



# **“Using Collaborative Online Discussion Strategy for Enhancing Secondary Stage Students’ EFL Oral Fluency”**

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## **Abstract**

### **Using Collaborative Online Discussion Strategy for Enhancing Secondary Stage Students' EFL Oral Fluency**

The present research aimed at investigating the effect of using collaborative online discussion strategy on enhancing secondary stage students' EFL oral fluency. The research followed the quasi experimental design of two groups (control and experimental). A total of forty EFL first year secondary stage students of Hurghada secondary official language school, Red Sea governorate, Egypt, were randomly assigned to two groups; twenty students for the control group and twenty for the experimental. The researcher designed and used the instruments and materials of the research, which included: an EFL oral fluency skills list, an EFL oral fluency test, an EFL oral fluency scoring rubric, and an instructional unit based on collaborative online discussion strategy. The results of the research showed the statistically significant differences between the mean scores which obtained by the experimental group in the pre/posttest of the EFL oral fluency (in favor of the posttest). Moreover, there were statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental and the control groups in the post test of the EFL oral fluency (in favor of the experimental group). Therefore, the impact of using collaborative online discussion strategy on enhancing secondary stage students' EFL oral fluency has been verified.

#### **Keywords:**

*Collaborative online discussion, Oral fluency*

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## المستخلص

"استخدام استراتيجية المناقشة التشاركية عبر الأنترنت لتعزيز الطلاقة الشفوية للغة

كلغة أجنبية لدى طلاب المرحلة الثانوية" الإنجليزية

إعداد

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هدف البحث الحالي إلى التحقق من تأثير استخدام استراتيجية المناقشة التشاركية عبر الأنترنت على تعزيز الطلاقة الشفوية للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية لدى طلاب المرحلة الثانوية. اتبعت الدراسة التصميم شبه التجريبي ذو المجموعتين (الضابطة والتجريبية)، تم اختيار أربعون طالباً و طالبة من طلاب الصف الاول الثانوى بمدرسة الغردقة الثانوية الرسمية للغات بالغردقة، محافظة البحر الأحمر، مصر، بشكل عشوائى وتقسيمهم الى مجموعتين: عشرون طالباً و طالبة للمجموعة الضابطة، وعشرون للمجموعة التجريبية. وقامت الباحثة بتصميم واستخدام أدوات ومواد البحث والتي تضمنت: قائمة بمهارات الطلاقة الشفوية للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، واختبار الطلاقة الشفوية للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، وقائمة تقييم تحليلية للطلاقة الشفوية للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، و وحدة تعليمية قائمة على استخدام استراتيجية المناقشة التشاركية عبر الأنترنت. وقد أشارت نتائج البحث الى وجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية بين متوسطات الدرجات التي حصلت عليها المجموعة التجريبية فى التطبيق القبلى والبعدى لاختبار الطلاقة الشفوية للغة الانجليزية كلغة اجنبية لصالح التطبيق البعدى، كما أسفرت أيضاً عن وجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية بين متوسطات درجات المجموعة التجريبية والضابطة فى التطبيق البعدى لاختبار الطلاقة الشفوية للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية لصالح المجموعة التجريبية. بناءً على ذلك، تم التحقق من تأثير استخدام استراتيجية المناقشة التشاركية عبر الأنترنت على تعزيز الطلاقة الشفوية للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية لدى طلاب المرحلة الثانوية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المناقشة التشاركية عبر الأنترنت ، الطلاقة الشفوية

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## **1. Introduction**

Communication is a complex term used differently depending on a situation; it is the act of transmitting and receiving information by using words, sounds, signs or behaviors. It is a process which helps people to communicate and convey their feelings, emotions and attitudes. This process is a basic form of social interaction, which is a fundamental characteristic to all human beings.

Communicating orally in a second or foreign language such as English can be a difficult task especially for the low proficiency learners as they may lack the confidence and feel shy when interacting verbally in the target language. This may hold them back from expressing themselves vocally though they are fully aware that in order to be fluent in the target language, they need to practice speaking not only in the classroom but also outside the classroom (Abu Bakar, Latiff & Hamat, 2013).

Speaking in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has begun to come out as a branch of teaching and learning. Speaking is a form of oral expression of ideas. It is a skill by which learners interact and make relationships among each other through using appropriate patterns of stress, intonation, rhythm, and the choice of suitable words to convey meaning (Gad, 2012). Kelly (2008) stated that interaction has long been considered to play an important role. It could determine whether the learning objectives of each meeting in the classroom can be achieved or not.

Eisenring & Margana (2019) mentioned that interaction becomes the principal means for teachers and students to exchange their ideas, feelings, and opinions. According to Lopez (2016), speaking is usually known as one of the most useful and interactive skills to communicate in English. Students can use the language authentically while interacting with peers collaboratively. Moreover, Buitrago (2017) stated that spending time in EFL speaking classes helps students develop their oral fluency and motivates them to speak freely without worry about making mistakes. Thus, speaking classes should pay attention to engage students more in authentic contexts to improve their fluency and interaction.

Although the word fluency has long been used in everyday speech to mean speaking rapidly and well, in ELT it has largely come to mean speaking rapidly and smoothly but not necessarily grammatically (Guillot, 1999). Therefore, fluency is regarded "a performance descriptor for oral assessment of foreign language learners and as an indicator of progress in language learning" (Chambers, 1997, p. 535).

