

Compendium of Augmented Blended Teaching & Learning for Open Pedagogic Tools

Blended Learning Tool Evaluation - Skype

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Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

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Report Overview

This document describes *Skype* as a tool to support blended learning. Following testing and evaluation, it discusses the functionalities and how the tool supports educators in their professional activities, namely:

- Professional Engagement
- Digital Resources
- Teaching & Learning
- Assessment
- Empowerment of Learners
- Facilitating Learners' Digital Competence



1. Introduction

Skype is a video, audio and chat application, available on various desktop, mobile and video game console platforms. It is a reliable, stable and user-friendly application that allows users to connect with others from anywhere at any time. People has been using Skype for years with success, making it one of the most popular communications platforms in the world.

One of the significant advantages of Skype is that it is Free. Although Skype is a commercial tool, all of its popular features are free to use apart from the international calls to mobiles or landlines to non-Skype users.

Skype apart from the popular audio and HD video calls supports several interesting functionalities. Among them are smart messaging, file sharing, screen sharing, call recording, live subtitles, raise hands, poll creation and call scheduling. The above features undeniably make Skype an essential communication tool for distance learning with some of the features be valuable for educators, others for learners and others for both of them.

Skype features like screen sharing, or polling make lectures more interesting and explanatory. Students become more attentive and engaged towards their teachers and often get higher grades. Students enhance their digital competence while using Skype and its advanced features.

2. Testing and evaluation of the tool

Skype has been tested thoroughly and daily for several months. We are using Skype for all of our group meetings and we checked the proper functionality of all the features describing below. Video and audio calls were tested with up to 50 people and the meeting coordinator had the role of the educator.

3. Functionalities supporting blended learning

Skype is an application that offers several advanced functionalities, enabling educators to efficiently support blended learning. Some Skype features are valuable for the educators, others for learners and others for both of them.

3.1 Supporting Professional Engagement

- Easiness to use

Skype is a very simple to use application, even for non-experienced users. The user can download it from the [skype.com](https://www.skype.com) webpage (Figure 1) and install it. When you launch Skype for the first time you have to create a new account (Figure 3), otherwise the user signs-in with the existing account (Figure 2).

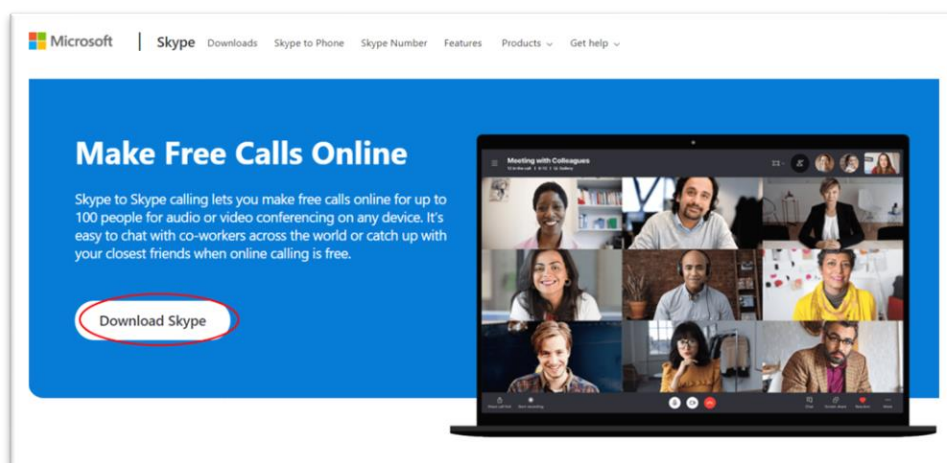


Figure 1-Download Skype from Skype Microsoft page

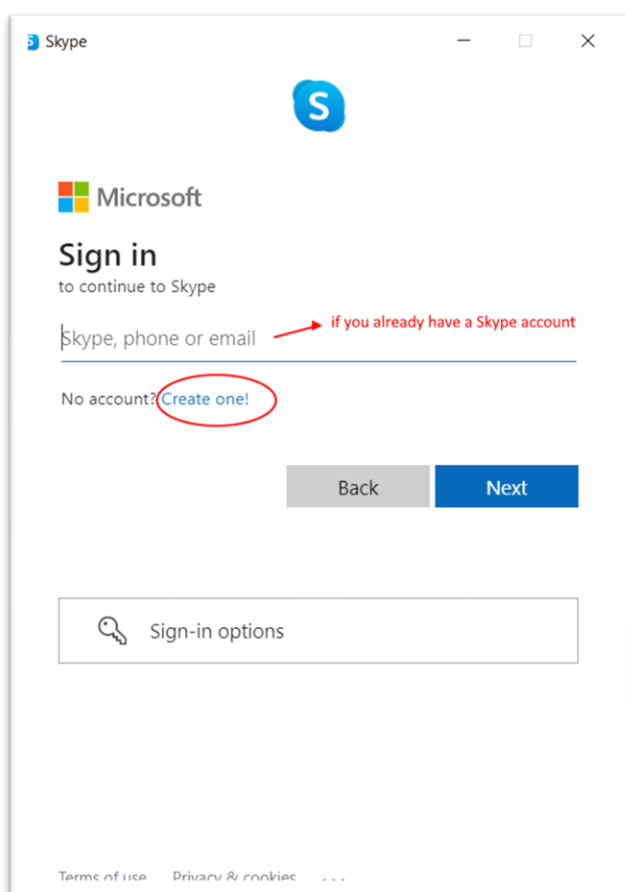


Figure 2- Sign in if you have a Skype account

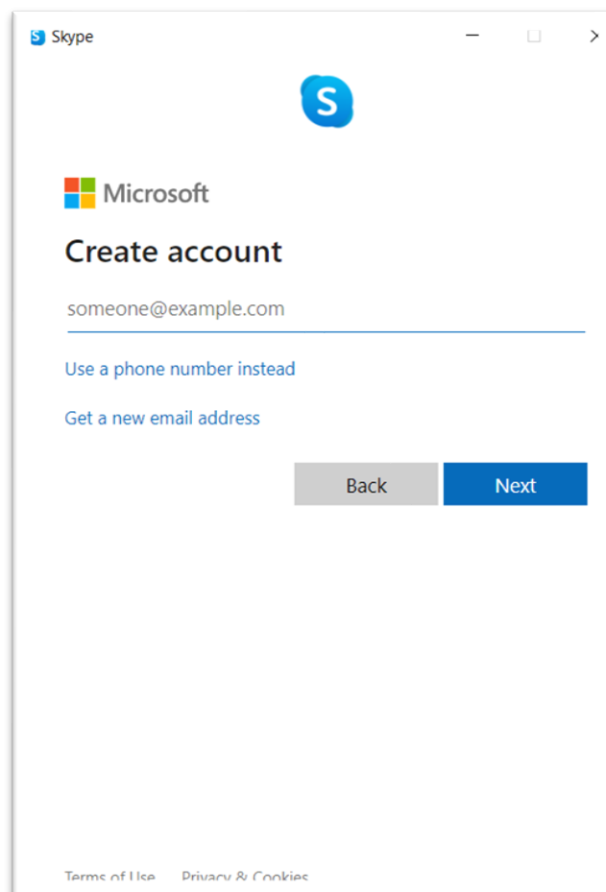


Figure 3- Create a new Skype account



The interface is simple, clean and straightforward with familiar features and buttons (Figure 4).

