sixty English majors, coming from two classes of second-year students enrolled in Tongren University, Guizhou Province, southwestern China. The reason why they are selected to be subjects in this study is that, according to the National Curriculum for College English Majors of Higher Education in China, the English major students' English proficiency should be divided into eight degrees. By the time this study is carried out, all the subjects have reached Grade Three. According to the national curriculum, English of this level are graded as intermediate. That is, they have acquired certain speaking skills which are suitable for the present study.

There will be one experimental group and control group representing the subjects. There are 30 students in each group. All of them will have the same course content, format, text materials, but different instructional methods: Skype online discussions and traditional classroom discussions.

3.2 Instruments

There were three kinds of instruments used in this study in order to collect data: 1) speaking pretest and post-test based on Analytic Oral Proficiency Assessment Scale (AOPAS, see Appendix A), 2) Attitude Survey (Appendix B) and 3) Interview Questions (see Appendix C).

3.2.1 Speaking pretest and posttest

The first instrument was to measure students' oral English proficiency in terms of pronunciation, fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, and accuracy. Speaking pretest could also be used as the criteria to divide students into experimental group and control group. According to the theory of Vygotsky's ZPD, there is a distance between what one can do with assistance and what one can not without any assistance. If a person gets help from those who have higher abilities, the distance will disappear. It means that he or she has already improved his or her ability already. Based on the scores of the students' pretest, they were ordered from No.1 to No. 60. The first place student was S1; the second one was S2, then S3, S4, S5 to S60. Then all the odd numbers would be the control group. Such as: S1, S3, S5 and so on. On the contrary,

all the even numbers would be the experimental group. Such as: S2, S4, S6 and so forth. As a result, the subjects were then arranged in the mixed ability groups. Pretest and Posttest questions used in this part include the following questions:

Pretest questions:

1) What is your name?

2) What is your major?

3) Where are you from?

4) Tell us in English about a trip that you took recently.

5) Tell us in English what is your plan for the winter vacation.

Posttest questions:

1) Could you introduce your name?

2) What subject are you studying?

3) Could you please introduce your hometown?

4) Could you please share your recent travel experience with us?

5) What are you going to do in the winter vacation?

These pretest and posttest questions were administered at the beginning of the experiment and the end of the experiment respectively. The tests were to determine whether there were any improvements in students' performance on the oral proficiency test between the two groups. Two raters will sit with students when the students speak. Meanwhile, students' answering will be tape-recorded in order that two raters can do detail scoring later. In terms of difficulty level, the contents for the pretest and

post-test were the similar but in order to guarantee the questions test the same contents and have the same level of difficulty, they are phrased in different sentence structures. If the pretest and post-test are totally different, the results from these two tests will not parallel. The scores for these five questions will be based upon Analytic Oral Proficiency Assessment Scale (AOPAS).

3.2.1.1 Analytic Oral Proficiency Assessment Scale (AOPAS)

According to Kost (2004), AOPAS are the five fundamental elements of oral proficiency. It includes five categories: pronunciation, fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, and accuracy. There are specific descriptions for each of these five categories. In terms of pronunciation, it means speakers can pronounce correctly and can use plenty of intonations to express themselves clearly without confusing words. As for fluency, it refers that speakers can speak freely without any unnatural pause. They can talk like a native speaker and they are very active and responsive during their talk. The third category is comprehension. This ability requires speaker to understand clearly what they have listened and also they are able to paraphrase and ask questions when they are unfamiliar with the content. Vocabulary is the fourth category. If a speaker has rich and extensive vocabulary, and he or she can use very accurate usage to talk, he or she will get the high score. The last category is accuracy. If speakers can use complete sentences in answering and they make very few grammar mistakes during their conversations, they will get the score from 17 to 15.

In addition, each category has its own scoring descriptions. This study mainly adopts Kost's AOPAS as scoring students' oral English proficiency, but comprehensibility and vocabulary categories were adapted in order to keep scores reliability. For example, comprehensibility in the original AOPAS, if speaker requests his or her interlocutor to rephrase only one time, he or she would get 17 to 15 points. This would make raters hesitate to give either 17 points, 16 points or 15 points. Thus, it was adapted. One to three times rephrasing equals 17 to 15 points, then 4 to 6 rephrasing equals 14 to 12 points. Each item has its own intervals in order to keep balance with given scores. Similarly, the vocabulary category was adjusted in the same manner as the comprehensibility category. In terms of pronunciation, the raters could count the numbers of mistakes. For example, one mistake in pronunciation equals 17 points, 2 mistakes equals 16 points, and 3 mistakes equals 15 points. Similarly, the scores for fluency are evaluated by the number of unnatural pauses. If a speaker makes 16-18 unnatural pause, he would get 2-0 points respectively. Scoring for accuracy is that the less grammar mistakes the speakers make, the higher scores they would have. In brief, the raters could score the speakers' proficiency independently for each category. Thus, the AOPAS is used to score the speakers' proficiency in the present study. For the details of AOPAS, see appendix A, part 2.

3.2.1.2 Training for Inter-Rater Reliability

In order to establish raters' reliability for this study, the data were evaluated by two raters—one is an English native speaker from USA, the other is the

researcher's colleague with high oral English proficiency who once graduated from university of USA. First, the researcher provided the two raters with AOPAS, discussed the concept of oral proficiency together, and then negotiated the definition of the rating criterion of each section. Second, the researcher provided the raters with some oral proficiency interview voice samples, then asked them to evaluate based on AOPAS. After this, the researcher compared the scores resulted from two raters to reach an overall agreement on the definitions of the rating criteria.

The statistical calculation for percentage agreement used in this study was the simplest and most common method of reporting inter-rater reliability. Holsti's (1969) coefficient of reliability (C. R.) indicates the number of agreements per total number of coding decisions. And it provides a formula for calculating percent agreement as follows:

C. R. = 2m / n1+ n2

Where: m= the number of coding decisions upon which the two coders agree

n1= number of coding decisions made by rater 1

n2= number of coding decisions made by rater 2

When the C. R. value is above 0.75, it indicates excellent agreement. On the contrary, if the value is less than 0.75, it means low reliability. The two raters needed to discuss and reach the agreement where differences occurred. In this way, satisfactory inter-rater agreement could be reached.

3.2.2 Attitude survey

The third instrument in this study was attitude survey (see appendix B). According to Wilson and McClean (1994), closed-ended questions are more easily analyzed. Every answer can be given a number or value so that a statistical interpretation can be assessed. After reading related research papers, ten closed-ended questions in this survey were used in order to obtain students' opinions about their attitude toward voice-based SCMC in oral English learning. This attitude survey was conducted in the end of the experiment. In order to make students clear about the questionnaire, all questions are written in English and Chinese. Furthermore, for the validity of all questions, two professors are invited to check the language use for each item. With the help of professors' suggestions, all questions are revised for 3 times. The first draft was checked by one professor who taught English for nearly 20 years. Those long sentences were revised into the simple ones so that the students could easily catch the meaning. The second time, the survey was translated into Chinese for each item. The researcher's colleague, who was a specialist in English translation, checked the translations to make sure that students could understand the content well. In order to get reliable scores, in the last time, the researcher invited one professor who taught Chinese for nearly 20 years to check Chinese expressions.

3.2.3 Interview questions

In the present study, a semi-structured interview (see appendix C) was conducted. There were four questions in the interview. Each question was checked many

times by the researcher and two professors in order to make it appropriate for the present study. Semi-structured interviews were used in the present study because they allowed the interviewer and the interviewees the flexibility to go into details when needed. According to Corbetta (2003), the interviewer is free to conduct the conversation as he or she thinks fit, to give explanation and ask for clarification if the answer is not clear.

3.3 Variables

As viewed in the previous chapters, this study focuses on the effectiveness of SCMC on students' oral English proficiency via online Skype discussions, as well as the students' opinions on voice-based SCMC in oral English learning. The independent variable of the present study will be the online discussions with Skype and discussions in the traditional face-to-face classroom. The dependent variables of the present study will be students' oral English proficiency and students' attitudes toward voice-based SCMC in oral English learning.

3.4 Procedures

3.4.1 Research Design

Table 3.1 shows the pretest and posttest quasi-experimental design with one experimental group and control group used in this study. According to Chang (2007), longitudinal study was needed to give students longer time for practicing English speaking and gaining measurable improvement. Hence, the study covered 12 weeks in fall, 2012.

In this research experiment, the independent variable will be discussions in the traditional face-to-face classroom (X_1) and the online discussions with Skype (X_2). The dependent variables of the present study will be students' oral English proficiency (denoted O_1 and O_2) and students' attitudes toward voice-based SCMC in oral English learning.

Table 3.1 The Quasi-Experimental Design with Two groups

Week of the study	1	3	5	7	9	11	12
control group	O_1	X_1	X_1	X_1	X_1	X_1	O_2
Experimental group	O_1	X_2	X_2	X_2	X_2	X_2	O_2A

Note:

X_1: Traditional classroom discussions

X_2: Skype online discussions

O_1: Pretest of students' of students' oral English proficiency

O_2: Posttest of students' oral English proficiency

A: Survey of students' attitudes and semi-structured interviews toward voice-based SCMC in oral English learning.

The researcher and her colleague will use the same five activities to give two groups instructions respectively at the same time. However, students in experimental group will be introduced to participate in five activities through Skype. There were two reasons why the researcher used the five activities in this study. First, the types of

activities were quite appropriate because they were designed based on the principles of CLT. As reviewed in Chapter 2, communicative language teaching (CLT) is adopted as a teaching approach in this study. Littlewood (1981) distinguished between functional communication activities and social interaction activities as major activity types in CLT. According to Littlewood, functional communication activities required students to use their language resources to overcome an information gap or solve a problem. Social interactional activities required the learners to pay attention to the context and the roles of the people involved. Social interactional activities included conversation and discussion sessions, dialogues, role plays, simulations and debates. In the present study, the designed Activity 4 was problem solving, which was the type of functional activities while the other four types were topic discussion, topic talk, role play and debate, which were types of social interactional activities. The second reason was that the contents of activities were quite closely related to students' life. Students were quite familiar with the topic of hobbies and ideal friends. They knew the way of ordering in restaurant. In each term, Tongren University held a debating contest among students. Most of the students showed interests in debating. Great interests lead to high motivation. As a result, students had high motivation in practicing speaking. Csizer and Dornyei (2005) pointed out that motivation played an essential role in learning. Students who have higher levels of motivation usually demonstrate superior academic performance.