Jones (2007) assured that oral fluency does not only refer to the perfect use of language without interruptions or hesitations but to a confident oral production where listeners can follow ideas in a smooth form. In addition, Buitrago (2017) declared that to achieve oral fluency, students are provided with the authentic context, content and interesting topics which motivate them to interact and practice the English language in the actual situation. For this, teachers should develop appropriate strategy to help students achieve a better fluency level through using useful and collaborative activities.

Over the previous decades, it has revealed that collaborative learning is considered an effective teaching and learning strategy which may have a positive impact on student's learning (Lou, 2001). Collaborative learning has become one of the latest trends in the learning process that actively engages students in building knowledge through involving them in discussions and collaboration processes.

Collaborative learning is simply known as two or more people working together towards a common goal. It happens when the teacher makes use of small groups and encourages them to work together (Johnson & Johnson, 2004). It is also one of the best strategies that was proved to be effective as it provides students with opportunities to exchange experiences. Collaborative learning changes the focus from transmitting information and knowledge to students by the teacher to help them construct knowledge by themselves (Hiltz, Coppola, Rotter, & Turoff, 2000).

Some researchers such as Muhammad & Melor (2019) stated that it was demonstrated that the collaborative learning helped learners in learning English, especially oral interaction. Moreover, Bocanegra & Valencia (2018)

indicated that students learn better in collaborative groups than in a traditional classroom environment, whereas, collaborative strategy promoted oral interaction in second English learners, as the collaborative activities present many advantages, such as increasing self-esteem and motivation among the learners, creating positive feelings, and improving cognitive thinking (Jacobs, 2002).

Nowadays, face to face collaborative learning is considered a challenging approach that may not achieve the expected outcomes in all situations (Kirschner, Paas, & Kirschner, 2009); therefore, some modifications have been suggested to address these challenges such as the use of technology. In fact, there is a clear transformation of the learning and teaching process in education towards digitalizing learning. Digitalization has opened wide discussions regarding how to learn (Courtney & Wilhoite-Mathews, 2015). These advances in the field of technology resulted in the appearance of new research domains represented in computer-supported collaborative learning or online collaborative learning (Stahl, Koschmann, & Suthers, 2014).

Online collaborative learning aims to provide an online environment to a group of students to facilitate collaboration with the aim of enhancing their learning (Kreijns, 2003). This is usually done by offering online instruments that are designed to facilitate the process of co-construct and sharing information as well as providing students with more opportunities to practice learning (Fjermestad, 2004).

Gilbert & Dabbagh (2005) declared that while collaboration promotes dialogue between learners, online discussion technology gives the ability of every learner to respond to the questions, and participate equally. In a study, over half of the students from three online courses reported that they learned a great deal from their peers through online discussions with 78% of the students valuing online discussion as a chance to share opinions among peers and instructors (Wu & hiltz, 2004).

Online discussion is a new way in teaching and learning as many educational institutions, schools and universities used it abroad. It is very vital as a support for teaching and opportunity for interaction between learners. Alhabbash (2012) stated that online discussion has good effects on learning

and acquiring the four skills especially speaking. He assured that through online discussions, students actively explored questioning skills, problem resolution, and collaborative learning.

Moreover, online discussion can provide opportunities to enhance student learning through direct collaboration among participants. Maddix (2012) stated, “Effective online courses are highly dependent on the success of online discussion” and stressed that “effective online discussion can create a dynamic learning context that fosters learning among students and the teacher”.

## **2. Context of the problem**

- As a lecturer in the curriculum and instruction department (TEFL) at Hurghada Faculty of Education, the researcher observed that, some students of first year secondary stage lack the EFL oral fluency skills as they hesitate and feel shy when speaking English language.

To document the problem, a pilot study was conducted to find out the lack of the EFL oral fluency skills of first year secondary stage students. The pilot study was conducted at Hurghada secondary official language school, Red Sea governorate. It adopted the EFL speaking fluency test from Ben (2015), which was administered (35) students. The results revealed the following:

- About seventy percent of the students suffered from speaking English language fluently.
- About eighty percent of them suffered when engaging in an English language discussion as they feel shy.

This might be due to several reasons:

- Many students think in Arabic and then translate their ideas into English.
- Many students feel shy when they are asked to speak in English in front of their classmates.
- Some teachers do not provide students with enough opportunities to practice speaking due to the limited class time.

- Some teachers do not think that oral fluency skills are important to be given much attention.

Abdelkafy (2020) mentioned that the teaching methods used by most teachers do not cope with the changing challenges that EFL learners encounter. This is reflected in many Egyptian schools and colleges contexts where speaking skills are still often taught in conventional classroom settings with traditional lectures and tools. Moreover, Richards & Renandya (2002) assured that in the Egyptian schools, exams are in a written form not oral, as a result students read the questions, understand them and then write the answer in the sheet. Thus, there is no need for them to be interested in speaking skills and that is why students after studying English in the elementary and preparatory schools are unable to converse naturally with native speakers.

Various studies declared the benefits of using collaborative online discussion strategy for enhancing secondary stage students' EFL oral fluency, such as: Wu & hiltz (2004), Bocanegra & Valencia (2018), and Muhammad & Melor (2019). Based on the previous, the present research used the collaborative online discussion strategy for enhancing secondary stage students' EFL oral fluency.

### **3. Aim of the research**

The present research aimed to:

- Investigate the effect of using collaborative online discussion strategy on enhancing first year secondary stage students' EFL oral fluency.

### **4. Questions of the research**

The present research attempted to answer the following questions:

- What are the EFL oral fluency skills needed for first year secondary stage students?
- What is the effect of using collaborative online discussion strategy on enhancing secondary stage students' EFL oral fluency?