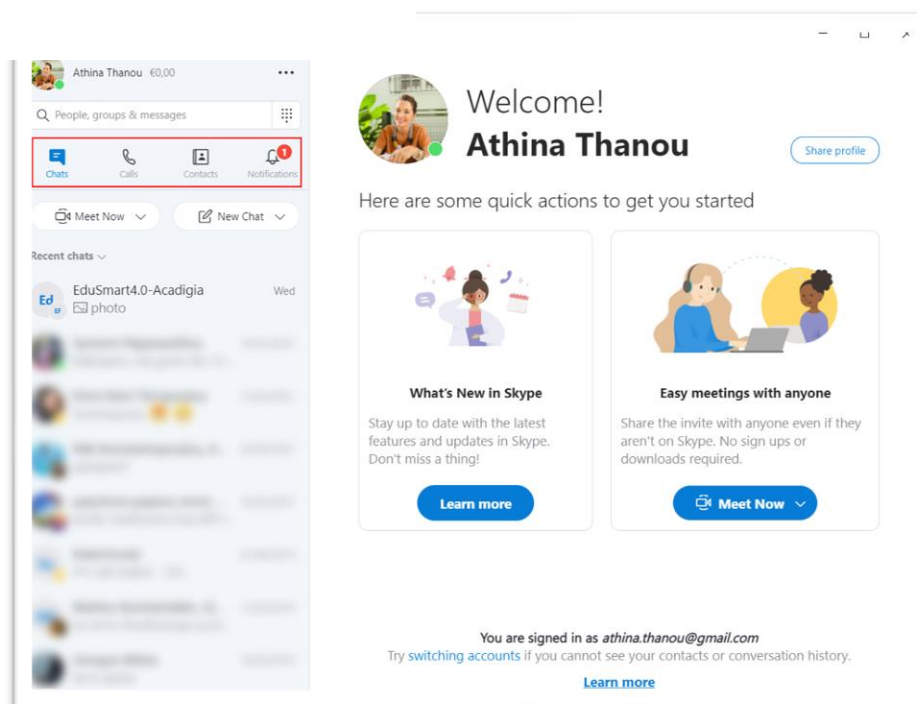


Figure 4 – User friendly interface

- Completely free

Skype is a FREE reliable video, audio and chat application that supports calls up to 100 people and numerous useful features. The only service that needs Skype credit or a subscription is international calls to mobiles or landlines to reach people who are not using Skype.

- Accessibility & flexibility

Skype is available for various devices including desktops, laptops and mobile devices and it is automatically synchronized across them. In case, there is no access to a computer or phone, or a user do not want to download it, he/she can easily connect to his/her Skype account via a browser (Microsoft Edge, Google Chrome, Safari and Opera). Alexa smart devices and Xbox also support Skype. The ability to use the application from whatever device is closest as well as to use it while on the go (Figure 5), make Skype a valuable communication solution for professionals.

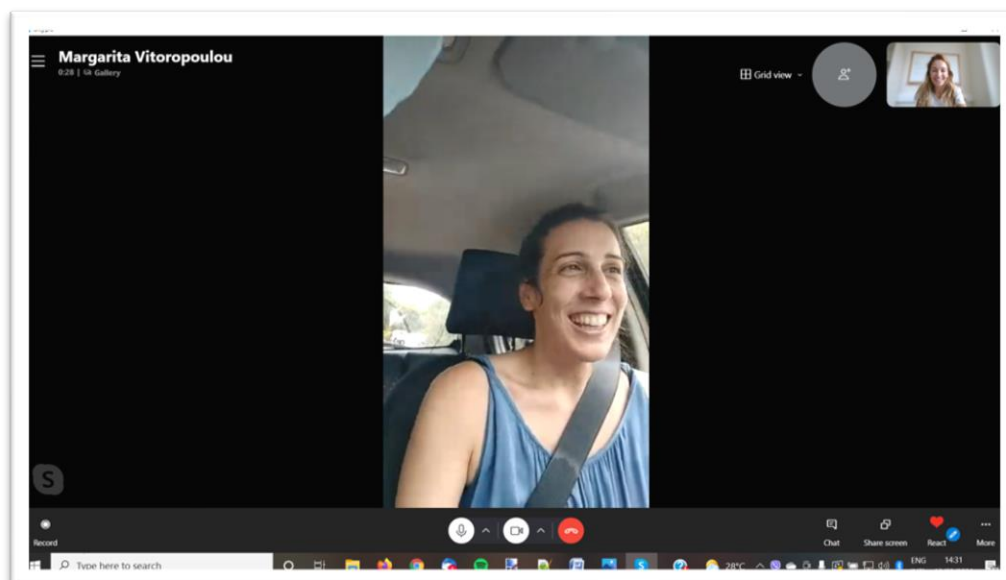


Figure 4-Skype on the go

- Advanced features:

Skype apart from the popular audio and HD video calls along with the smart messaging supports several interesting functionalities. Among them are file sharing, screen sharing, call recording, live subtitles, poll creation and call scheduling.

3.2 Supporting Digital Resources

It is important that Skype supports several digital resources because they enhance the learning procedure in different ways. Digital resources facilitate educators to prepare more fascinating and interesting courses by using videos, images, graphics or interactive quizzes, aiming at their students' engagement. Learners enjoy leaving the traditional learning procedure and experience a more collaborative and open environment that can be accessed from anywhere at any time. Some of the digital resources supported by Skype are the following:

- File sharing
- One Drive
- Screen sharing
- Call recording
- Skype extensions for Google Chrome, Mozilla and Outlook.com

A Skype chat icon can be added in Google chrome and Mozilla Firefox to share directly news, articles or interesting pages. A Skype plug-in is also available for Outlook.com for the addition of a similar chat icon.