3.4.2 Procedures

Sixty second year students enrolled in English major in Tongren University received a pretest of oral English proficiency. Based on their scores, they were divided into two groups: control group and experimental group. The procedures for these two groups are listed in Table 3.2 and 3.3.

Table 3.2 Control group procedures

Treatment	Procedures	Week of the study	Delivery method
O_1	1. pretest of oral English proficiency 2. Divide students into groups	Week 1	In class
	No class	Week 2	
X_1	Activity1	Week 3	In class
	Traditional face-to-face instruction	Week 4	In class
X_1	Activity2	Week 5	In class
	Traditional face-to-face instruction	Week 6	In class

Table 3.2 Control group procedures (Cont.)

Treatment	Procedures	Week of the study	Delivery method
X₁	Activity3	Week 7	In class
	Traditional face-to-face instruction	Week 8	In class
X₁	Activity4	Week 9	In class
	Traditional face-to-face instruction	Week 10	In class
X₁	Activity5	Week 11	In class
O₂	Posttest of oral English proficiency	Week 12	In class

Table 3.3 Experimental group procedures

Treatment	Procedures	Week of the study	Delivery method
O₁	1. pretest of oral English proficiency	Week 1	In class

Table 3.3 Experimental group procedures (Cont.)

Treatment	Procedures	Week of the study	Delivery method
	2. Divide students into groups		
	Training students on how to use Skype (See Appendix E)	Week 2	In class
X_2	Activity 1	Week 3	Skype online talk
	1. Collect homework1 2. Traditional face-to-face instruction	Week 4	In class
X_2	Activity 2	Week 5	Skype online talk
	1. Collect homework2 2. Traditional face-to-face instruction	Week 6	In class

Table 3.3 Experimental group procedures (Cont.)

Treatment	Procedures	Week of the study	Delivery method
X_2	Activity 3	Week 7	Skype online talk
	1. Collect homework3	Week 8	In class
	2. Traditional face-to-face instruction		
X_2	Activity 4	Week 9	Skype online talk
	1. Collect homework4	Week 10	In class
	2. Traditional face-to-face instruction		
X_2	Activity 5	Week 11	Skype online talk
$O_2,$ A	1. Collect homework5	Week 12	In class
	2. Attitude Survey		
	3. posttest of oral English proficiency		

3.5 Data Analysis

This section discusses the methods for data analysis employed in the present study. Data obtained from the 12-week experiment on speaking pretest and post-test scores and from students' attitude survey were presented in terms of quantitative analysis while data obtained from the semi-structured interviews were presented in terms of qualitative analysis.

3.5.1 Quantitative Analysis

Students' mean scores on speaking pretest were analyzed by Analysis of Independent-Samples T Test. Its purpose was to see if there were any significant differences between groups (experimental/control). In addition, students' attitudes were analyzed by the frequencies of descriptive statistics.

Research question 1 was analyzed by using independent-samples t-test. The gained mean scores from the posttest of the oral proficiency between the experimental and control groups were examined. The .05 level of confidence was used as the criterion level for determining a significant difference. The purpose is to see whether there are statistical significant differences from students' posttest scores, thus, to decide effects on improving speaking performances of students.

3.5.2 Qualitative Analysis

This method was used to reveal the students' opinions in order to understand their attitudes. All the students' interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed for data analysis.

3.6 Pilot Study

It is necessary for researcher to do pilot study before the main study. According to Williamson (2004), a pilot study is a small experiment, which can test logistics and gather information prior to a main study. The present pilot study employed all the instruments in the main study. The following sections were the procedures of this pilot.

3.6.1 Subjects

Eight second-year students enrolled in Tongren University, Guizhou Province were invited to join in the pilot study. They were selected based on convenience and availability. These eight students would not take part in the main study, and they were divided into control group and experimental group on the basis of their pretest scores.

3.6.2 Procedures

The procedures of the present pilot study were the followings. First, the pretest will be given to the subjects, and then based on their pretest scores, they were ordered from No.1 to No. 8. The first place student was S1; the second one was S2, then S3, S4, S5, S6, S7 and S8. Table 3.4 shows how they were divided into two groups.

Table 3.4 The way of dividing groups

EG	S1	S3	S5	S7
CG	S2	S4	S6	S8

Note:

EG: Experimental group

CG: Control group

Second, experimental group will be trained on how to use Skype. Third, both experimental group and control group were required to do the same activities as introduced in the main study. The control group practiced these activities in a traditional classroom while the experimental group practiced through Skype online talk. Fourth, after finished five activities, eight subjects would have a posttest and the experimental group would have an attitude survey.

3.6.3 Data Analysis

Data from the pilot study were analyzed in two ways: qualitative and quantitative analysis.

3.6.3.1 Results of Quantitative Analysis

3.6.3.1.1 Independent-Samples T-test

In order to see if there were any significant differences between control group and experimental group, independent-samples t-test were used in this pilot study. As shown in Table 3.5, the oral proficiency score of the control group was M=58.63 (SD=4.809) and that of the experimental group was M=58.88

(SD=4.549). There was no significant difference between the two groups in terms of students' oral English proficiency. (P=0.916>0.05)

Table 3.5 comparison of speaking pretest scores between control group and experimental group

Group	Pretest		P-value
CG	M	58.63	
	SD	4.809	
EG	M	58.88	.916
	SD	4.549	

3.6.3.1.2 Independent-Samples T test Analysis

In this pilot study, independent-samples T test analysis was used to find if communications through the use of Skype helped experimental students improve oral English proficiency when compared with control students. As shown in Table 3.6, the posttest score of the control group was M=55.13 (SD=4.704) and that of the experimental group was M=64.13 (SD=4.016). It could be concluded that there was significant difference between control group and experimental group because the P-value was less than 0.05 (P=0.001<0.05)

Table 3.6 P value from posttests between CG and EG

Group	Posttest		P-value
CG	M	55.13	
	SD	4.704	
EG	M	64.13	.001
	SD	4.016	

From the results of Table 3.7, the scores of mean, standard deviation and p-value of two groups' five oral proficiency sections are reported. The posttest scores of five sections of the control group were M=11.38 (SD=1.685), M=12.25 (SD=2.053), M=11.13 (SD=2.532), M=9.5 (SD=.926) and M=10.88 (SD=1.356) for pronunciation, fluency, comprehensibility, vocabulary and accuracy respectively. For the posttest scores of five sections of the experimental group were M=12 (SD=2.000), M=12.25 (SD=2.712), M=13.88 (SD=2.100), M=12.13 (SD=1.808) and M=13.88 (SD=1.458) for pronunciation, fluency, comprehensibility, vocabulary and accuracy respectively. The results indicated that there was significant difference for students' proficiency in terms of comprehensibility (P=0.034<0.05), vocabulary (P=0.004<0.05) and accuracy (P=0.001<0.05). That is, their comprehensibility, vocabulary and accuracy were improved.

Table 3.7 Independent-Samples T-test of Five Sections between control and Experimental Groups

Group	Control Group		Experimental Group		P-value
Sections	M	SD	M	SD	
Pronunciation	11.38	1.685	12	2.000	0.510
Fluency	12.25	2.053	12.25	2.712	1.000
Comprehensibility	11.13	2.532	13.88	2.100	0.034
Vocabulary	9.5	.926	12.13	1.808	0.004
Accuracy	10.88	1.356	13.88	1.458	0.001

3.6.3.1.3 Descriptive Statistics Analysis

Obviously, data from students' questionnaires indicated that students had positive attitudes towards the implementation of Skype online talk in speaking classes because the majority of students (94.7%) said Skype was useful to their oral English learning, and most of them (80.3%) reported that they were confident about communicating with their classmates through Skype. As shown in Table 3.8, 80.2% students agreed they felt free to ask questions through Skype, and 73.9% students agreed they learned more spoken English skills than they would have learned in a regular English class. There were 75.5% of the students reported they had more interaction and communication with their classmates through Skype, 79.4% of the students agree that working with classmates online was beneficial to them, and

70.6% of students agreed that they enjoyed doing the Skype online assignments rather than tradition assignments. In terms of interesting, all students strongly agreed that the Skype online talk made the course more interesting. However, there were still 13.7% said it was difficult for them to learn how to use Skype.

Table 3.8 Student Questionnaires on the Likert-scale

Item	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
	%	%	%	%	%
1. I think Skype was useful to my oral English learning. 我认为 Skype 对我口语学习很有帮助	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.3	94.7
2. I had more interaction and communication with my classmates through Skype. 通过 Skype 我和同学间的互动和交流变得更多了	0.0	0.0	15.2	75.5	9.3
3. I felt free to ask questions through Skype. 通过 Skype，我问同学问题的时候感到很自然	0.0	10.9	5.4	80.2	3.2
4. I learned more spoken English skills than I would have learned in a regular English class. 比起传统英语课堂，我学到了更多口语方面的技能	0.0	3.5	6.7	73.9	15.9
5. Working with classmates online was beneficial to me. 和同学在线交流对我很有帮助	0.0	0.0	12.6	79.4	8

Table 3.8 Student Questionnaires on the Likert-scale (Cont.)

Item	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
	%	%	%	%	%
6. The Skpye online talk made the course more interesting. Skype 在线交流使课堂变得非常有趣	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100
7. I felt shy when talking to my classmates via Skype. 使用 Skype 和同学交流，我感觉到很害羞	7.5	80.2	0.0	10	2.3
8. I enjoyed doing the Skype online assignments rather than traditional assignments. 比起完成传统的教学任务，我更喜欢完成 Skype 在线布置的任务	3.2	10.8	12.5	70.6	2.9
9. I was confident about communicating with my classmates through Skype. 用 Skype 和同学交流我感到非常自信	0.0	5.6	0.0	80.3	14.4
10. It's difficult for me to learn how to use Skype. 我学习怎么使用 Skype 很困难	10.5	75.8	0.0	13.7	0.0

3.6.3.2 Results of Qualitative Analysis

There were 6 students in interviews. Generally speaking, the students' opinions on voice-based SCMC via Skype in oral English learning were reported into positive attitudes. There were 5 interviewees reported that speaking via Skype in oral

English learning were interesting and they were not shy of making mistakes when talking. They report that:" *we are very interested in Skype online talk and we are not shy of making mistakes when talking.* "

However, one interviewee reported that he would rather have the traditional speaking class because he thought it was difficult to learn how to use Skype.

