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**The Effect of an Online Learning Community
Project on Enhancing EFL Listening Skills of
Secondary Stage Students**

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Abstract

The present research aimed at examining the effect of using an online learning community project on enhancing listening skills of secondary stage EFL students. The research adopted the quasi-experimental design using forty 2nd year secondary stage students to be the research participants. Intact classes of twenty (20) students were used for the experimental and control groups. The online learning community project was used in teaching the experimental group in the second term of the academic year (2022-2023). A self-developed instrument titled "EFL Listening Skills Test" was administered to determine the pretest and post-test performance of the two groups. The data of the research were analyzed statistically. The results showed that the use of online learning community project had a significant effect on enhancing EFL students' listening skills. In conclusion, the research recommended implementing the online learning community project inside the classroom. It was also suggested that further research should be conducted related to using online learning community project for developing other language skills such as speaking and reading.

Key words: An Online Learning Community Project, EFL Listening Skills, Egypt.

Introduction

According to the requirements of our lives, learning English has important utility values in all spheres. Listening is one of the four skills needed to learn the English language. Listening will help you become more proficient with both pronunciation and language comprehension. Lots of people feel good when talking, but when it's time to hear the thoughts or feelings of someone else, they stumble.

Listening Skill

One of the most challenging skills for language learners to acquire, listening is a crucial component of good communication since it shows a person's capacity to receive and interpret information during the communication process. Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011) stated that listening includes listening for thoughts, feelings, and intentions, and this needs active involvement, effort, and practice. It is one of the subjects studied in the field of language arts and in the discipline of conversation analysis.

Additionally, Hutchins et al. (2013) illustrated that listening is one of the language phonoreception skills through which voices and language symbols are transferred through the auditory nerve to the hearing center in the brain. Moreover, listening is an integrated performance that requires the listener to use his or her sight and hearing senses and the power of the mind in following up with the speaker's speech to understand, comprehend, and determine ideas (Patrick, 2019).

Vandergrift (2011) also highlighted the importance of this language skill, considering it a critical means of acquiring a second language and a channel through which we process language in real-time. In addition, Mohajer and Pourgharib (2014) asserted that listening skill may be the single most important skill promoting personal and professional development since it influences the effectiveness of individuals, both at school and in the workplace. Listening skill is more important than other language skills (reading, writing, and speaking) as it is the first acquired skill.

Listening is a skill that exposes a listener's proficiency in a language to others and is particularly difficult for beginning L2 students. According to Rahimirad and Zare-ee (2015) noted that numerous difficulties that can be encountered in listening tasks consist of unknown vocabulary, unfamiliar topics, fast speech rate, noise around, and unfamiliar or different accents. Also, when students are involved in a listening activity and they cannot understand, they cannot complete the listening task on time.

Researchers in the field of EFL have assessed the use of different approaches, strategies, models, and techniques to improve the English listening skills. The online learning community is one of the recommended ways for enhancing students' listening skills.

Online Learning Community

An online learning community refers to a paradigm shift in learning and teaching from a more instruction-based and teacher-centered approach to a more interactive and learner-centered approach, and from an instructor to a facilitator of learning. Palloff and Pratt (2007) defined an online learning community as a virtual environment for participants in which these elements "honesty, responsiveness, relevance, respect, openness, and empowerment" are present. Group members can feel safe in expressing themselves without fear of how they will be perceived, allowing for active, rich discussion" (p. 22).

In the area of teachers' professional development, learning communities are seen as offering valuable opportunities for authentic and

personalized learning (Duncan-Howell, 2010), informal exchange of good practice, and peer learning (Avalos, 2011).

González-Lloret (2020) asserted that online collaborative learning has great benefits when students are provided with equal participation chances, more time for interaction, and more constructive feedback.