- Alexa and Xbox support Skype

With Alexa smart devices, Skype calls become fascinating. By asking «Alexa call <contact name> on Skype», users reach any of their contacts quickly and efficiently. Accordingly, Skype integration with

Xbox, enables Xbox users to make or receive audio and video calls while playing a game or watching a show.

- Cortana

Skype integrates with Cortana and suggests smart replies or give useful information based on your text messages.

3.3 Supporting Teaching & Learning

Although Skype was not initially designed for online teaching, the numerous advanced features that supports make it a significant teaching tool. Among these useful features are:

- Video conference calls

Educators can easily make a video call by creating a link and share with up to 100 students. If the students are not in the instructor's contact list, learners' emails are necessary to send them the link via email. Skype also supports a direct connection to Facebook for sharing the call invitation with a group. The video conference call is a great tool for teaching because both educators and learners can be present from anywhere. This gives them great flexibility and freedom. Also tutors can invite guest lecturers, teachers or experts on their field from across the world to share their knowledge and experience with the students who would otherwise be very difficult if not possible to attend.

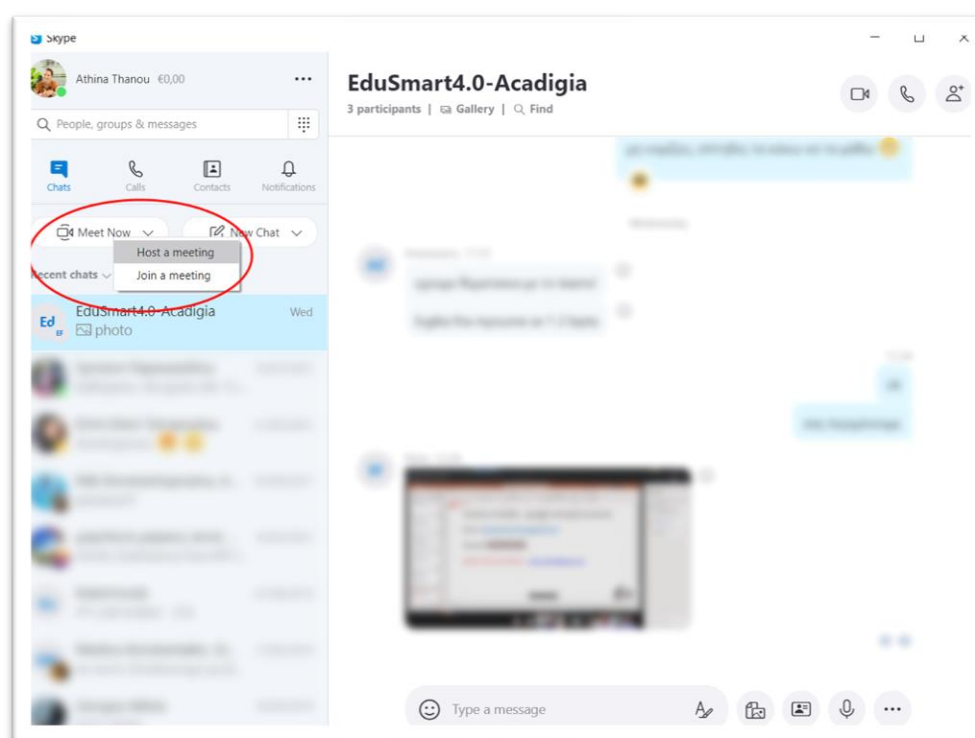


Figure 5-Creating a video conference call, step 1

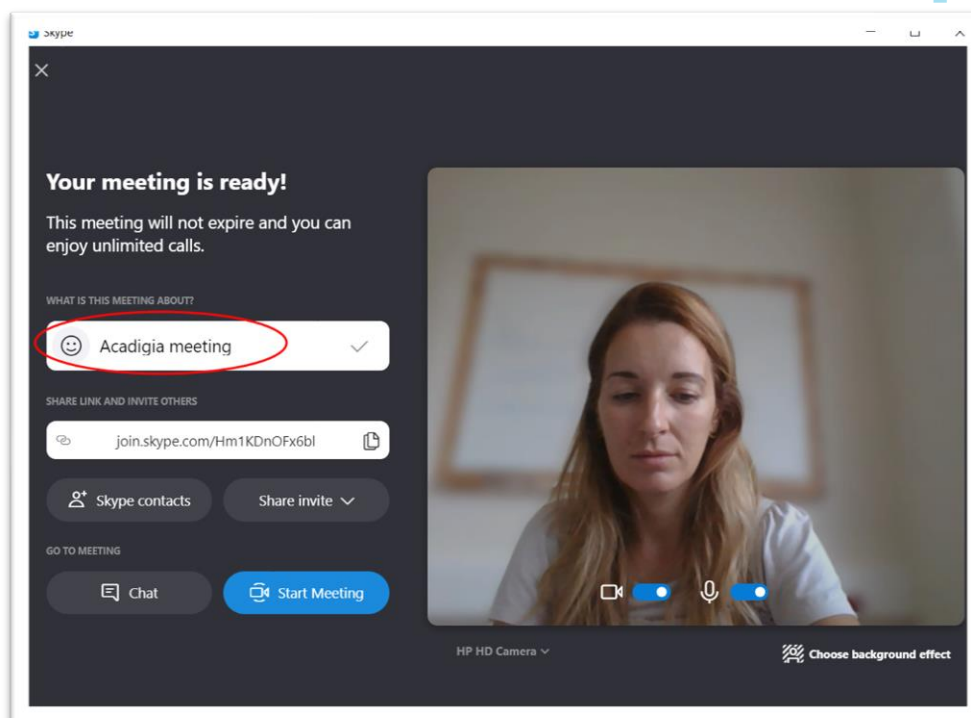


Figure 6-Giving a name to your conference call, step 2

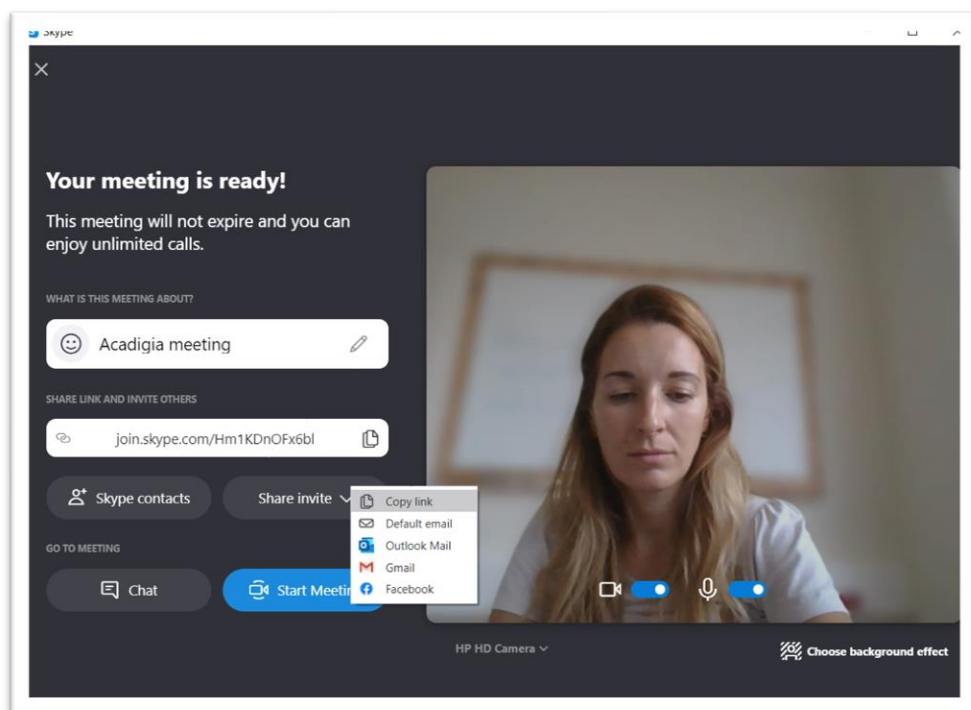


Figure 7- Sharing the meeting link, step 3

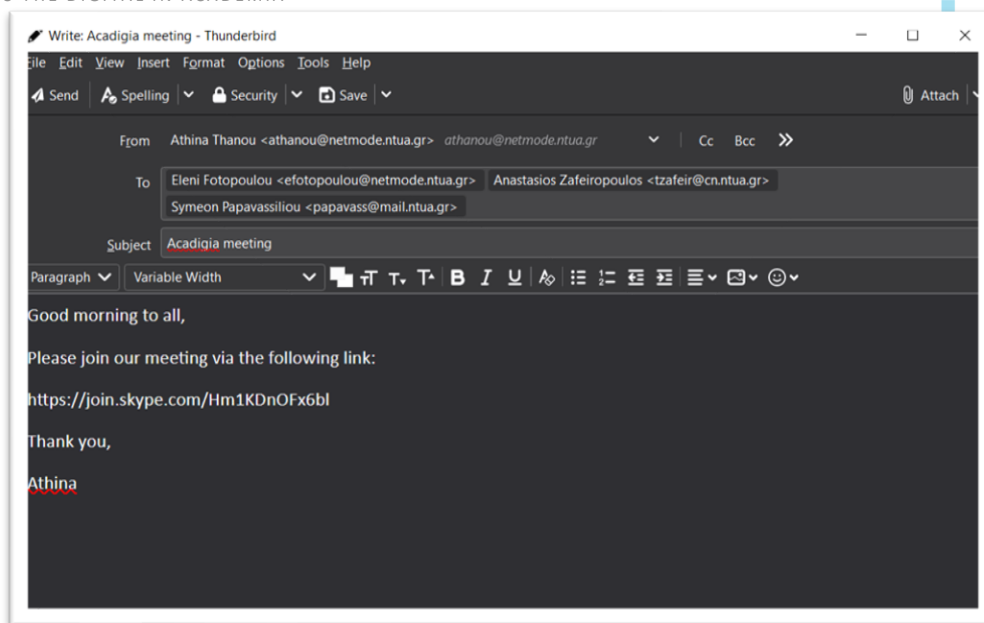
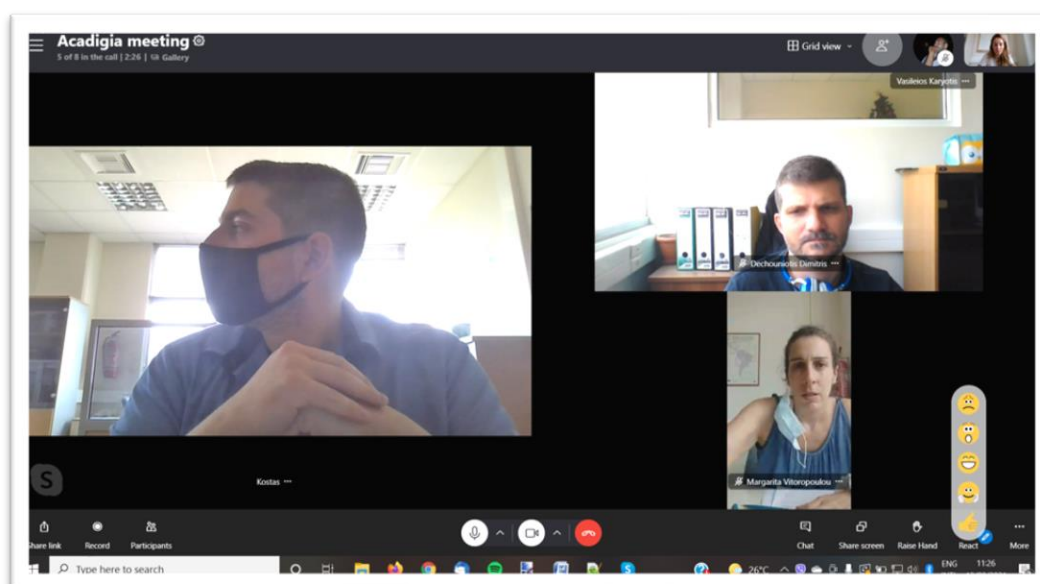


Figure 9 – Sending meeting link via email, step 4



- File sharing

Skype users can easily send one or more files to one or multiple contacts by simply dragging and dropping them onto the conversation window. Accordingly tutors can quickly and efficiently share all necessary material for their course like power point presentations, videos, or exercises. Correspondingly, students can upload their assignments or anything they want to share with their fellow students and tutor. Skype ensures the security of the files transferring as they are automatically encrypted. The size of the files is not an issue as files up to 300 MB can be sent.