3.6.4 Implications for the Main Study

After this pilot study, some implications were obtained to be improved in the main study. First, the students should be given more time to learn how to use Skype. Second, both control group and experimental group should have much more time to practice speaking in class. Third, the handouts for the activities should be translated into Chinese in order to make sure that students would understand the instructions well. Fourth, in order to establish inter-rater reliability in the main study, an effective training should be conducted by giving more training for the two raters.

3.7 Summary

This chapter introduced the details of the research methodology employed in this study, which included the subjects, the instruments, variables, experiment procedures, data analysis and pilot study. The results and discussions of the main study would be introduced in the next chapter.

CHPATER 4

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This chapter reports the results of the data which were collected by using three instruments: speaking pretest and post-test, attitude survey and interview questions. Data were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The research findings were presented in order to answer the two proposed research questions.

4.1 Answers to Research Question 1

Do communications through the use of Synchronous Computer Mediated Communication (SCMC) via Skype help students improve oral English proficiency when compared with a group of students who engage in a traditional face-to-face oral English practice? If yes, what field is improved in terms of pronunciation, fluency, comprehension, vocabulary and accuracy?

To respond to this research question, the results of speaking pretest and posttest between control group and experimental group are reported to examine the effectiveness of SCMC on EFL college students' oral English proficiency. Then the results of the five sections in terms of pronunciation, fluency, comprehensibility, vocabulary and accuracy are presented.

4.1.1 Results of Speaking Pretest

As introduced in Chapter 3, sixty students were pretested. The scores from the pretest were analyzed by independent-sample t-test in order to see if there were any significant differences between control group and experimental group. The result is illustrated in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Speaking pretest scores between control group and experimental group

Group	Pretest		P-value
CG	M	64.60	
	SD	2.328	
EG	M	64.93	.567
	SD	2.149	

** P＜0.05

* CG: Control Group; EG: Experimental Group

As shown in Table 4.1, the mean score of CG students' speaking pretest was 64.60 while that of the EG students was 64.93. The finding indicates that there is no significant difference between the two groups since the P-value is .567 which is higher than .05. Thus, it can be concluded that students from the two groups have the same level of speaking ability before experiment.

4.1.2 Results of Speaking Posttest

To find out if communications through the use of Skype helped experimental students improve oral English proficiency when compared with control students, the posttest was used. The results from the test are illustrated in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Speaking posttest scores between control group and experimental group

Group	Posttest		P-value
CG	M	65.80	
	SD	2.355	
EG	M	77.90	.001
	SD	2.564	

** P＜0.05

* CG: Control Group; EG: Experimental Group

Table 4.2 shows the statistical significance of the scores obtained from the speaking posttest. The posttest score of the control group was M=65.80 (SD=2.355) and that of the experimental group was M=77.90 (SD=2.564). It could be concluded that there was significant difference between the control group and the experimental

group because P-value was .001 which was lower than .05. It showed that the speaking

ability of the students in the experimental has improved.

4.1.3 Results of Five Sections between Control and Experimental

Groups

The results clearly showed that the speaking ability has improved but to find

out in detail which field of speaking, i.e. , pronunciation, fluency, comprehensibility,

vocabulary and accuracy, has improved, the independent-sample t-test was used to

analyze the scores of the posttest. The results then are presented in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 Independent-Sample T-test of Five Sections between Control and Experimental groups

Group	Control Group		Experimental Group		P-value
Sections	M	SD	M	SD	
Pronunciation	7.37	1.671	13.13	1.655	0.000**
Fluency	11.70	1.208	12.25	2.712	0.000**
Comprehensibility	6.10	1.375	6.20	1.348	0.777
Vocabulary	6.20	1.375	10.40	1.499	0.001**
Accuracy	6.73	1.202	7.20	1.095	0.121

** P＜0.05

* CG: Control Group; EG: Experimental Group

As shown in Table 4.3, the scores of mean, standard deviation and p-value of

two groups in five oral proficiency sections are reported. The posttest scores of five

sections of the control group were M=7.37 (SD=1.671), M=11.70 (SD=1.208), M=6.10 (SD=1.375), M=6.20 (SD=1.375) and M=6.73 (SD=1.202) for pronunciation, fluency, comprehensibility, vocabulary and accuracy respectively. For the posttest scores of five sections of the experimental group were M=13.13 (SD=1.655), M=15.47 (SD=1.196), M=6.20 (SD=1.348), M=10.40 (SD=1.499) and M=7.20 (SD=1.095) for pronunciation, fluency, comprehensibility, vocabulary and accuracy respectively. The results indicated that there was significant difference for students' proficiency in terms of pronunciation (P=0.000<0.05), fluency (P=0.000<0.05) and vocabulary (P=0.001<0.05). That is, their pronunciation, fluency and vocabulary were improved significantly.

4.2 Answer to Research Question 2

What are the students' attitudes towards voice-based SCMC via Skype in oral English learning?

To answer this research question, an attitude survey and a semi-structured interview were conducted. Data obtained from students' questionnaires were analyzed by descriptive statistics while data from a semi-structured interview were analyzed qualitatively.

4.2.1 Results of attitude survey

An attitude survey was conducted with 30 students from experimental group after 12-week experiment was administered. The findings are presented in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4 Student Questionnaires on the Likert-scale

Item	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
	%	%	%	%	%
1. I think Skype was useful to my oral English learning.	0.0	13.3	0.0	33.3	53.3
2. I had more interaction and communication with my classmates through Skype.	0.0	13.3	6.7	70	10
3. I felt free to ask questions through Skype.	0.0	3.4	23.3	60	13.3
4. I learned more spoken English skills than I would have learned in a regular English class.	0.0	3.3	16.7	53.3	26.7
4. Working with classmates online was beneficial to me.	0.0	0.0	26.7	60	13.3

Table 4.4 Student Questionnaires on the Likert-scale (Cont.)

Item	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
	%	%	%	%	%
6. The Skpye online talk made the course more interesting.	3.3	10	16.7	26.7	43.3
7. I felt shy when talking to my classmates via Skype.	46.7	23.3	10	16.7	3.3
8. I enjoyed doing the Skype online assignments rather than traditional assignments.	0.0	10	30	40	20
9. I was confident about communicating with my classmates through Skype.	3.3	0.0	20	63.3	13.3
10. It's difficult for me to learn how to use Skype.	43.3	40	0.0	10	6.7

Table 4.4 above shows the students' responses to the questionnaire. First, the majority of students had positive attitudes towards the implementation of Skype online talk in speaking classes. From item 1, totally eighty six point six percent of the students reported that Skype was useful to their oral English learning. From item 2 and item 4, the percentage of students who thought they had more interaction and communication with their classmates through Skype and they learned more spoken English skills than they would have learned in a regular English class is eighty percent. Second, from item 3 and item 5, there were seventy three point three percent of the students reported that they felt free to ask questions through Skype and they thought Skype was beneficial to them when working with classmates online. Moreover, from item 9, seventy six point six percent of the students hold on opinion that they were confident about communicating with their classmates through Skype. In terms of interesting, from item 6, seventy percent of the students reported that the Skype online talk made the course more interesting. From item 8, sixty percent of the students reported that they enjoyed doing the Skype online assignments more than traditional assignments, but still thirty percent of the students undecided whether they enjoyed doing the Skype online assignments more than traditional assignments. Additionally, in item 7, seventy percent of the students disagreed that they felt shy when talking to their classmates via Skype. Obviously, from item 10, the Skype technology was easy for students to use because there were eighty three point three percent of them disagreed that Skype was difficult for them to learn even though sixteen point seven percent of the students agreed with this opinion.

4.2.2 Results of a Semi-structured Interview

Fifteen students were randomly chosen from the experimental group to participate in this semi-structured interview. The findings from this interview acted as the second evidence to answer the second research question qualitatively. The students' statements were tape recorded. Data obtained from the records were transcribed and clarified into categories. The main categories of students' attitudes towards online Skype discussions were presented in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5 the main categories of students' attitudes towards online Skype discussions

Popular Learning Software (PLS)	PLS1: Free to use
	PLS2: Easy to use
Positive Learning Process (PLP)	PLP1: Reducing embarrassment
	PLP2: Getting closer to classmates
	PLP3: Receiving feedback in time
Effective Learning Outputs (ELO)	ELO1: Speaking skills improved
	ELO2: Confidence increased
	ELO3: Motivation enhanced

4.2.2.1 Good Learning Software (PLS)

First, from the students' interview recording language analysis, in the experimental group, there are eighty six percent (or 13) of the interviewees reported their opinions that Skype was good learning software for learning English. Their responses were divided into the two sub-categories.

PLS1: Free to use

There were seventy six percent (or 10) of the interviewees said that they would like to use Skype because it was free to use. They did not need to pay for it. For example:

Subject 1: ... There is software for improving our spoken English, but I prefer Skype

because I don't need to pay money for using it. It's a little

difference from QQ since many foreigners use it.

Subject 3: ... I like to use Skype because it's free for us. Nowadays many websites

are good for learning English, but we need to pay to login in. Why not use

this kind of software?

PLS2: **Easy to use**

Besides free to use, ninety two percent (or 12) interviewees stated that Skype was easy to use for practicing English. For example:

Subject 4: ... Before I know Skype, I'm afraid I could not use it properly for I thought

I'm not good at computer. Now, I can use it easily. It's not difficult to learn

how to use it.

Subject 13: ... Skype is not difficult to use. There is a clear introduction of how to use it
when you download it into the computer. I enjoy using it because it's
easy.

4.2.2.2 Positive Learning Process (PLP)

Second, there were eighty percent (or 12) of the interviewees hold opinions that online Skype discussion was a positive learning process for them. This category could be divided into three sub-categories.

PLP1: Reducing embarrassment

Among PLP interviewees, eighty three percent (or 10) interviewees said that Skype online discussion could reduce their embarrassment. For example:

Subject 6 ... I don't like traditional speaking class because I seldom talk to my
classmates. However, when I use Skype, I don't feel nervous at all.