## **5. Hypotheses of the research**

The present research tested the following hypotheses:

- There are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of both the experimental and the control groups in the post-test of the EFL oral fluency favoring the experimental group.
- There are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group in the pre/posttest of the EFL oral fluency favoring the post application.

## **6. Significance of the research**

The research was supposed to be significant for the following:

1. Secondary stage students: as collaborative online discussion strategy is supposed to enhance their EFL oral fluency.
2. Teachers: as it may develop their awareness with the benefits of using collaborative online discussion strategy for enhancing EFL oral fluency.
3. Course designers: as it may pay their attention to design motivational activities based on collaborative online discussion strategy such as, small groups discussion and brainstorming which can enhance the students' EFL oral fluency.

## **7. Delimitations of the research**

The research was delimited to:

1. A sample of (40) students of the first year secondary stage, Hurghada secondary official language school, as this stage prepare the students for the university stage.
2. Some EFL oral fluency skills.
3. The first semester of (2022/2023).

## **8. Instruments and materials of the research**

The researcher designed and used the following:

1. An EFL oral fluency skills list.
2. An EFL oral fluency test.

3. An EFL oral fluency scoring rubric.
4. An instructional unit based on collaborative online discussion strategy.

## **9. Definition of terms**

### **• Oral fluency**

- It is a specific feature characterizing the level of speaking skills which manifests itself in the learner's ability to speak freely, without unnecessary pausing and with the prosody of speech, syntax and vocabulary range comparable with those characteristic of the speech of a native speaker (Polyakov & Tormyshova, 2014, p. 168).
- It is defined procedurally as is the ability of the first year secondary stage students to speak rapidly and smoothly with few pauses.

### **• Collaborative learning**

- Laal & Laal (2012) defined it as an educational approach that involves students in the teaching and learning process where they work together to find solutions to a problem, fulfill a task, or design a product.
- It is defined procedurally as is the ability of the first year secondary stage students to interact in groups for sharing ideas and completing required tasks.

### **• Online discussion**

- Hew, Cheung & Ng (2010) defined it as a text-based learning activity in which online learners are engaged to interact with each other in discussing a particular topic without being limited by time and place.
- It is defined procedurally as is the ability of the first year secondary stage students to exchange ideas collaboratively for the purpose of enhancing students thinking, and learning.

## **10. Review of literature**

### **• 10.1. Oral fluency**

Communicating orally in a second or foreign language such as English can be a difficult task especially for the low proficiency learners as they may lack the confidence and feel shy and apprehensive when interacting verbally in the

target language. This may hold them back from expressing themselves vocally though they are fully aware that in order to be fluent in the target language, they need to practice speaking not only in the classroom but also outside the classroom (Abu Bakar, Latiff & Hamat, 2013).

It is important to explain the relation between the two concepts used above, speaking and fluency. Speaking is the main skill; it includes all the levels of oral communication and all the stages of that process. On the other hand, fluency is a sub-skill and implies how easy a foreign language learner can express himself without having to stop to think about words (Acosta, 2017).

According to the importance of teaching oral fluency, Richards (2008:19) explained that the mastery of oral fluency skills in language is a priority for the second or foreign language. Consequently, learners often evaluate their success in language learning as well as the effectiveness of their English course on the basis of how much they have improved in their spoken proficiency.

### **Activities to promote oral fluency**

Kayi (2006:64-68) declared that there are some activities as follows:

*Role play:* students pretend they are in various social contexts and have a variety of social roles.

*Brainstorming:* learners generate ideas quickly and freely. The good characteristics of it are that students are not criticized for their ideas so they share their ideas.

*Discussion:* students share ideas about an event, or find solutions in their discussion groups. Before the discussion, it is essential that the purpose of the discussion activity is set by the teacher, so that students do not spend their time chatting with each other about irrelevant things.

*Story telling:* students can briefly summarize a story they heard from somebody beforehand and then tell their classmates.

Nabil (2021) mentioned some activities that could help in improving oral fluency:

- **Small-group activities:** students speak more easily in front of a small group than in front of the whole class, they feel freer to try out, to experiment with the language and in this way they can improve their fluency and their self-confidence. Group work is a strategy, which includes different types of activities; it could be a discussion or a task with reporting back to the whole class afterwards.
- **Whole-class activities:** a lot of whole-class activities aim at improving the students' oral fluency as well; discussions and debates, games, simulation and role-play can make it easier.
- **Individual activities:** each student has to introduce an event and the others ask questions about it. Everybody takes it in turn. As 'homework' the students are asked to fill in the gaps. When teacher asks them about it, they always react positively, everybody wants to talk and they are obviously enjoying themselves very much.

According to the current research, the researcher used some activities such as: small groups, brainstorming and oral collaborative discussion activities whereas, the students asked to join Zoom Clouding Meet platform and read the passages, generate ideas quickly and freely, and practice the collaborative discussion. They negotiate, participate actively in the language activities, learn from each other and perform the required language tasks.

### **The teachers' role to enhance oral fluency**

Hamillton (2005:66) confirmed that teachers should give the students the opportunity to speak and explore their own thinking .Teacher should:

- Provide opportunities for speaking, discussion, and ideas, expressions, and opinions.
- Be a responsive listener to students' talk.
- Nurture an accepting environment where students will feel free to express themselves without fear of censure by adult or by fellow students.
- Promote robust discussion and explosion amongst class members.
- Establish strategies to ensure all students have fair and equitable

opportunities to develop their interpersonal speaking and listening skills, .e.g. large and small group discussions.