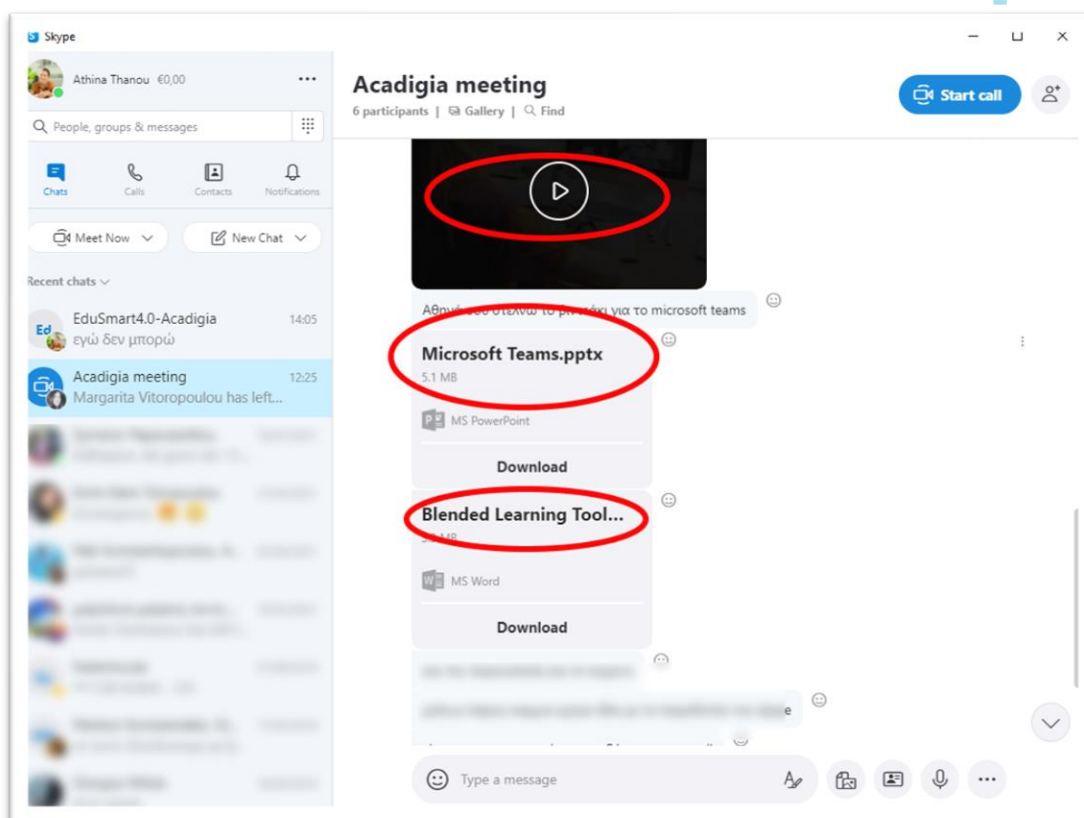


Figure 8-File sharing by dragging and dropping

- OneDrive

Users can share a link to a file or a folder stored on their One Drive cloud platform. The OneDrive add-in permits educators to share big documents with their learners and allows members of the same group to edit the same document, in case of a project assignment.





Figure 13 -Sharing files from Drive

- Screen sharing

Skype enables users to share their screen with others during a voice or video call. They can share photos, a video, a power-point presentation, a programme or anything appearing on their screen. This feature is especially useful for teaching as tutors are allowed to show their screens quickly and directly to their class and explain how to complete a task, solve a problem, run a simulation or present a useful tool. Screen-sharing facilitates the learning process by making more explanatory, interesting and in depth the lectures. It can also bring the human element back to lessons if tutors share their screens while writing with a digital pen or tablet mouse pad. Screen-sharing technology saves time as otherwise educators would spend more time explaining. Even though this feature is used mainly by teachers, it can also be used by students to make a presentation, submit a question or share anything their classmates may find interesting. Screen-sharing is a powerful tool that makes students more engaged and attentive towards their teachers.

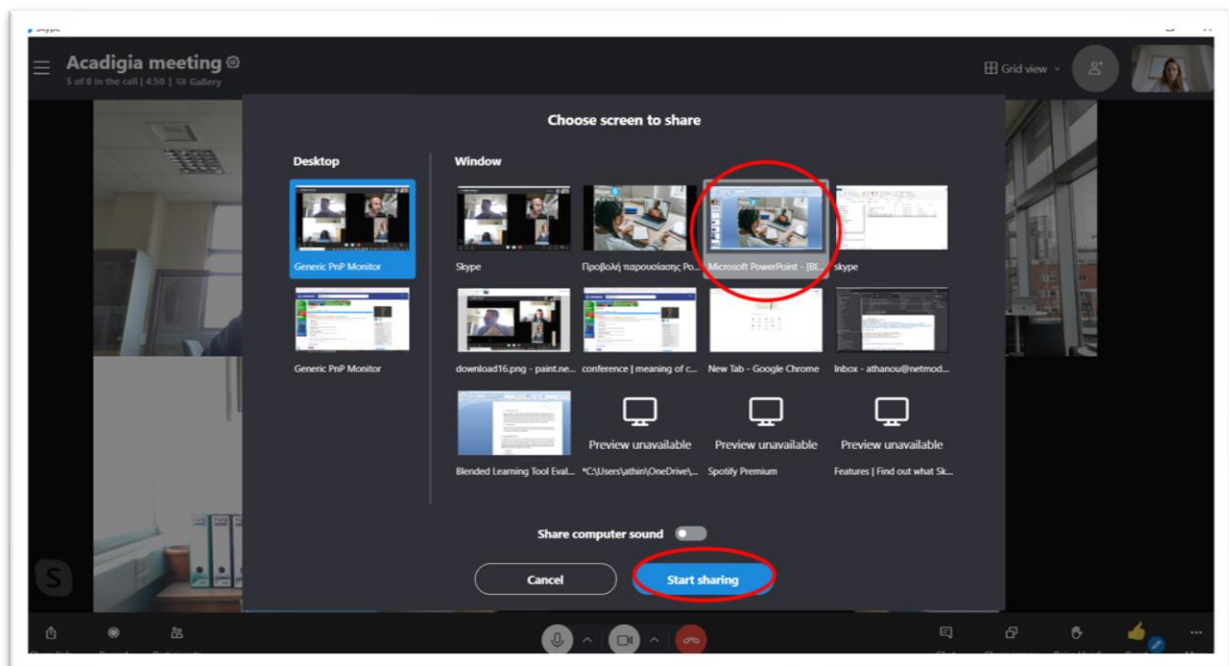


Figure 9-Screen sharing

- Call recording

A Skype call can be recorded, downloaded and easily being sent to several contacts. Teachers can record their lectures and send them later to their students allowing them to review the whole session or particular areas. Students have the flexibility to pause or rewind sessions that helps in keeping notes and deeper understanding. It appears that call recording increases student engagement and their achievements, including higher grades.