Subject 8 ... I feel free to ask questions via Skype, so I'd like to talk more in class.

Subject 9... In regular class, I feel very shy when my teacher asks me to talk to my
partners. I don't know I should stand straightly or I must sit down. I dare
not look at my classmates' eyes. However, when I use Skype, I feel
comfortable to talk. I just feel easy to talk.

PLP2: Getting closer to classmates

There were seventy three percent (or 11) of the interviewees stating that using online Skype discussions made them be closer to their classmates indeed. For example:

Subject 2: ... In fact, I'm not an outgoing person. In speaking class, I seldom talk to my

classmates. However, Skype build a friendship bridge between us. I feel

warm to talk to them in this way.

Subject 11: ... Online Skype discussion is quite different from the regular speaking

class. For team work, I feel closer to my classmates because we have more

chance to talk.

PLP3: Receiving Feedback in time

There were sixty six percent (or 10) of the interviewees who were quite excited in using Skype. They said that they could get feedback in time from their classmates. For example:

Subject 8: ... Using Skype can let me correct my pronunciation and grammar mistakes

immediately. When I listen to my record, I can find which word I

pronounce in a wrong way. Sometimes, when I type the missing words, my

classmates will send me a message to correct it.

Subject 14: ... In traditional speaking class, when I made mistakes, my classmates felt

shy to correct me. However, through Skype, if I made mistakes, they felt

natural to correct me because we don't talk face to face.

4.2.2.3 Effective Learning Outputs (ELO)

Third, from the students' interview, it can be concluded that nearly eighty six percent (or 13) interviewees reported that Skype gave them effective learning outputs as well. Totally, ELO were categorized into four sub-groups.

ELO1: Speaking Skills improved

Among the mentioned interviewees, seventy seven percent (or 10) of the students stated that their speaking skills were improved. For example:

Subject 9: ...I learn more spoken English skills than I would have learned in a regular class. For example, I used to speak English so fast instead of clearly and properly. However, when I talk to my classmates via Skype, I find speaking too fast will be difficult for them to understand me.

Subject 11: ... When I talk to my classmates via Skype, I can listen to my voice clearly from earphones. I feel that I am a native speaker. So I try to respond to my classmates in a natural way. I believe this way can improve my oral English.

ELO2: Confidence increased

Eighty four percent (or 11) of the interviewees said that their confidence has been largely increased through using Skype in speaking class. For example:

Subject 1: ... when I talk to my classmates face to face, I feel shy. Now, I use Skype to talk, I feel easy. I don't need to look at my classmates' eyes; I can look at the screen to talk freely. It makes me feel more confident.

Subject 3: ... I feel more confident because I could use this software to talk freely and naturally. I like this way of talking.

Subject 6: ... Skype online talks make the course not so boring. It stimulates me to talk more with confidence.

ELO3: Motivation enhanced

Totally, there were seventy six percent (or 10) of the interviewees sharing the same opinions that their motivations were enhanced after they had online Skype discussions. For example:

Subject 2: ... Skype online designed activities motivate me to communicate with my classmates because with their help, we can achieve the tasks successfully.

Subject 3: ... When I use Skype, I would like to talk more and more...

As shown above, the majority of students hold the positive opinions about using Skype in speaking class. However, still three students reported that they undecided if they enjoyed doing the Skype online assignments more than traditional assignments, and only two students disagreed Skype was useful to their oral English learning. Their statements were presented as follows:

Subject 5: ... Skype is a new tool for me to learn English, but I'm not sure whether I enjoy doing the online assignments or not. I'm afraid it will take me long time to finish them.

Subject 12: ... It's hard for me to tell whether I can achieve the Skype online assignments or not because I cannot self-control. I enjoy playing game online. Sometimes I cannot decide if I could concentrate my mind on assignments.

Subject 15: ... I could not decide whether I enjoy the Skype online assignments or not because sometimes I could not hear my classmates clearly, it's too noisy when they talk.

Subject 10: ... Actually, I think Skype is not useful to my oral English learning. Sometimes I'm lazy; I don't want to talk anymore. I pretend talking, but my teacher doesn't know it. If in traditional class, I must be active because my teacher looks at me in somewhere.

Subject 11: ... To be honest, Skype could not help me improve my oral English. Time is too limited for me to practice. The worst thing is the bad internet connection. Sometimes we could hardly hear each other. My teammates and I do not know how to resolve the problem because we are all in the same English level; there is no outstanding classmate in my team.

In brief, data obtained from the semi-structured interview were analyzed qualitatively. The results showed that the majority of students had positive feelings towards the Skype online discussions. However, still three students expressed neutral opinions and two students had negative opinions.

4.3 Summary

In this chapter, data obtained from the speaking pretest and post-test based on Analytic Oral Proficiency Assessment Scale, attitude survey and interview questions were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The quantitative data were analyzed by Analysis of Independent-Sample T Test and Descriptive Statistics Analysis. In terms of qualitative data, students' responses to the semi-structure interview were categorized in details. From the analysis, two research questions have

been answered. The answer to the first research question is communications through the use of Synchronous Computer Mediated Communication via Skype help students improve their oral English proficiency when compared with a group of students who engage in a traditional face-to-face oral English practice. However, among the five criteria: pronunciation, fluency, comprehensibility, vocabulary and accuracy, only the ability of pronunciation, fluency and vocabulary were improved. The answer to the second question was positive. The majority of students expressed positive opinion on voice-based SCMC via Skype in oral English learning. The next chapter will discuss the findings, conclusion, implication and limitations in details.
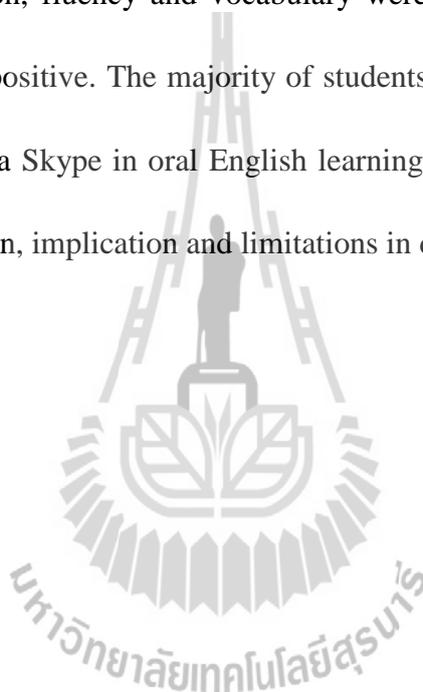
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND LIMITATIONS

This chapter discusses the research results and findings reported in Chapter Four. The discussion is organized based on the research questions presented in Chapter one. The first part will discuss the effects of Synchronous Computer-mediated Communication (SCMC) via Skype online discussions on students' oral English proficiency. The second part will discuss the factors affecting the students' opinions on SCMC via Skype online discussions. Then, implications are provided and finally, limitations and recommendations for further research are described.

5.1 Effects of SCMC via Skype Online Discussions on Students' Oral English Proficiency

Generally, the present study revealed that students' oral English proficiency was improved through SCMC via Skype online discussions. However, with regard to the five field of oral English proficiency, i.e., pronunciation, fluency, comprehension, vocabulary and accuracy, only the ability of pronunciation, fluency and vocabulary was improved.

5.1.1 Discussion on Overall Improvement of Oral English Proficiency

According to the previous data analysis in Chapter four, the results from speaking pretest and posttest scores revealed that there were positive effects of SCMC

via Skype online discussions on improving university students' oral English proficiency. As shown in the previous data analysis in Chapter four and based on the literature review in Chapter two, the discussion on students' achievements can be summarized as follows:

Firstly, SCMC via Skype online discussions in the present study provides learners with opportunities to be engaged in meaningful real-life interaction (Sotillo, 2000). As introduced in Chapter one, most of students in China do not have adequate English proficiency because of non-English environment and their shyness. They still learn English as test-takers. However, the use of SCMC via Skype in speaking classroom in the present study allows students to overcome those mentioned problems. The main reasons are illustrated below.

First of all, SCMC system provided audio and video functions for learners to interact and communicate with each other in real life. For example, one student (subject 11) said: *"I could listen to my voice and see my face clearly through Skype. I feel that I am a native speaker. It stimulates me to respond to my classmates in a natural way"*. Another student (subject 3) said: *"I enjoy watching and listening through Skype, so I would like to talk more and more"*. Under this condition, students owned a high motivation to speak English in large. As Cheon (2003) pointed out that students' motivation and participation played a positive role in second language acquisition.

In addition, under the SCMC environment, shy and reluctant students can communicate freely and more confidently. For example, one student (subject 6) said: *"I don't like traditional speaking class for I seldom talk to my classmates. When I use Skype, I don't feel nervous at all"*. Another student also said: *"I feel shy when I talk to my classmates face to face. Now, Skype online discussions make me feel easy. I don't need to look at my classmates' eyes. It makes me feel more confident"*. In an L2 speaking class, the use of computer and SCMC, for example, Skype online discussions, as teaching tools has a significant effect on reducing the anxiety and nervousness, and enhancing EFL learners' confidence (Bax, 2003; Merrill & Hammons, 1996; Molnar, 1997). Gradually, learners felt more confident speaking out and increasing their outputs while communicating with others.

Besides, SCMC via Skype online discussion provided students with a quick feedback. For instance, one student (subject 14) said: *"In traditional speaking class, when I make mistakes, my classmates feel shy to correct me. However, through Skype, they feel natural to correct me because we don't talk face to face"*. In this way, students can review their conversations, examine their mistakes and see if any corrective feedback was provided by their teachers or partners.

Secondly, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory as a learning theory helps students to use language to communicate more to improve their speaking ability. Vygotskian construct including social interaction and zone of proximal development (ZPD) are crucial concepts for the study of language learning in a SCMC context. As reviewed in

Chapter two, Vygotsky (1978) pointed out two levels, social level between people and individual level inside an individual, to explain how a child's cultural development functions. That is, a child interacts with other individuals who are with higher mental development in society and construct relationships with them to gain help with the development of his or her knowledge. In the present study, students are quite active to interact with each other through Skype. For instance, one student (subject 6) said: "*In the past, I seldom have chances to interact with my classmates in face-to-to speaking class because we often read and recite text. Now, Skype online discussions provide me with more opportunities to interact with each other*". As Lantolf (2006) said that fewer interactions will result in a slower mental development.