### **Techniques for assessing oral fluency**

According to Rukhsana (2009:21), “Language teachers need a method which takes subjective qualitative observations and then transforms them into objective quantitative measures”. He declared some techniques as follows:

- *Reading aloud*: requires learners to read part of text or a dialogue. It is used to assess the phonological aspect of speaking. The script is given to learner few minutes before the test in order to prepare himself.
- *Interviews*: are considered the most common technique for testing the oral performance; it is characterized by involving a face-to-face exchange of information.
- *Collaborative tasks and discussions*: learners simply respond with their own opinions to a set of statement relevant to a certain theme. These tasked and discussions are similar to role play except that the learner is not required to assume a role but simply to be themselves.

### **Ways of responding to the students’ mistakes during oral fluency:**

To provide feedback during oral fluency work, Harmer (2001) confirmed that there are various ways to respond the students’ mistakes as follows:

- a) *Recording mistakes*: a teacher gives feedback afterward (e.g. only observe and listen to students). To avoid the problems of forgetting what students have said, the teacher can write down notes to discuss them afterward.
- b) *Gentle correction*: a teacher intervenes if students are not able to continue in communication and not able to think about what to say.
- c) *After the event*: a teacher records his/her students’ mistakes then gives feedback to the class about student performance giving suggestions to develop their performance.

Some researchers have conducted several studies to improve EFL students’ fluency skills using different approaches and strategies such as:

Alghobashy (2021) investigated the effect of using TED (Technology, Education, and Design) talks based instruction on developing EFL speaking fluency of secondary stage students. The participants were (30) students of second year secondary stage at integrated distinct governmental language school in Shebin Elkom. They were taught using TED talks-based instruction to develop their EFL speaking fluency. Results revealed that there are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the participants in the pre and post assessment of EFL speaking fluency in favor of the post assessment, so the EFL speaking fluency was developed.

Nabil (2021) conducted a study that aimed to develop the EFL oral fluency skills of the secondary stage students through the communicative approach. A total of forty EFL first year secondary stage students from AL Zankaloun secondary school, Sharkia Governorate were chosen randomly. The results of the study approved that the communicative approach is effective in developing the EFL oral fluency of the secondary stage students; also it has a clear, strong and noticeable impact on their motivation to speak and talk orally and fluently.

Hammam (2020) investigated the effectiveness of mobile learning in developing oral fluency of preparatory stage pupils. The participants were (60) students enrolled in the first year prep pupils in Alexandria. Results of the two groups revealed a significant degree of improvement in the experimental group's oral fluency test.

Pishkar, Moinzadeh, & Dabaghi (2017) investigated the effectiveness of modern English drama in developing students' speaking fluency and accuracy. (60) EFL students from Hormozgan University in Iran participated in the study. Results revealed that EFL students' speaking fluency developed, whereas their speaking accuracy decreased in some areas of oral communication. Thus, the study proved that using modern English drama was effective in developing the participant's speaking fluency, but it had no effect on their speaking accuracy.

Abdel-Haq & Amin's study (2013) aimed at developing secondary stage students' EFL interaction and fluency skills through using a self-efficacy based program. Thirty-six students from El-Shimaa secondary school participated in the study. Results revealed that using a self-efficacy based program was effective in developing EFL interaction and fluency skills.

- **10.2. Online collaborative learning**

Richlin (2006) suggested that good learning is collaborative and social, not competitive and isolated. In addition, Buitrago (2017) assured that collaboration is a meaningful and useful tool within an academic environment that takes advantage of the strengths and abilities of each participant and puts them together to achieve shared goals in more effective forms. In addition, Lane (2016) stated that students who experience a collaborative learning environment are more satisfied with their learning experience than those exposed to the traditional lecture method of teaching. In a collaborative learning environment, learners are not passive receptacles but are active in their process of knowledge acquisition as they participate in discussions, search for information, and exchange opinions with their peers. The learning process creates a bond between learners as their knowledge construction depends on each other's contribution to the discussion (Palloff & Pratt, 2005).

Altamimi & Attamimi (2014) mentioned that the role of teachers using the collaborative learning method shifts from transmitters of knowledge to mediators of learning, and sometimes watching how students take turns to ask and answer, interacting and collaborating with the activity. The teacher's role in this part involves facilitating, modeling, and coaching. Moreover, Hathorn & Ingram (2002) argue that collaborative groups should have 1) a group goal, 2) equal participation, 3) interaction, 4) interdependence, 5) independence from teacher, and 6) synthesis of information.

Arta (2018) stated that collaborative learning is very beneficial to develop secondary high school students' speaking skill. This main argument is constructed by the possible benefits of collaborative learning on speaking skill, such as reducing language anxiety, encouraging active participation, and increasing confidence and self-esteem. Based on these, English teachers also can benefit from this investigation in a way that they can insert collaborative learning approach into their teaching practice. Moreover, Buitrago (2017) analyzed the effects of using collaborative and self-directed learning strategies

through speaking tasks to develop oral fluency. This study was carried out with a group of 10 students with a pre-intermediate level (CEFR A2) in English at a Colombian University. The results suggest that fluency can be acquired collaboratively when learning from others and by making mistakes.

Computer-mediated collaborative learning is a more effective problem-solving strategy than individual learning (Uribe, Klein, & Sullivan, 2003). In face to face classes some students may not attend regularly and when they attend are unable to fully participate as they are unaware of the discussions taking place when they missed the classes. As a result, frustration can lead to students dropping out of the course (Makewa, 2014).