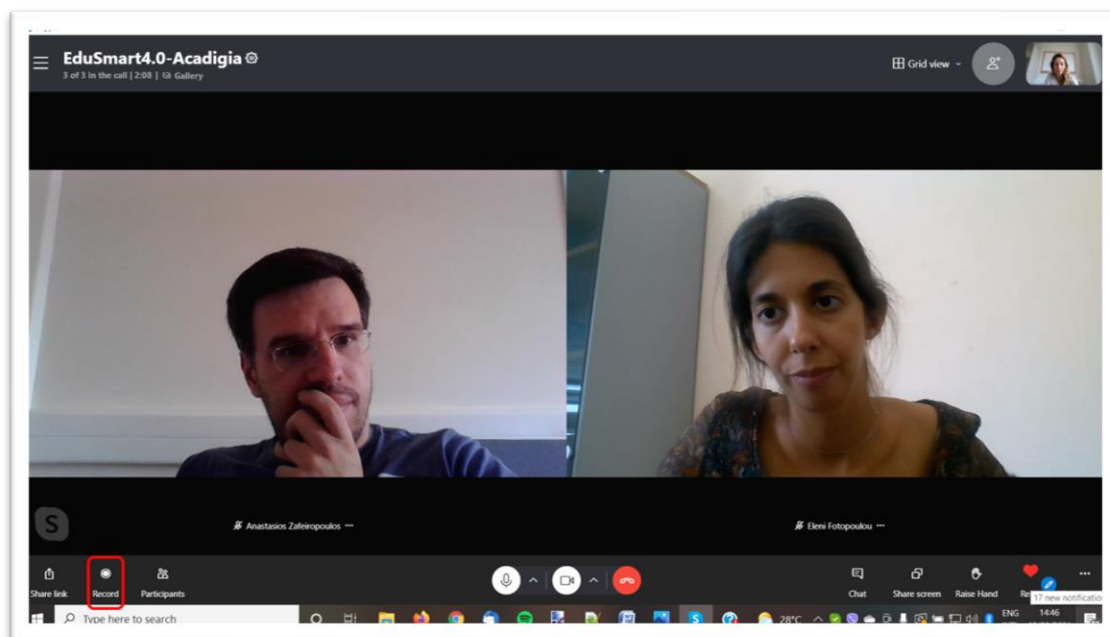


Figure 10-Record a call

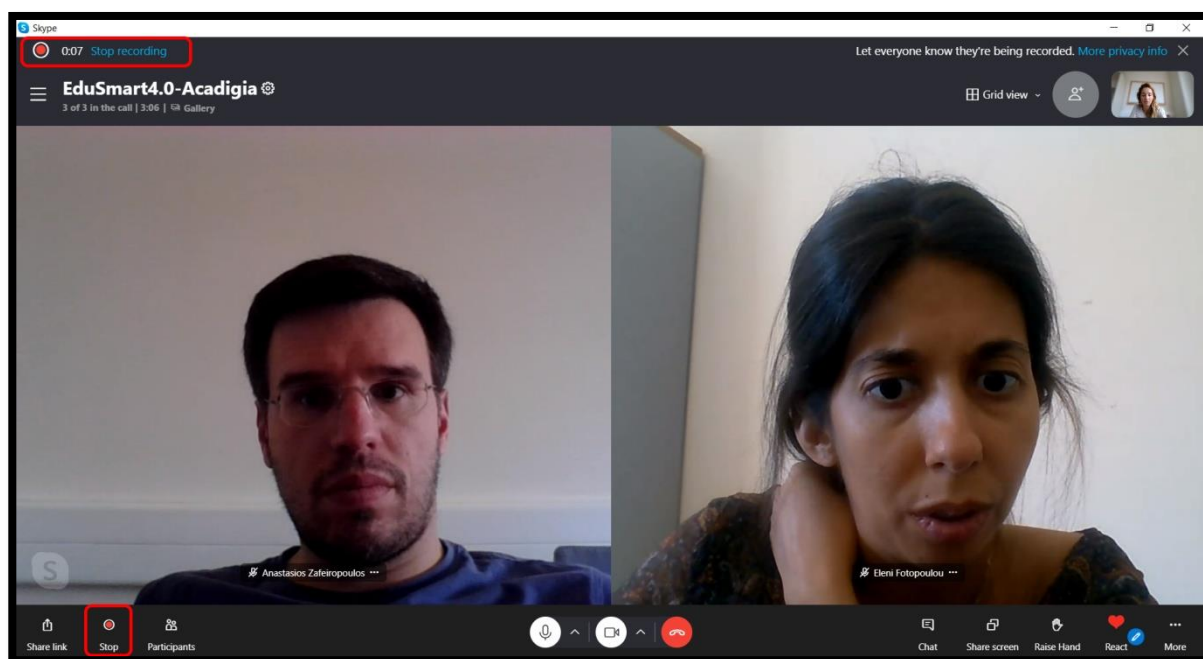
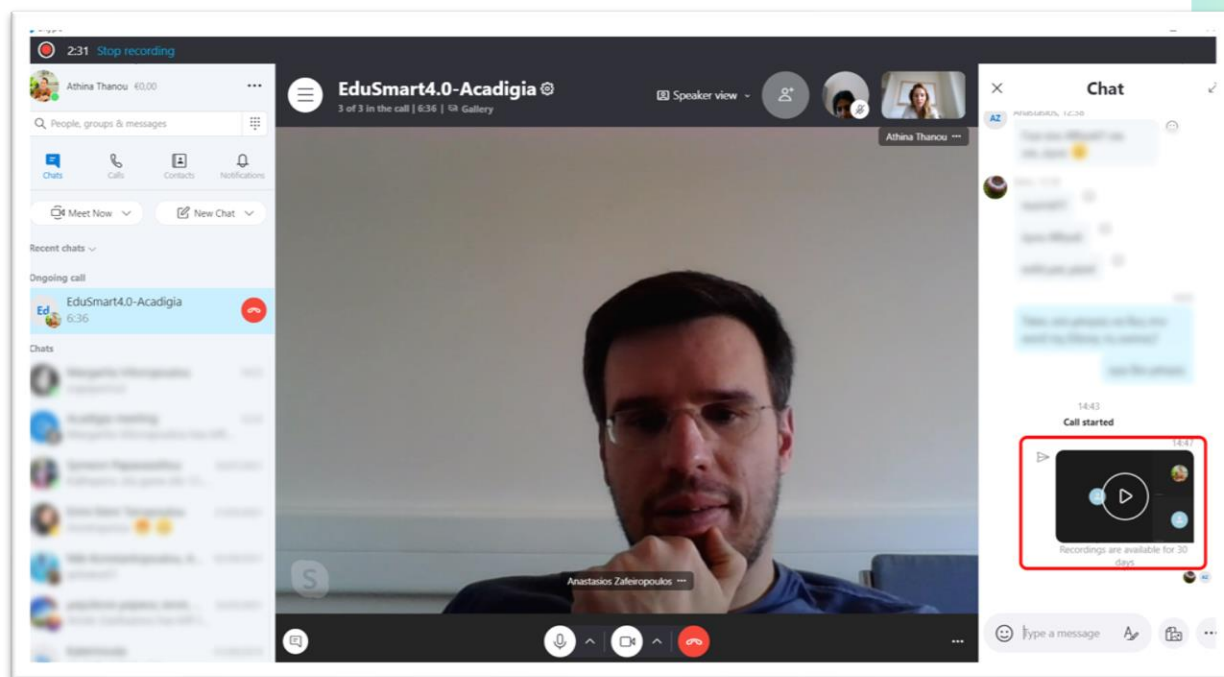