In terms of Vygotsky's ZPD, it was also an affective factor improving students' oral English proficiency. According to Vygotsky (1978), learning happens within the area of ZPD. It is the distance between what a learner can do with help and what he or she can do without help. If those lower-level learners do not need help from those higher-level, their language was acquired. As shown in Table 3.4 in Chapter three, this rationale was used as a way of dividing groups. In this way, those lower-level students could learn more from those higher-level ones to improve their speaking ability. For example, one student (subject 8) said: *"when we have online discussions through Skype, I'm quite excited that the best student in my group can help me correct my pronunciation and my grammar. I need his help, because my English is poor"*. Furthermore, as reviewed in Chapter two, ZPD is the next stage of learning; all activities should be within learners' ZPD. As shown

in Appendix D, the five Skype online discussions in the present study would not challenge the students' actual ability. In this way, students were motivated to join the discussions to improve their speaking ability. For example, one student (subject 3) said: *"I don't feel any difficulties. I always discuss such online topics, like asking hometown, introducing hobbies and so on. In addition, I'm quite familiar with the forms of activities, such as topic discussing, role playing, debating and so forth"*.

Thirdly, communicative language teaching (CLT) approach helps learners acquire second language learning because of different structures of activities (Nunan, 2004), especially for EFL learners. Nowadays, CLT has become an important approach to develop learners' communicative competence. In the present study, as reviewed in Chapter one, most Chinese students are passive and shy. Without well-designed learning tasks, they are afraid of speaking English. To overcome this problem, CLT activities, such as social formulas, dialogue activity, problem-solving activities and role-plays, were taken into considerations to design Skype online discussions. Based on the data analyzed from students' interview in Chapter four, students reported that they enjoyed doing CLT activities, and they were actively engaged in the learning process in speaking classes because the designed activities provided them with more opportunities to speak English. For example, one student (subject 13) said: *"Before I use Skype in class, I think it will waste my time to practice and I will keep salient for my shyness. However, the motivated online tasks especially role-play and debating, provided me with high motivation to talk more and more"*.

To sum up, in the present study, it was shown that the students' oral English proficiency could be improved because of the experimental tool designed upon the theoretical frameworks. That is, Vgotsky's social cultural theory and CLT approach has been applied to the use of SCMC via Skype online discussions within CALL environment.

5.1.2 Discussion on Five Sections of English Proficiency

With respect to students' improvement in oral English proficiency, although the ability of comprehensibility and accuracy was not improved significantly, the students got improvements in pronunciation, fluency and vocabulary. The reasons could be concluded as follows:

First, as shown in Table 4.3 in Chapter four, the ability of pronunciation is significantly improved. As Yang and Chang (2007) pointed out learner can directly and immediately receive corrections or feedback on wrong or improper pronunciation under SCMC environment. In the present study, when students do not pronounce a word or phrase very clearly, they could receive feedback and correction through Skype. In this way, they realized their wrong pronunciation. As time goes on, they would make fewer mistakes. Thus, they could improve their proficiency of pronunciation.

Second, the results from Table 4.3 in chapter four showed the students improved their fluency ability because they had more chances to practice via Skype online discussions. According to Sotillo (2000), SCMC seems to encourage communicative fluency, which is generally understood as quality of oral

communication that expresses itself in coherence, fluidity and appropriate lexical choice. Through the present designed Skype online discussions, students could interact with each other. As time passes, they became familiar with situations in which they had to express their opinions under varied topics. As a result they felt at ease and spoke fluently and freely, thus performing better on the posttest.

Third, even though students' vocabulary for discussions is limited, the prepared handouts listed large vocabularies, which might make students talk easily with enough vocabulary. In the present study, students were given handouts which were related to the topics. For example, when students did Activity 2, they could read the given vocabularies of describing a person's personality from the handouts. Furthermore, within one group, the higher-level students could teach vocabulary directly, or they could provide appropriate feedback and assistance during online discussions. In this way, students might be more motivated to learn relevant vocabulary for the SCMC activities. Thus, they got improvements in vocabulary.

Fourth, no advanced online English tutor is the most significant factor influencing the development of comprehensibility. When the students could not understand the others' meaning or they could not accomplish a task alone, it is helpful to get help from an advanced online English tutor. In the present study, even though the students had more chances to speak via varied online discussion topic, they could not understand well without an advanced online English tutor's help. According to NCLRC (2004), tutor would state the same idea in different ways to aid

comprehension or use a variety of communication strategies to sustain conversations which were related to familiar topics. In fact, students used facial expression and gestures to indicate problems with comprehension. As shown in Appendix A, paraphrasing and clarification were counted as misunderstanding and actually lowered their scores. Thus, it might be the crucial factor in affecting the improvement of comprehensibility.

Finally, with respect to accuracy, the students tended to ignore each other's mistakes, as they were focusing more on meaning than on form during the conversation. Several scholars have speculated that the degree of accuracy in SCMC would be low because SCMC tends to foster a focus on meaning (Beauvois, 1992; Kelm, 1992). Besides, Kern (1995) even cautioned that grammatical accuracy and discursive coherence would not be well achieved in real-time networked-based communications. In the present study, students tended not to focus on others' mistakes as much as on the meaning of what was being said. Thus, their ability of accuracy might not be improved significantly.

In brief, from the comparison between the speaking pretest and posttest, it clearly answered the first research question that the use of SCMC via Skype help students improve oral English proficiency when compared with a group of students who engage in a traditional face-to-face oral English practice. In terms of five main skills of speaking, the ability of pronunciation, fluency and vocabulary were improved significantly.

5.2 Students' Opinions on SCMC via Skype online discussions

As reported in Chapter four, the findings from the attitude survey and students interviews indicated that the majority of students had positive opinions towards the implementation of Skype online discussions in speaking classes. However, still few students expressed neutral and negative opinions.

5.2.1 Discussion on Overall Opinion

In general, the majority of the students hold the positive opinions towards the implementation of SCMC via Skype online discussions. The explanations leading to positive opinions are discussed as follows.

First, as introduced in chapter one, the existing traditional face-to-face speaking class are not what students expected because they seldom have more chances to interact with each other. They learn passively. Students come to class, sit down quietly, and keep reading the texts again and again. However, the present designed class brings students a new learning style. Under SCMC environment, Skype online discussions provide the platform for students to practice speaking English in a large extent. Technology environment makes students feel great enthusiasm.

Second, after SCMC via Skype online discussions were implored to the speaking class, student began to actively perform online discussions. They interacted with each other and they gained much knowledge compared to their traditional face-to-face class. They were motivated to speak more in speaking class. As one student (subject 3) said that when he used Skype, he would like to talk more and more.

Furthermore, from the student questionnaires on the Likert-scale in Chapter four and student semi-structured interview, it could be concluded that the majority of the students hold positive opinions towards the use of SCMC via Skype online discussions in speaking class.

5.2.2 Discussion on Positive Opinion

From the previous discussion, the positive value of SCMC via Skype online discussions has been acknowledged by students. The main factors influencing students' positive opinions were summarized as follows.

Firstly, Skype online discussions make students feel flexible and convenient. In contrast with traditional face-to-face conversations, Skype online discussions do not ask students to meet at a fixed location, they can login from their computer. That is, students can freely schedule online discussions into their schedules. Furthermore, they don't need to pay money to use Skype because it's free software.

Secondly, no pressure and nervousness lead to a positive opinion as well. Unlike face-to-face meetings in class, students could watch computer screen to talk, they didn't need to have eyes contact. With less pressure and nervousness, students would feel free and ease. They would not be afraid of speaking English, and they could express what they thought freely.

Thirdly, immediate feedback makes students feel that Skype online discussions can help them improve their oral English. Under SCMC environment, if students use wrong English patterns, their classmates would give them direct and

immediate feedback, sometimes with typed messages, sometimes with voice messages. This advantage of Skype would give students direct and immediate feedback, corrections and encouragement so that they could realize their mistakes.

To sum up, based on the data analysis from section 4.2.1 to 4.2.2 in Chapter four, students expressed their positive opinions towards the use of SCMC via Skype online discussions. The majority of the students agreed that SCMC via Skype online discussions should be utilized more into speaking classes.

5.2.3 Discussion on Neutral and Negative Opinion

As shown in Table 4.4 and 4.5 in Chapter four, there were some students who showed their neutral and negative opinions toward the implementation of SCMC via Skype online discussions. The main reasons can be summarized as follows:

First, technical problems make students feel unhappy with Skyp online discussions. In practice, the potential for technological problems is unavoidable. Problems such as bad internet connection, hardware or software broken might be the factors which interfere with the Skype online discussions. Due to these problems, students were not able to participate in the discussion on a few occasions. Thus, the high quality of computers and internet connection are necessary.

Second, limited time for practice is not enough for students. As shown in Appendix D, there are five Skype online discussion activities. Totally time allowance for students is five hours. Students cannot get many achievements in such short time. The oral English proficiency growth might be a gradual and cumulative process, and

there are no quick results (Kost, 2004; Barr, Leakey, and Ranchoux, 2005). That is, any language acquisition cannot be acquired in a short time. It must experience a long period actually.

The last but the most important is that no advanced online English teaching tutor to help students overcome occurring problems. As Dimova (2007) argued that computers can only do what they are programmed to do because computers are machines. No matter how powerful they are, they cannot replace the teacher. In the present study, Skype cannot deal with students' unexpected learning problems and to response to students' questions immediately as teachers do. Advanced English teaching tutors can give students professional clarifications and feedbacks so that students can make great achievements. Furthermore, Advanced English teaching tutors can be monitors to let students pay more attention to the classroom activities, otherwise students will be absent-minded.

All in all, Skype online discussions made students feel flexible and convenient. Students would not feel any pressure and nervousness during Skype online discussions. It enabled students gain immediate feedback to improve their oral English proficiency. However, students should be given more time to practice in Skype online discussions. Meanwhile, some efforts should be done to make good internet connection and keep software or hardware effective. Furthermore, advanced teaching English tutors should be taken into consideration when Skype online discussions in speaking class are implemented.