### **Benefits of online collaborative learning**

Online collaborative learning may have the tools that make it more effective than face-to face collaborative learning due to several reasons. Thompson & Ku (2006) added that online collaborative learning better prepares students for their future jobs, where workers are supposed to be involved in projects and tasks that require being separated physically and geographically. According to González-Lloret, (2020), online collaborative learning is of great benefits when students are provided with equal participation chances, more time for interaction, and more constructive feedback. Moreover, Garrison, Anderson & Archer (2011) indicated that there are many benefits of online collaborative learning for the students. Online collaborative learning enhances learner-learner interaction. It develops students' higher order thinking skills. Streetman (2018) added that online collaborative learning promotes communication such as writing texts, emails, and chats. Online collaborative learning enhances students' communication, shared ideas, and mutual feedback from peers.

### **Challenges of online collaborative learning**

Designing and maintaining a collaborative learning experience is a challenge for teachers who have been adopting traditional methods of teaching. It is also a challenge for students who have been taught in a traditional teacher-centered setting. There may be technological difficulties for students engaged in online collaboration. The technological skill needed for

online collaboration may be a challenge for students and teachers. Technical difficulties hamper collaborative learning and create a high level of frustration among learners. Some students prefer to learn by themselves rather than learn in a collaborative setting (Lane, 2016).

Abdelkafy (2020) investigated the effect of online collaborative learning on developing English majors' speaking skills and social presence. The participants were (25) first year English department basic education students at Faculty of Education, Ain Shams University. Findings revealed that the program based on online collaborative learning proved to be statistically effective in developing EFL speaking skills, and social presence as well as reducing English-speaking anxiety levels.

Kyeong-Ouk Jeong (2019) examined the impact of online collaborative English language learning to enhance learner motivation and classroom engagement in university English instruction. The study reveals that participants regarded online collaborative English learning activities as the positive and motivating learning experience. Participants also identified affective and metacognitive benefits of online collaborative EFL learning activities for learner motivation and classroom engagement. This study reveals that the social networking platform in online group collaboration played a crucial role for the participants in understanding the integration of online group collaboration as the positive and effective language learning strategy. Moreover, Al Sayed's study (2013) investigated the effectiveness of a proposed framework for an online collaborative learning environment in developing problem-solving skills and attitudes towards the learning environment among educational technology students. The study recommended the use of online collaborative learning due to its several advantages.

### **Tools of facilitating online collaborative learning**

There are two main types of tools that can facilitate online collaborative learning. The first one is that of synchronous nature such as Zoom and Google Meet where students meet together at the same time through any of the video conferencing tools. The second one is that of asynchronous type such as Google docs and online forums where students can work together without having to be connected at the same time (González-Lloret, 2020).

• **10.3. Online discussion**

Nowadays, there is a fast expansion of the utilization of the internet and digital resources, whereby the web has become the most interactive tool and medium of communication in teaching and learning process (Epignosis, 2014). Internet is considered as one of the worldwide broadcasting capabilities for sharing information and collaboration, and it is used for interaction between individuals regardless of their geographic location (Dogruer, 2011).

One potentially useful Internet activity for language students is chatting, that is, communicating in real time by typing or voicing a message into a computer so that it can immediately be read on other computer screens or heard by users, even in another part of the world. Some sites on the Internet are specifically intended for nonnative English speakers and provide opportunities for them to communicate in English (Kitao & Kitao, 2000).

Baradaran & Khalili (2009) stated that online chat rooms can be incorporated into the course syllabi of foreign language courses as a regular homework assignment to encourage students to use the target language actively and frequently. Alongside the merits of chat rooms, a multitude of other studies demonstrate their various advantages in ELT. Some such examples are reported below:

- Offering the learner the chance to produce language which is somewhere between everyday spoken English and the language in its written form.
- Allowing learners to interact in an authentic context with native speakers without being restricted by location.
- Enabling communication to take place in real time.
- Promoting active involvement and being enticed into conversing with others yet being able to withdraw when learners feel like it.
- Encouraging collaborative learning and teamwork among language learners and helping them to develop their group skills.
- Providing opportunities for negotiation of meaning, thus promoting language acquisition.

In addition, Faja (2013) declared the benefits that students have perceived from online discussions: extended time to reflect on and structure their thoughts before communicating the ideas; more time to check course readings

or other sources of information; more in depth discussion than in-class discussion would permit; access to different perspectives on the same issue

### **Types of online discussions**

Al-Shalchi (2009) indicated that there are two types of discussions that can take place in an online environment: asynchronous discussions and synchronous discussions: Asynchronous discussions are discussions that students can take part at any time, whereas synchronous discussions require that the participants of the discussion all meet at the same time to talk about the issue at hand.

When instructors decide to use *synchronous discussions*, they are choosing an environment that is more similar to face-to-face discussions because the students and instructors are meeting at the same time. In synchronous environments, students are able to work collaboratively and receive instant feedback. When an instructor uses a type of communication strategy that is more similar to face to face discussions, some people may be more inclined to open up to the possibility of having online discussions.

Alternatively, *asynchronous discussions* give the students more time to think about the topic being studied and to research more about it if they need to do so. They can respond after they have had time to think about the topic and read what others have already contributed to the discussion. Students are able to log into their classes to view the questions and remarks made by other students and the instructor before making their own contribution. It is easy for students to turn to outside resources to get more information about the topic being discussed and to be able to support their argument with scholarly work. Research has found that students did the extra research before making a comment because they did not want to sound unintelligent in front of their colleagues, and they felt that they did not have enough background knowledge in the subject matter.

### **Factors for successful online discussions (Rose & Smith, 2007)**

- *Clear Directions*

One thing that an instructor must make sure to do is provide the students with directions for online discussions that are simple and do not cause any confusion among the learners. It should be made clear whether the discussion will be synchronous or asynchronous. If it is a synchronous discussion, the students will need to know where and when to meet, and if it is asynchronous, the students need to know if they must meet a deadline for responding to the questions posted.