Figure 11-The call is being recorded



- Poll creation

Polling is a great tool for educators as they receive instant feedback on how students feel or think on a topic and what they understand regarding the lesson. Polls help tutors to improve their lectures by maintaining students alert, boosting their engagement to the course or repeating sessions or parts not being understood. Polls are very easy to create or erase and the responses are anonymous which gives students the safety of not being judged by their educators or classmates. Tutors can choose whether to show or hide poll results to class but in case of presenting them, results could be the trigger for further discussion on the topic.



Figure 13-Creating a poll, step 1



× **Poll**

QUESTION

What communication tool do you prefer?

EXPIRATION

14/09/2021

14:58

OPTIONS

Skype

Webex

Google Classroom

Create poll

Figure 15-Creating a poll, step 2

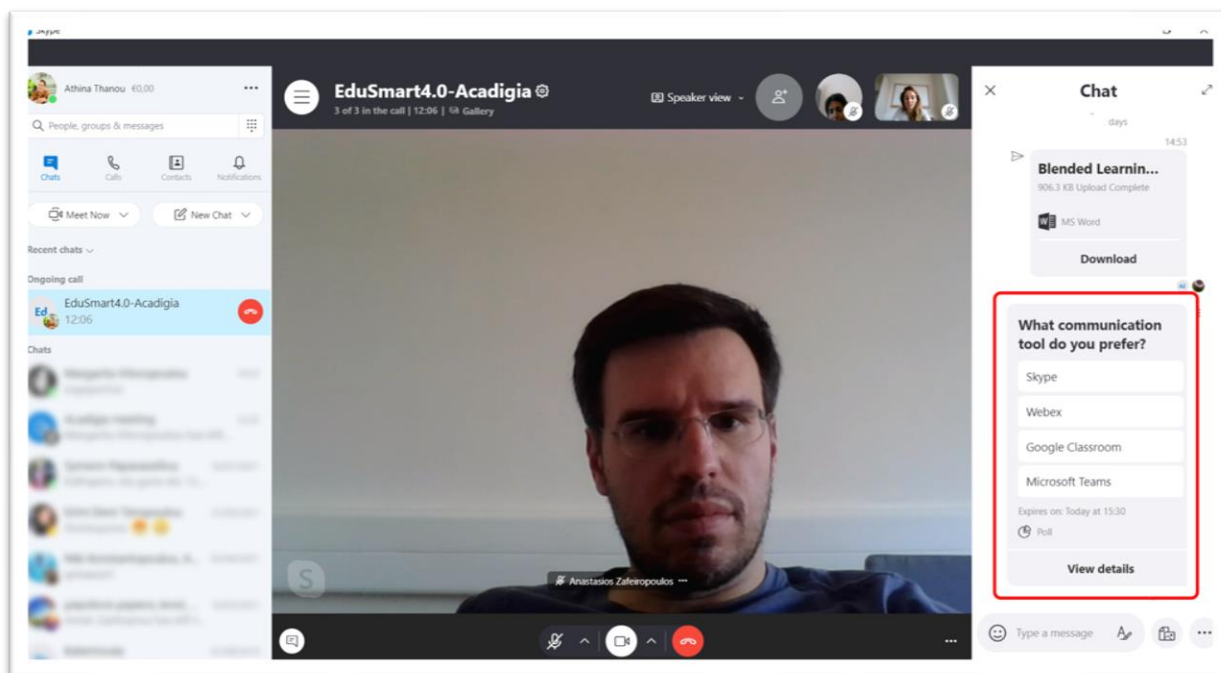


Figure 16-Poll created

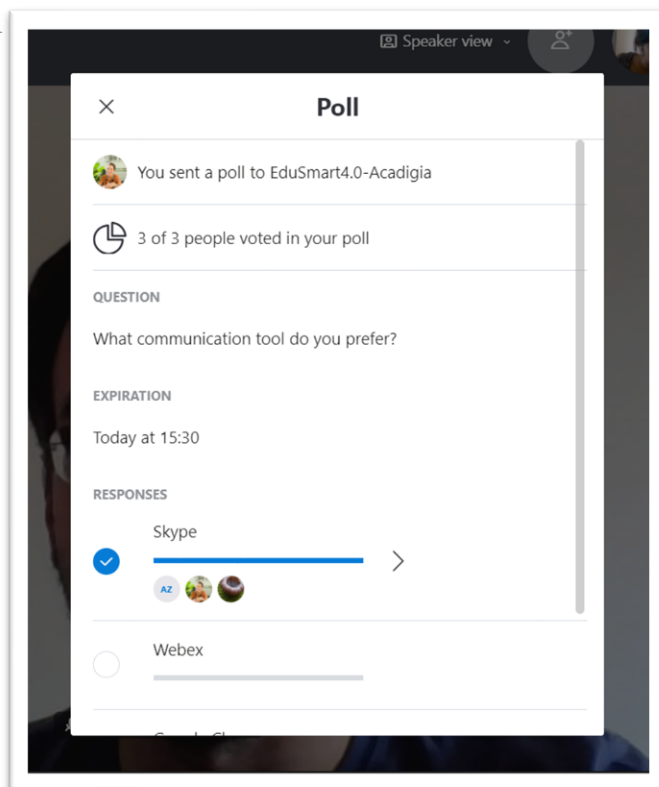


Figure 17-Poll results

- Raise hands

The raise-hand feature is one of Skype's latest add-ons and a valuable tool for teaching. Tutors are notified when a student wants to speak without being interrupted.