5.3 Pedagogical Implications

This study examined the effects of SCMC via Skype online discussions on Chinese university students' oral English proficiency. Also, students' opinions towards the use of SCMC via Skype online discussions were investigated. If some instructors plan to fully understand the potential and implement of SCMC via Skype online discussions in language teaching, the following instructional points would be helpful.

First, it can be concluded that the appropriate integration of CALL and SCMC via Skpye online discussions is necessary to the success of English speaking classroom in China context. As well, implementing Skype online discussions learning model under SCMC environment in university English study is also needful, because students can interact more actively than they performed in traditional face-to-face class. In addition, it provides good results in speaking, so it can directly benefit other researchers who are aiming at developing students' language speaking ability.

Second, education institutes, speaking instructors and university students might raise their awareness of the importance of computer quality and internet connection during their teaching and learning process. That is, not only instructors but also students must have high-quality computers and fast speed internet connections to practice in classroom as well. Thus, education institutes should put more funds to the requirements in order to equip the instructors and students for teaching and learning English so that they can implement SCMC into language teaching and learning successfully.

Third, it can contribute the understanding of CALL and SCMC via Skype to the current China Education context. As introduced in Chapter one, in order to enhance the students' oral English proficiency, Chinese education system focuses on the reform of the shifting from exam-oriented education to practical education. Namely, students can use English to communicate with each other easily and successfully.

## 5.4 Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

Although the findings have showed that students have significantly improved their oral English proficiency as well as they expressed their positive opinions on Skype online discussions, some limitations should be addressed.

First, the study was conducted with 60 second year English major students in Tongren University, China. The findings are limited to subjects in the present study. The subjects of this study may not represent other major students. So, for the future research, subject from other majors have to be considered into practice.

Second, the duration of the experiment was not long enough. The experiment extends for 12 weeks only. Students in the present cannot have enough time to practice. Significant results could not be expected in a short time period. The limited conducting time might be the reasons for the insignificant improvement of students' ability in comprehensibility and accuracy, and so does their neutral and negative opinions. Thus, for the future research, the time might be prolonged to an academic year.

Third, the present study could not provide each group with online English teaching tutors for the Skype online discussions. Even though there is one or two higher level students in each group to help lower level students to practice English, the limited level of students cannot resolve all problems. As some students reported that they needed more help from teachers. Thus, in the future research, it is better to have at least one online English teaching tutor to facilitate students' Skype online discussions. Presence of English native speaker as the facilitator will provide students the necessary feedback and corrections immediately (Malone, Rifkin, and Johnson, 2003).

To sum up, research on the use of SCMC via Skype online discussion to improve university students' oral English proficiency is well worth conducting. It might be significantly contribute to the professional development of instructors who have to apply CALL in their future career, as well as to the research in the field of EFL speaking.
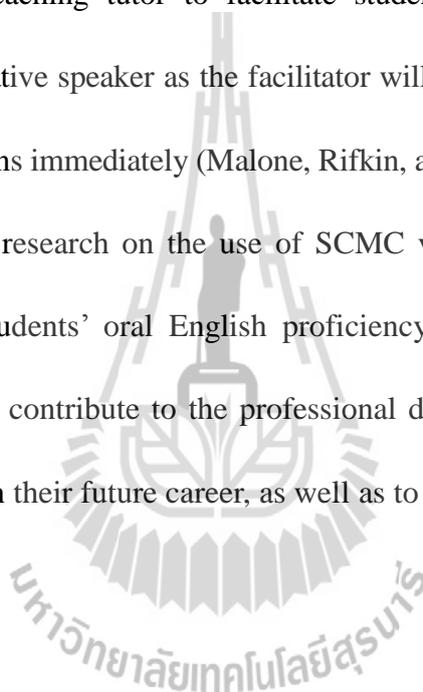
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Analytic Oral Proficiency Assessment Scale

Part 1: Pretest and Posttest Questions

Pretest and Posttest Questions
Pretest questions: What is your name? What is your major? Where are you from? Tell us in English about a trip you took recently. Tell us in English what is your plan for the summer vacation Posttest questions: Could you introduce your name? What subject are you studying? Could you please introduce your hometown? Could you please share your recent travel experience with us? What are you going to do in the winter vacation?

Part 2: Analytic Oral Proficiency Assessment Scale

Analytic Oral Proficiency Assessment Scale			
1. pronunciation	**Mistakes**	**Points**	**Levels**
✧ **Correct pronunciation** and **intonation** ✧ Very **few** mistakes which **do not impede** English native interlocutor's comprehension	**1-3 mistakes**	**17-15**	**P6**
✧ **Very few pronunciation mistakes** ✧ Might have problem with a few specific words ✧ Meaning is clear	**4-6 mistakes**	**14-12**	**P5**
✧ **Some mispronunciation**, but sympathetic English native interlocutor is able to understand ✧ **Native language influences pronunciation**	**7-9 mistakes**	**11-9**	**P4**
✧ Pronunciation **strongly influenced by native language** ✧ Pronunciation problems **interfere**	**10-12 mistakes**	**8-6**	**P3**

	Points	Levels
with comprehension		
✧ Problematic for sympathetic native English interlocutor		
✧ Pronunciation problems **manifest** themselves throughout speech ✧ **Meaning frequently obscured** by poor pronunciation ✧ Only **partially comprehensible** (even to sympathetic English native interlocutor)	**13-15 mistakes**	**5-3**	**P2**
✧ Mostly incomprehensible	**16-18 mistakes**	**2-0**	**P1**
2. Fluency		**Points**	**Levels**
Very Fluent: ✧ **No unnatural pauses** ✧ Languages **flows** ✧ Wants to talk ✧ **Offers information** ✧ Gives detailed answers ✧ Very responsive and **takes initiative** in the conversation	**1-3 unnatural pauses**	**17-15**	**F6**

Quite Fluent: ✧ **Only slight stumbling or unnatural** pauses ✧ Says more than required ✧ Responsive and **occasionally** takes initiative in the conversation	**4-6** **unnatural** **pauses**	**14-12**	**F5**
Some Definite Stumbling: ✧ Speech **somewhat disjointed because of pauses** ✧ But **manages to continue** and respond ✧ Memorized chunks of language might be produced without hesitation	**7-9** **unnatural** **pauses**	**11-9**	**F4**
Speech Frequently Hesitant: ✧ **Sentences may be left uncompleted** ✧ Slow answers ✧ Provides **minimum** information in responses ✧ Frequent enumerations ✧ Some one-word answers	**10-12** **unnatural** **pauses**	**8-6**	**F3**

Faltering Speech: ✧ **Very long pauses** ✧ Very slow answers	**13-15** **unnatural** **pauses**	**5-3**	**F2**
Speech totally disjointed: ✧ Fragmentary	**16-18** **unnatural** **pauses**	**2-0**	**F1**
3. Comprehensibility		**Points**	**Levels**
✧ **Does not request or need** **rephrasing by the interlocutor** ✧ Responds appropriately to **all** cues and asks back ✧ **Uses** a variety of communication strategies (e.g., paraphrasing, question-asking, or circumlocution.) to sustain conversation that is related to familiar topics	**1-3 times**	**17-15**	**C6**
✧ **May ask for clarification and** **rephrasing by the interlocutor** ✧ Responds appropriately to some cues ✧ **May** use paraphrasing, question-asking, circumlocution, and	**4-6 times**	**14-12**	**C5**

other strategies to avoid communication breakdown			
✧ **Rarely asks for clarification or rephrasing by the interlocutor** ✧ With one-word answer	7-9 times	11-9	C4
✧ **Seems to have problems understanding simple questions by the interlocutor** ✧ Does not ask for clarification or rephrasing by the English native interlocutor ✧ Attempts to clarify meaning by repeating words or reverting to English ✧ Primarily uses facial expression and gestures to indicated problems with comprehension	10-12 times	8-6	C3
✧ **Seems to have serious problems to understand interlocutor** ✧ Misunderstandings occur frequently ✧ Only responds after interlocutor	13-15 times	5-3	C2

translates question ✧ Relies heavily on facial expressions and gestures to indicate comprehension problems			
✧ **Does not seem to understand** **interlocutor**	**16-18 times**	**2-0**	**C1**
4. Vocabulary		**Points**	**Levels**
✧ **Rich and extensive vocabulary** ✧ **Very accurate usage**	**7 or above 7** **unusual** **vocabularies**	**17-15**	**V6**
✧ **Variety of vocabulary** ✧ **Generally** accurate usage ✧ **Occasionally** lacks basic words ✧ Vocabulary mistakes **do not affect** meaning	**5-6 unusual** **vocabularies**	**14-12**	**V5**
✧ **Word choice is appropriate and** **adequate for situation** ✧ **Few** erroneous words which sympathetic English native interlocutor could understand ✧ **Some** mistakes might lead to	**4-5 unusual** **vocabularies**	**11-9**	**V4**

misunderstandings			
✧ **Some literal translation**			
✧ **Some use of English or literal translations and invented words** ✧ Limited vocabulary	**2-3 unusual vocabularies**	**8-6**	**V3**
✧ Use of English or literal translations and invented words ✧ **Inadequate** for situation ✧ Very small and basic vocabulary	**0-1 unusual vocabulary**	**5-3**	**V2**
✧ **Very limited** ✧ Inaccurate usage ✧ Basic vocabulary	**0 unusual vocabulary**	**2-0**	**V1**
5. Accuracy/Structure		**Points**	**Levels**
Very few mistakes: ✧ Demonstrates **exceptional control** of grammatical forms ✧ Uses complete sentences in answer ✧ Uses **auxiliary** and **participle** in present perfect tense correctly ✧ Uses grammar items correctly that go beyond simple sentence structures verbs	**1-3 mistakes**	**17-15**	**A6**

✧ **Conjugates correctly in present tense** ✧ Frequently attempts complicated sentence structure ✧ Shows evidence of attention to mechanical errors even when these may not interfere with communication ✧ Self-corrections result in improved language use			
Few mistakes which (do not affect meaning): ✧ Some control of grammatical forms ✧ **Attempts to** use complete sentences in answer ✧ **Attempts to** use auxiliary and participle in present perfect ✧ **Conjugates correctly in present tense** ✧ Often tries out grammar items that go beyond simple sentence structures with some success	**4-6 mistakes**	**14-12**	**A5**