- *Promoting Motivation*

Students should be motivated to contribute to the discussions. There are different ways that can be accomplished. The instructor can find out what interests the students and tie in their interests to the discussion being presented. The instructor also needs to address how students will be assessed on their participation in discussions.

- *Organization*

The way that the discussion is organized plays an important role in the development process. This helps students find the information that they are searching for, and when students need to return they will know where to search for what they are looking for. It is much easier for students to retrieve this information. This will help students create summaries of their discussions and help them remember the content better.

Abu Bakar, Latiff & Hamat (2013) discussed the use of an asynchronous online discussion forum as a communication tool to assist the low proficiency ESL learners to build their confidence and practice using the target language orally. As an online discussion forum, the multimedia enhance discussion forum was specifically designed to be used by a selected group of low proficiency ESL learners at tertiary level for one academic semester. This online forum allows the learners to audio and video-record their discussions, listen to the recorded discussions and respond to their friends' ideas and opinions. The findings indicate positive responses from the ESL learners while using online discussions.

Alhabbash (2012) conducted a study to examine the effectiveness of classroom and online discussion on speaking skill of 12th students. The

sample was divided into three groups, the experimental classroom discussion group was 25 students, the experimental online discussion group was 15 students and the control group was 25 students. The findings recommended the necessity of implementing classroom and online discussion in teaching English language to bring better outcomes in students' speaking skill. In addition, Kelly O'Neal (2009) investigated the effectiveness of using asynchronous discussions in an online course compared to traditional classroom face to face discussions. The instructional program for both groups included the same required textbook, syllabus, and activities. The results have direct implications for using asynchronous discussions in an online learning environment.

- **10.4. Online collaborative discussion strategy and oral fluency**

Collaborative learning strategy is effective in the field of oral interaction. Babiker (2018) assured that collaborative learning techniques help students be communicative and most EL teachers think that collaborative learning strategy helps EL learners be fluent and produce accurate utterances. This is due to continuous discussions, exchanging experiences and attempting to correct errors within the groups. Oña (2019) expressed that oral interaction represents significant challenges to learners. It is necessary to acquire the learning to communicate with each other in real settings of their lives. For that reason, there was a necessity to promote interaction and collaboration to improve oral abilities. When students work in partnership with peers, they can quickly develop oral skills.

Buitrago (2017) assured that to achieve a fluent communication, it is necessary to understand what is said and have the ability to produce well-pronounced. Thus, fluency can be acquired when interacting with others collaboratively and by making mistakes. Learning collaboratively motivates students to speak fluently, engage them in realistic communicative situations, increase their confidence, and make their personal reflection. Haidara's (2016) research reports that many Indonesian secondary high school students are good at English written tests like reading and writing, but most of them still are hardly able to speak. Because the lack of practice, high language anxiety, and lack of confidence. He assured that one solution could be the collaborative

learning strategy (CL). Therefore, CL would be beneficial for teaching practice where students' speaking skill could be nurtured.

On the other hand, Harmer (2001) asserted that discussion activities, considered as the most useful and interesting form of oral practice since it offers chances for students to exchange their thoughts, talk about their experiences and express their opinions to improve their communicative ability. In addition, Karam & Bashir (2021) declared that discussion activities are a great way to practice fluency and improve students' confidence. Teachers should involve some enjoyable discussion activities and give students a chance to express their ideas thereby improve their fluency. Applying discussion activities have several benefits such as increasing students' motivation. Moreover, students who are shy to speak in front of their classmates might find a small group of discussion activities is less daunting. If they can practice speaking with the smaller group it may assist students to acquire the fluency and confidence to speak in front of the whole class. According to their study, they examined the impact of discussion activities on improving students' fluency in speaking skill. The findings indicate that practicing various discussion activities contribute to engage students, and raise their level of motivation, confidence and fluency.

Baradaran & Khalili (2009) investigated a study to investigate the effectiveness of using chat rooms as a newly-developed technique on the oral fluency of EFL learners. The difference between the two groups was using chat rooms among the experimental group. The analysis of the data revealed that the learners who underwent the chat room significantly outperformed those who did not in terms of oral fluency. Hence, using chat rooms in the EFL context can be recommended as an efficient technique in improving oral fluency.

### **The role of the teacher in collaborative discussion**

Alhabbash (2012) declared the responsibilities of the teacher who leads the discussion in collaborating learning:

- 1- Start and conclude the discussion, paying attention to the time limits.
- 2- Give all group members an equal chance to participate.

- 3- Keep the discussion on the subject. If participants move onto a completely different subject or start bringing up irrelevant points, you should politely bring the discussion back to the subject.
- 4- Keep the discussion moving. You may have to cut off discussion politely if members spend too much time on one point or start repeating the same ideas.
- 5- Make sure that all group members can understand each other.
- 6- Summarize when needed and make sure that all participants understand and accept the group decision.

## **11. Design of the research**

The present research used the quasi experimental design of a control and an experimental group of pre/posttest application to investigate the effect of using collaborative online discussion strategy on enhancing first year secondary stage students' EFL oral fluency. The experiment lasted for three weeks, according to the academic schedule. The course selected for this experiment was presented from New Hello book.

## **12. Participants of the research**

Twenty male and female students of the first year secondary stage were chosen voluntarily from Hurgada secondary official language school, Red Sea governorate as the experimental group who were instructed by using online collaborative discussion strategy, while twenty were chosen as the control group who were instructed by using the traditional method.