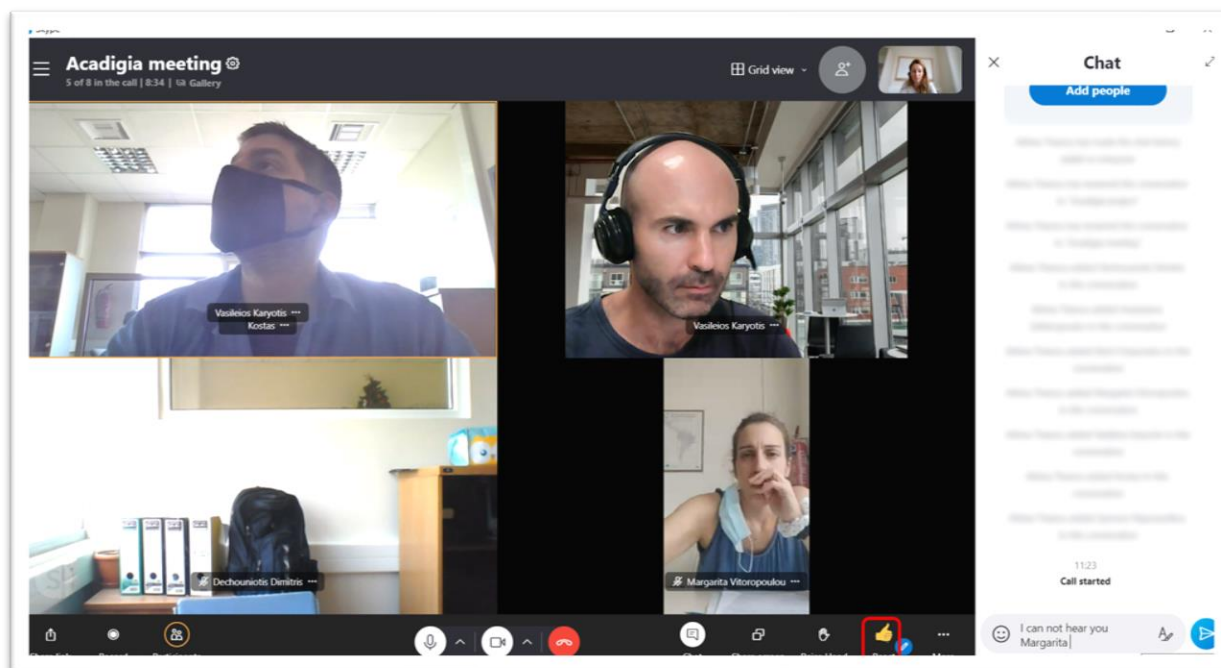


Figure 18-Raise hand feature



- Live captions and Subtitles

Live captions and Subtitles are automatically transcribed captions that appear on the screen during an audio or video call. They can be really useful for students who are deaf or hearing-impaired, students with developmental disabilities like attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and autism and non-native speaker students.



Figure 19-Automated transcribed subtitles

3.4 Supporting Assessment

One of the challenges in a blended learning model is when assessments have to be online. However, Skype offers the following alternatives:

- Interview

Tutors can use interviews via audio or video calls to assess their students. This examination type may be considerable beneficial for students with developmental disabilities, as dyslexia. Interviews are also a good practice for educators to be acquainted with their students.

- Poll creation

Polling can be used as a classroom assessment tool to check understanding and gaining knowledge.

- Share a link for assessment

Probably, the most efficient way to assess students is by using online forms. After creating the form, educators can easily share it with learners via the Skype “file sharing” feature. Shorter available time or open cameras are issues that should be considered by educators.



3.5 Supporting the Empowerment of Learners

Even though Skype is one of the first video solutions, the innovative technology used and the advanced available features make Skype a great tool not only for teachers but for learners as well. Regarding learners, the most significant features that support learning process are:

- Live interaction and feedback

The Skype audio and video conference call enables students to have a direct communication and interaction with their tutor when the physical presence in a classroom is not possible. During a video conference, Skype students can send text messages on the group meeting to ask questions or make a comment without interrupting the lecture. Raise hands is another useful feature for learners to notify lecturer about a question or a comment they have.

- File sharing, one drive, screen sharing

File sharing and OneDrive are valuable tools for students because not only they can easily access and download material shared by their educators, but they can also submit quickly and easily any assignment they have. Screen sharing enables students to make a presentation, submit a question or share something useful or interesting. Also screen-sharing makes lectures more interesting and explanatory for learners, saving them time from studying at home.

- Recording

Video call recording is useful because students can review the whole session or particular areas of a course that are not well understood. Students have also the flexibility to pause or rewind sessions which is helpful in keeping notes and deeper understanding.

- Subtitles

Subtitles and captions are really important for students who are deaf or hearing-impaired, students with developmental disabilities like attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and autism and non-native speaker students.

- Easy to use and accessibility

One of the Skype assets is the simple and user friendly interface. Learners become quickly and easily familiar with its basic features, without wasting time to become acquainted. Also the option of connecting to Skype from any closest device such as a desktop, a laptop or a mobile device, make Skype a communication solution for learners.

3.6 Facilitating Learners' Digital Competence

The rapid advance of new technologies affects all aspects of life and requires students to develop digital competence. Educators need to understand this demand and use digital technologies to enhance not only student learning experience but also their digital competence. Students who develop digital competence become citizens who know how to use digital technologies in a responsible, critical and creative way.

Teachers, who use a video conference tool for lectures, exploit digital technologies and enforce their students to use them too. More specifically learners:

- **Interact through digital technologies** as they attend their courses through audio or video calls.



- Are **sharing through digital technologies** to access the class material or submit an assignment
- **Engage in online citizenship through digital technologies** by raising hand
- **Collaborate through digital channels** by participating in a discussion in their virtual class or working on an assignment with other classmates.
- **Store digital information**, the class material (power point presentations, videos, pictures) shared by the educator
- **Retrieve digital information**, the class material (power point presentations, videos, pictures) to study
- **Filter digital information** while studying or playing the recorded course session

Summary of functionalities	
Audio & video conference calls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience audio and video calls for up to 100 people.
File sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share one or multiple files to one or multiple contacts by dragging and dropping them.
OneDrive sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share big documents or edit the same document with a small group of students
Share desktop or mobile screen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share anything appearing on desktop or mobile screen (graphs, presentations, tools) during a call
Record call	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Record a lecture and send it to students
Raise hands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notify tutor that you want to make a question or a comment without interrupting the lecture
Poll creation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a poll to retrieve instant feedback on your audience attention
Live captions & subtitles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Automated transcribed captions appearing on the screen
interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine students through a video call
Xbox integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receive or make a call while playing a game or watching a show
Alexa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Automate Skype meetings by asking Alexa to call your contacts.
Text messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Send text messages during a video conference call to ask a question or make a comment without interrupting the lecture
Search within a conversation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Search an audio or video conversation window
Skype extension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share directly news, articles or interesting pages using the Skype chat icon in Google chrome, Mozilla Firefox and Outlook.com.

4. Tutorial Video and PowerPoint slides

The ACADIGIA resources for Skype are available on the website [here](#).