✧ Attempts to self-correct primarily for meaning when communication breaks down ✧ Self-corrections often result in improved language use			
Some mistakes: ✧ Short answers ✧ Some enumerations ✧ **Conjugation in present tense is inconsistent** ✧ Uses present when present perfect is required ✧ Rarely attempts to use grammar items that go beyond simple sentence structures ✧ Mistakes often give unintended meaning ✧ Self-correction not necessarily results in improved speech ✧ Might attempt to self-correct for meaning when communication breaks down	**7-9 mistakes**	**11-9**	**A4**

Lots of mistakes:	10-12	8-6	A3
✧ **Conjugation in present tense is often incorrect** ✧ Uses present tense when present perfect is required ✧ Uses same sentence structure most of the time ✧ **Often uses infinitives** ✧ Mostly enumerations ✧ Meaning frequently obscured by grammar mistakes	mistakes		
✧ **No sentence structure** ✧ Some memorized chunks ✧ Mostly infinitives ✧ Errors frequently interfere with comprehension	13-15 mistakes	5-3	A2
✧ **Only isolated words** ✧ Errors interfere strongly with comprehension	16-18 mistakes	2-0	A1

APPENDIX B

Attitude Survey

Student Questionnaire

INSTRUCTIONS

We would like to ask you to help us by answering the following questions concerning improving oral English proficiency via Skype activities. This survey is conducted by School of Foreign Languages, Suranaree University. This is not a test so there is no "right" or "wrong " answers and your responses will be kept strictly confidential. We are interested in your personal opinion. Please give your answers sincerely as only this will guarantee the success of the investigation. Thank you very much.

Name: _____   **Email Address: _____**

Section: This section explores your attitude regarding the skype online activities
To what extent do you agree with each of the following statements. Please indicate your answer using the following 5-point scale where:
1. = Strongly disagree
2. = Disagree
3. = Undecided
4. = Agree
5. = Strongly Agree

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
1. I think Skype was useful to my oral English learning. 我认为 Skype 对我口语学习很有帮助					
2. I had more interaction and communication with my classmates through Skype. 通过 Skype 我和同学间的互动和交流变得更多了					
3. I felt free to ask questions through skype. 通过 Skype， 我问同学问题的时候感到很自然					
4. I learned more spoken English skills than I would have learned in a regular English class. 比起传统英语课堂，我学到了更多口语方面的技能					
5. Working with classmates online was beneficial to me. 和同学在线交流对我很有帮助					
6. The Skpye online talk made the course more interesting. Skype 在线交流使课堂变得非常有趣					
7. I felt shy when talking to my classmates via Skype. 使用 Skype 和同学交流，我感觉到很害羞					
8. I enjoyed doing the Skype online assignments rather than traditional assignments. 比起完成传统的教学任务，我更喜欢完成 skype 在线布置的任务					
9. I was confident about					

communicating with my classmates through Skype. 用 Skype 和同学交流我感到非常自信					
10. It's difficult for me to learn how to use Skype. 我学习怎么使用 Skype 很困难					

Thank you for your cooperation!

谢谢合作！
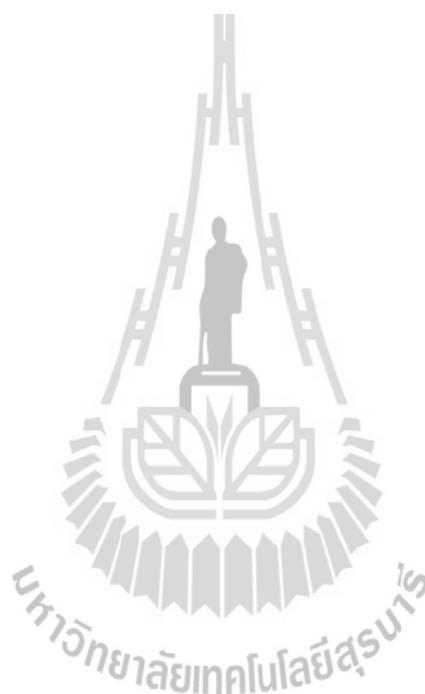
APPENDIX C

Interview Questions

1. Do you think using Skype is difficult for you? Why or why not? 你认为使用 Skype 很难吗？

2. Do you enjoy online Skype discussions? Why or why not? 你喜欢用 Skype 在线交流吗？

3. Do you think online Skype discussions can help you improve your oral English? Why or why not? Skype 在线交流能帮助你提高口语水平吗？

4. Do you have any suggestions and comments on the online Skype discussions? If yes, please state your opinions. 你对使用 Skype 进行线上英语对话有什么意见或看法吗？

APPENDIX D

Skype Online Discussion Activities

Activity 1

Topic: Hobbies

Format: Topic discussion

Time allowance: 1 hour

Questions:

1. List your five favorite hobbies. (why do you like them? How do you pursue them?)

2. Should people have hobbies? If so, what are the best ones to have?

Activity procedures:

1. Everyone should please read the handouts first before they talk via Skype. (25 minutes)

2. Then every group member will click the software RSkype when talks. Every question needs to be answered by every member. (25 minutes)

3. Free discussion. (10 minutes)

Handouts:

1. Sample of introducing the hobbies

I have lots of interests, like singing, listening to music, swimming, climbing the mountain. Some of my hobbies are:

1). Reading: Reading can make me relaxed when I felt upset.

2). Singing: I enjoy singing because it can reduce my pressure.

3). Cooking: I like to learn how to cook delicious food. When I am free, I enjoy cooking for my parents. My parents will be very happy to see I can do housework.

2. Web Resources

http://ezinearticles.com/?Guides-to-Introduce-Hobby-to-Your-Kids&id=5410059

http://www.diabetesdaily.com/forum/depression-staying-positive/44834-lets-introduce-your-hobbies

http://www.english-test.net/forum/ftopic35735.html

Note: You could find more resources on the Internet.

Activity 2

Topic: Ideal friend

Format: Topic talk

Time allowance: 1 hour

Activity procedures:

1. Please think for a while, and then everyone talks about what kind of personality that his or her friend should have? What about their or her physical appearance?

2. Talk about which one is more important to you, personality or physical appearance?

Handouts:

Vocabularies of describing a person's personality

A: active, aggressive, amiable, apprehensive, aspiring, audacious

C: capable, careful, candid, creative

D: disciplined, dependable, dutiful

E: efficient, energetic, expressivity

F: faithful, frank

G: generous, genteel, gentle, greedy, gullible

H: hard-working, hearty, honest, humble, humorous

I: impartial, industrious, ingenious, intelligent, inventive

K: kind, knowle,dgeable, kind-hearted

L: lazy, liberal, logical, loyal

M: mean, modest, moody

N: narrow-minded, nasty, nice, noisy

O: obedient, objective, optimistic, outgoing

P: passionate, persevering, pessimistic, precise, pushy

R: rational, realistic, reliable, romantic, responsible

S: sensible, self-conscious, selfish, sensitive, smart, sociable, strict, sympathetic

T: talented, temperate, timid, thoughtful, trustful

Activity 3

Topic: In a cafe

Format: Role play

Time allowance: 1 hour

Activity procedures:

1.   Before talking via Skype, every one should please read the handout first.

Topic 1:

sale	Tea	Coffee	Milk	Sandwich	Cake	Biscuits
Price	20	35	10	8	12	7
(RMB)						

Here is a menu. Imagine you are in a cafe, discuss

1) What are you going to have to eat and drink? Why?

2) Persuade your partner to have something to eat.

Note: Group1= S1 & S2

    Group2=S3 & S4

    Group3=S5 & S6

A. Sample of how to order

1. May I have a menu, please?

2. Please take my order.

3. What is the specialty of the restaurant?

4. What do you prefer?

5. Have you tabled out what you want?

6. We're ready to order. I'd like to have the hamburger please.

7. I'd like a steak

8. I'd like to have some red wine.

B. Web resources:

http://groups.dow3.com/showtopic-49.aspx

http://www.elementalenglish.com/2012/01/how-to-order-food-in-a-restaurant-in-english/

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hUU8hwl7WHA

After finish topic 1, if you have extra time, you can choose the following (Topic2).

Topic2:

Rose and Jack have a quarrel about what Rose did last night in Jack's office. In the mean time, Tom comes in. He tries to save Rose and Jack's relationship from breaking up.

Note: 1. please create a 5-15 minutes small role play based on the description above.

    2. Group1= S1, S2 & S3

      Group2= S4, S5 & S6

Activity 4

Topic: Daily Life

Format: Problem Solving

Time allowance: 1 hour

Activity procedures:

1. Read the following situations first:

◆   What should you do if:

1) You buy an expensive appliance, and it does not work when you get home?

2) Your boss makes an unreasonable demand?

3) You are angry at your friend and you want to let him/her know it?

4) You have a guest who you want to leave?

5) You want your employer to increase your salary?

6) You want permission from your parents to marry someone they don't like?

2. Every group member expresses his/her solution in 10 minutes based on above questions.

Activity 5

Topic: The Internet

Format: Debate

Time allowance: 1 hour

Activity procedures:

1. Before talking via Skype, everyone should please read the handout first.

2. Divide each group into two sides: pro side and con side. Students will have a debate on the following statement:

   Pro side (S1, S2 & S3): The Internet has a negative impact on youth

   Con side (S4, S5 & S6): The Internet does not have a negative impact on youth

3. First, S1 from the pro side will express his/her opinions. Second, S4 from con side will express his/her opposing opinions. Third, based on the opposition, S2 of pro side

has to challenge what has been said. Fourth, S5 of con side also has to challenge the opinions of S2 from the pro side. Finally, S3 and S6 conclude his/her own side's opinions for the debate respectively.

Note: Each group member takes about 4-5 minutes to address his/her opinions for the discussion questions.

Handouts: useful expressions for debate

1. Beginning

◆ My name is____. I represent the pro/con side.

◆ First of all, I want to make it clear that…

2. Question and Answer

◆ What will be your resolution policies for…?

◆ How will you handle possible additional problems if…?

◆ How will you resolve the problems caused by…

◆ The reason is that…

◆ If you disagree about…

◆ On the other hand…

◆ According to…

◆ Could you please tell me the advantages of…?

◆ Could you tell me something about…?