## **13. Variables of the research**

- **The independent variable is:**  
Using online collaborative discussion strategy in teaching the instructional unit
- **The dependent variable is:**  
EFL oral fluency

## **14. Instruments and materials of the research**

**1. Designing the instructional unit based on online collaborative discussion:**

**A. Selecting the instructional unit:**

The selected unit was unit one, in New Hello book which included (6) lessons that were built on varied oral activities and practices using online collaborative discussion that aimed at enhancing EFL oral fluency skills. Such a number of lessons were thought to be suitable to give a sufficient chance for dealing with the targeted skills.

**B. Conducting content analysis:**

Content analysis was a very important step before building the instruments of the research. It helped in giving objective, logical, and quantitative description of the targeted content.

**✓ Steps of conducting content analysis:**

1. Specifying the main categories and the inventories of the analysis. They were decided as follows:
  - Vocabulary items.
  - Grammatical items.
  - Communicative functions.
2. Establishing the validity of the inventories. To assure the validity of the content analysis, it was submitted to a jury of language teachers and supervisors who reported the validity of the inventories.
3. Enumerating and measuring the frequencies of the inventories of the analysis, and then giving the ranks and weights.
4. Obtaining the reliability coefficient of the content analysis. Coper formula was used to obtain the reliability coefficient which was 89%.

**2. The checklist of EFL oral fluency skills:**

- Based on the literature review, the researcher prepared a checklist of EFL oral fluency skills, which consisted of the following nine skills:
  - Describe situations or events exactly.
  - Express the message clearly in communication.
  - Use different linguistic form to express a variety of oral functions.
  - Master the utterances of words.
  - Pronounce words correctly.
  - Produce speech comfortably.
  - Talk with an acceptable accent and various stress, volume, speed and pitch to achieve effective communication.
  - Talk smoothly with rare repetition, self-correction or pauses.
  - Produce natural language with breath group, hesitation, pauses and repetition.
- The checklist was submitted to a jury of some TEFL specialists, who judged the relevance and suitability of those sub-skills to the participants of the research.
- The checklist was approved by the jury members with little modifications in the linguistic stating of the skills and their appropriateness to the participants of the research. The jury asked to delete three sub-skills. Thus, the list consisted of the following six skills:
  - Express the message clearly in communication.
  - Use different linguistic form to express a variety of oral functions.
  - Pronounce words correctly.
  - Produce speech comfortably.
  - Speak with an acceptable accent and various stress, volume, speed and pitch to achieve effective communication.
  - Speak smoothly with rare repetition, self-correction or pauses.

### **3. Designing the teacher's guide in light of online collaborative discussion strategy:**

The teacher's guide presents the activities and practices that students should handle during the period of the experiment. It is an adaptation of the first unit in New Hello, involving tasks for using online collaborative discussion. The following issues were put into consideration:

1. New Hello textbook focused mainly on various language activities (reading, writing, listening, speaking and life skills).
2. Online collaborative discussion requires every learner to have an account on Zoom clouding Meeting to practice the oral activities. As the learners are asked to practice in groups and pairs various language activities collaboratively. Thus the teaching procedures in each lesson include presentation, practice for collaboration and evaluation.
3. Learners were trained previously to communicate and join online through the application and how to record and interact with the group members prompts.

The teacher's guide was judged by a jury to judge the appropriateness of the tasks and activities, the suitability of the language and the consistency of the content with the objectives. In light of the jury's suggestions, some modifications were made in the arrangement of activities and they were all included in the final version of the book.

### **4. The EFL oral fluency test:**

#### **➤ Aim of the oral fluency test:**

The test was designed to:

- assess first year secondary stage students' performance in the selected EFL oral fluency skills.
- assess the effect of instruction based on online collaborative discussion strategy on enhancing first year secondary stage students' performance in the selected EFL oral fluency skills.

- compare between the experimental and control groups to investigate the effect of the instruction based on online collaborative discussion strategy to that of the traditional method.
- ensure the equality of the experimental and control groups before implementing the experiment.

➤ **Construction of the test:**

The test was in the oral form. It is in the form of reciprocal exchanges where both the examiner and the student had to adjust messages and take each other's contributions into account. It consisted of three oral tasks. Each task had various prompts to talk about.

The students were not allowed to repeat or record again when they made errors. The examiner adopted different techniques to extract answers, especially from shy students (calming down, speaking friendly, using probing questions and yes/no questions). The examiner should avoid:

- Correcting the students' errors;
- Interrupting the student unless necessary;
- Giving more explanation about the given questions.

➤ **Scoring the test**

- Three scores were given for each productive oral task; based on the following criteria:
  - Express the message clearly.
  - Use different linguistic form to express a variety of oral functions orally.
  - Pronounce words correctly.
  - Produce speech comfortably.

- Speak with an acceptable accent and various stress, volume, speed and pitch to achieve effective communication.
- Speak smoothly with rare repetition, self-correction or pauses.
- The total test scores were (27).

➤ **Instructions of the test**

The instructions of the test were presented in English. They were brief, simple to understand and free from any possible ambiguities. They contain information about the aim of the test, time allowed to complete the test and how to show the answers.

➤ **Piloting the test**

It was conducted prior to the real administration of the test. Thirty five students were chosen from first year secondary stage students to participate in this application. Those students were excluded from participating in the real experiment. The piloting aimed to:

- Ensure the clarity of instructions,
- Suitability of the linguistic level of the participants, and
- Determine the validity, reliability and duration of the test.

In light of the pilot study, it was found that period of (30) minutes would provide enough time to perform the required oral tasks test. In addition, the results confirmed the clarity and the suitability of the test items to the students in terms of content and assessment task type.