◆ Looking at other evidence…

◆ There is no denying that…

◆ On principle…

◆ My opposing reason is…

◆ That question is irrelevant to this debate.

◆ That is red herring.

3. Conclusion

◆ Therefore, I conclude that the…
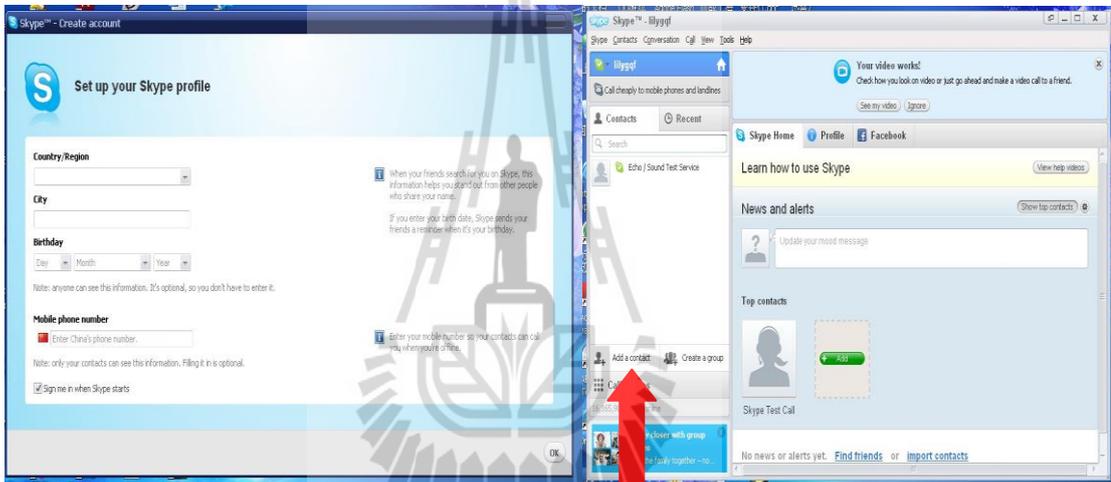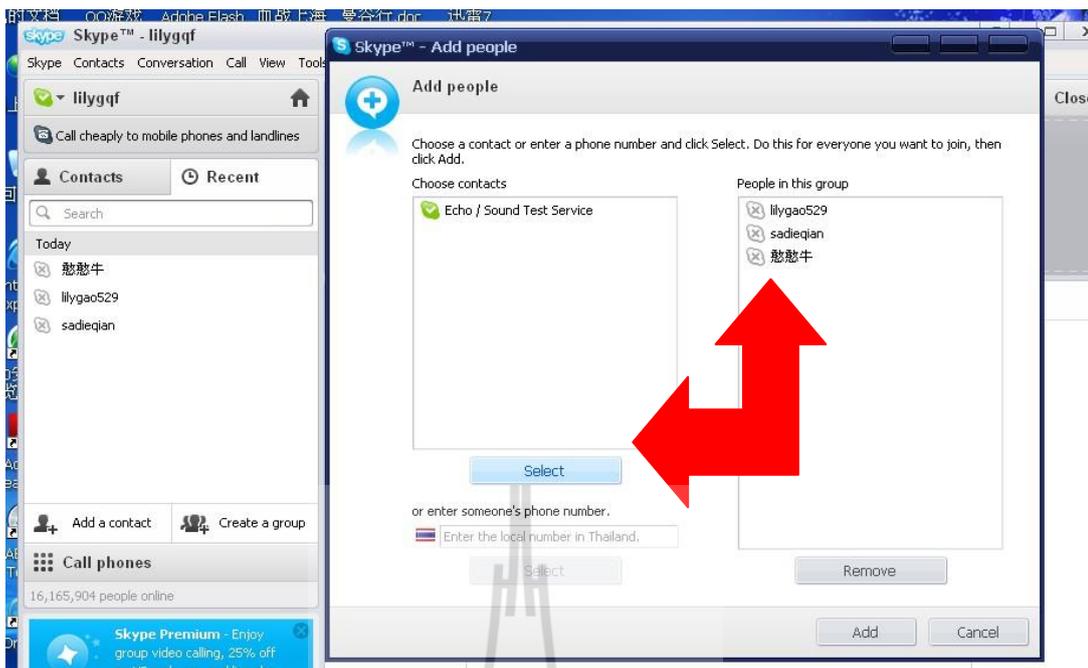
◆ I am sure that…

◆ I don't think it can be…

APPENDIX E

Instruction of using software

1. The demonstration of how to use Skype

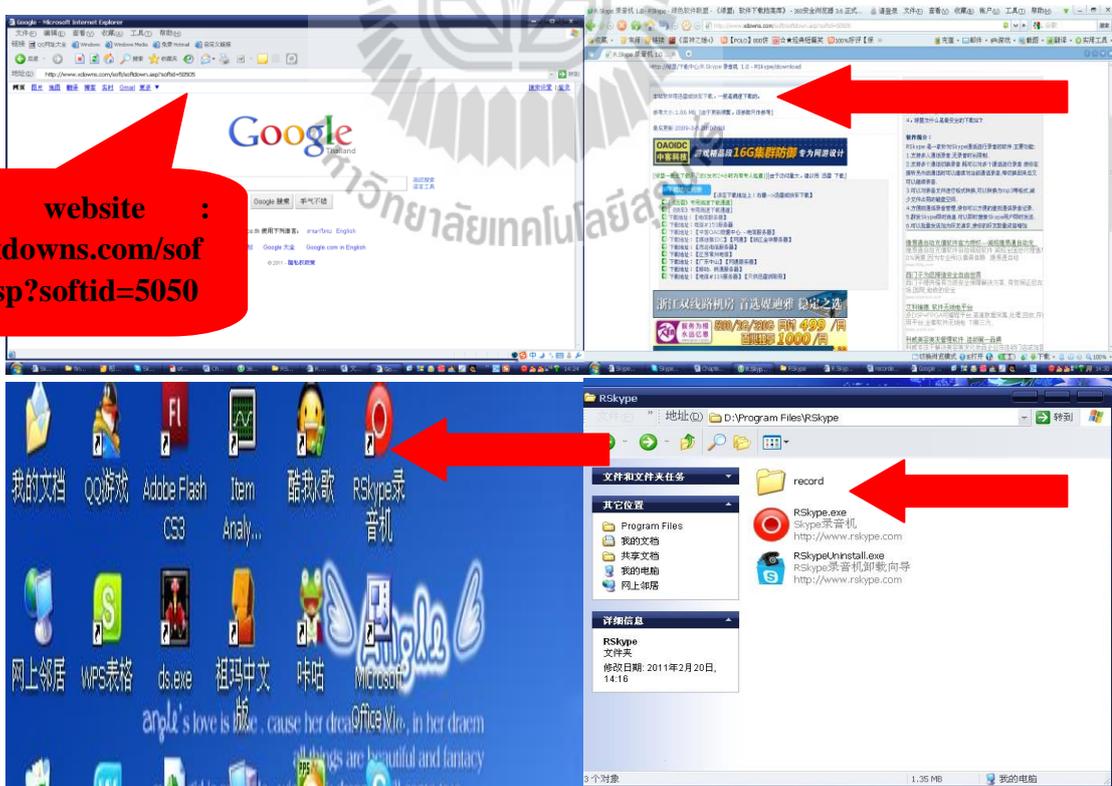2. Instruction of RSkype download

Type the website : http://www.xdowns.com/soft/softdown.asp?softid=5050
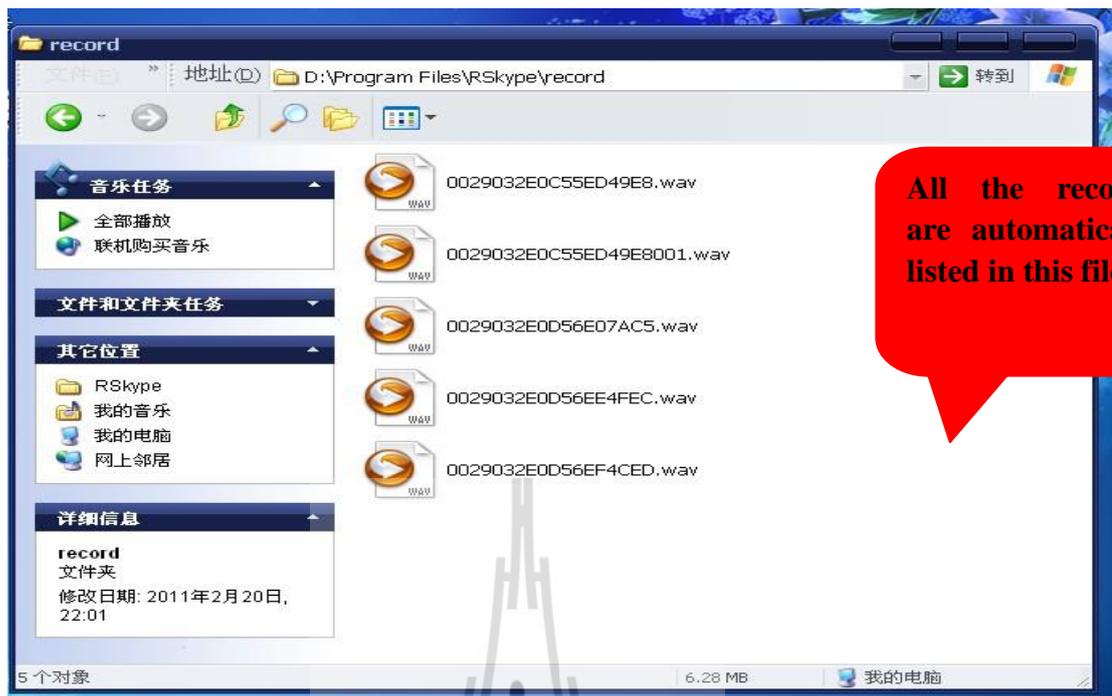
CURRICULUM VETAE

Qiongfang Gao was born on May 29, 1979 in China. She obtained her Bachelor Degree of Arts in English from school of Foreign Languages, Guizhou University for Nationalities. She studied at the School of Foreign Languages, Institute of Social Technology, Suranaree University of Technology for a Master's Degree in English Language Studies.