- The test was submitted to the jury members to report its validity. There was a consensus that the test was comprehensive and covered the unit content, the aim and the intended learning outcomes.
- The reliability of the test was determined by using Cronbach Alpha formula. The reliability coefficient of the test (0,845) and it was found to be significant at (0,01) level.

The researcher determined the test time by calculating the average of the time as follows:

**Test Time** = answer time of the first student + answer time of the last student

### 15. Procedures of the experiment

To execute the experiment, the following procedures were done:

#### ➤ Pre testing

To achieve homogeneity between both the experimental and control groups, the researcher divided the participants into two equivalent groups based on the results of the EFL oral fluency pre-test. Results ensure that there are no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental and the control groups in the pre-test of the EFL oral fluency.

**Table (1)**

Mann Whitney Test Analysis of Scores Obtained by the Control and Experimental Groups on Pre-Test of the oral fluency

Group	No.	Mean ranks	Sum of ranks	"Z" value	Sig.
Control	20	17.83	356.50	1.471	001
Experimental	20	23.18	463.50		Not

Maximum score= 54

Table (1) shows that according to the results obtained from the pre-test of oral fluency skills, it was revealed that there was not any significant difference between the mean scores obtained by the experimental and control groups in the pre-test of the EFL oral fluency.

#### ➤ Teaching

The researcher followed the procedures of online collaborative discussion strategy; introduced the topic of the lesson to the students and asked them to brainstorm orally all the ideas related to the topic.

#### ➤ Post testing

After teaching the content, the EFL oral fluency test was re-administered to the participants in order to measure the effect of using online collaborative

discussion strategy on enhancing EFL oral fluency and to compare the performance of both groups.

## 16. Results and findings

The quasi experimental design of the research depended on comparing students' scores in the test before and after teaching by using online collaborative discussion strategy, and comparing the student's scores of both the control and the experimental groups in the EFL oral fluency test. The researcher analyzed the quantitative data using "Z" test formula.

### ➤ Testing Hypothesis (One):

- There are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of both the experimental and the control groups in the post-test of the EFL oral fluency favoring the experimental group. Table (2) shows the subjects' scores and shows "z-value" of the participants' mean-scores.

**Table (2)**

Mann Whitney test analysis of scores obtained by the control and experimental groups on the post-test of oral fluency

Group	No.	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	"Z" value	Sig.
Control	20	10.50	210	5.453	0.01
Experimental	20	30.50	610		

Maximum score= 54

According to the data in table (2), "z" (5.453) is significant at (0.01) level. This finding affirms and supports hypothesis one and indicates that the experimental group surpassed the control group in the post-test of the EFL oral fluency. It is clear that using online collaborative discussion strategy has a strong positive effect on enhancing the experimental group's EFL oral fluency.

➤ **Testing Hypothesis (Two):**

- There are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group in the pre/posttest of the EFL oral fluency favoring the post application. Table (3) shows the subject' scores and shows "z-value" of the participants' mean scores.

**Table (3)**

Wilcoxon signed ranks test analysis of scores obtained by the experimental group in the pre/posttest of the EFL oral fluency

Administratio	No.	Mean rank	Sum of rank	"Z" valu	Sig.
Negative rank	20	00	00	3.929	0.01
Positive ranks		10.50	210		

**Maximum score= 54**

According to the data in table (3), "z value" (3.929) is significant at (0.01) level. This finding affirms and supports hypothesis two and indicates that the experimental group surpassed in the post-test of the EFL oral fluency. It is clear that using online collaborative discussion strategy has a strong positive effect on enhancing the participants' EFL oral fluency.

The results indicated the effectiveness of using the online collaborative discussion in enhancing EFL oral fluency is (1.32) by using Blake formula.

## 17. Discussion

The aim of this research was to develop EFL oral fluency of first year secondary stage students by using online collaborative discussion strategy. The implementation was through six sessions. These sessions dealt with the oral fluency skills and provided students with real opportunities to practice the language orally via different tasks. After the implementation, the results were positive and showed that using online collaborative discussion strategy was effective in enhancing EFL oral fluency. These findings are consistent with many other studies that reported significant impact for online collaborative such as: Baradaran &

Khalili (2009), Haidara (2016) & Al Sayed (2013). These findings can be attributed to several factors, such as:

- Online collaborative discussion strategy provided the participants with a new experience where they learned to brainstorm, generate, organize, and reconstruct ideas and information in small collaborative groups which was difficult to achieve in the face to-face based learning.
- The online collaborative discussion strategy tasks which aimed at pushing students to collaborate and practice the EFL oral fluency skills based on tasks which made the participants more involved in the required discussion.
- Online collaborative discussion strategy gave students opportunities to collaborate and practice English language in a non-threatening environment where participants had enough time to search for information before they engage in the discussion with their peers.
- The feedback participants received from the researcher and other peers during their collaborative groups enabled them to learn more from their mistakes regarding EFL oral fluency skills.

Therefore, the impact of using collaborative online discussion strategy on enhancing EFL oral fluency of first year secondary stage students has been verified.

### **18. Recommendations of the research**

In light of the research results, the researcher recommends the following:

- Oral fluency in the secondary stage needs a real care.
- Integrating technology in teaching is very important; as it creates a motivated environment and helps the learners to exchange ideas more quickly and overcome the shyness feeling.

### **19. Suggestions for Further researches:**

- Using collaborative online discussion strategy for enhancing listening skills for preparatory stage students.

- Using collaborative online discussion strategy for prompting communication skills for preparatory stage students.
- Using collaborative online discussion strategy for enhancing translation skills for secondary stage students.

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