Yang, Chuang, Li, & Tseng (2013) examined the effectiveness of integrating critical thinking into individualized English listening instruction using a virtual learning environment. There were 83 students enrolled in a semester-long general education course at a large university in Taiwan. A one-group pretest–post-test was used to collect data. The results of the research showed that learners participating in the treatment significantly improved in terms of English listening.

Liu (2014) investigated the differences in the perceptions of acquiring listening skills using online resources between elementary and intermediate students. 268 students from a private college and a public university in a Chinese EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context participated in the research project. The data collection methods included questionnaires, interviews, and pre- and post-testing measuring tools. According to the pre- and post-test results, the online environment had a positive influence on the public university students, and they made much progress in terms of English listening proficiency.

Regardless of these pros, most of the research studies on OLC have been done at the primary and preparatory levels. So, the present research was designed to investigate the effect of using an online learning community project on the secondary level.

Background of the Problem

This research's problem is that Malek Mahran students have poor listening skills; for example, they always face obstacles when listening for gist, listening for detail, listening for attitude, and listening for synonyms or antonyms. Thus, this research is an attempt to enhance EFL listening skills through an online learning community project.

A pilot study was conducted to assess EFL students' listening skills. An EFL listening skills test was designed and applied to two groups of students (N = 40). The maximum score of the items of the test was (20) marks. The test consisted of one question, divided into three items, to assess four sub-skills: listening for gist, listening for detail, listening for attitude, and listening for synonyms or antonyms. The results of the pilot study are presented in Table (1):

Table (1) Results of the EFL Listening Skills Pilot Study Test

Listening Sub-Skills	Maximum Score	Mean Score	Percentage
Listening for gist	5	1.5	30%
Listening for detail	5	1.8	36%
Listening for attitude	5	2	40%
Listening for synonyms or antonyms	5	2	40%
Total	20	7.3	36.5%

Results in Table (1) show the statistical results of the students' EFL listening skills test. The results revealed the students' poor level in listening. Their mean score ($m = 7.3$), and their level was (36, 5%).

Statement of the Problem

Based on the results of the pilot study and the review of related literature, it was noticed that 2nd year secondary stage students needed to improve their listening skills. Thus, the current research suggested using an Online Learning Community Project to enhance Malek Mahran students' listening skills.

Questions of the Research

The researcher posed the following questions:

1. What are the features of an online learning community project to enhance listening skills of secondary stage students?
2. What is the effect of the online learning community project on enhancing secondary stage students' listening skills?

Purpose of the Research

This research attempted to achieve the following objectives:

1. Identify the EFL listening skills necessary for Malek Mahran secondary stage students.
2. Examine the effect of an online learning community project on enhancing EFL listening skills of second year secondary stage students.

Significance of the Research

The research investigates the importance of using an online learning community project on enhancing EFL secondary stage students' listening skills (listening for gist, listening for detail, listening for attitude, and listening for synonyms or antonyms).

Delimitations of the Research

This research was delimited to:

1. The research participants: Second-year secondary stage students (40 male students at Malek Mahran, the experimental group consisted of 20 students, and the control group consisted of 20 students, East Al-Mehala Directorate, Gharbia Governorate).

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2. Some EFL listening skills identified through the content of "New Hello! English for Secondary Schools" represented in listening for gist, listening for detail, listening for attitude, and listening for synonyms or antonyms.

Hypotheses of the Research

The following hypotheses were tested:

1. There is a statistically significant difference at the 0.05 level between the mean score of the control and experimental group in EFL listening skills test in favour of the experimental group.
2. There is statistically significant difference between the experimental group's pre-post administrations of the EFL listening skills test in favour of the post-administration.

Methodology

Participants

The participants of the research were a group of Malek Mahran Students (N=40) selected from the Second Year Students at Malek Mahran school for boys, East Al-Mehala Directorate, Al-Gharbia. Those participants were divided into two groups: the experimental group and the control group.

Design

The research adopted the quasi-experimental design in terms of dividing the participants of the research into two groups: experimental and control. The experimental group was trained using the proposed online learning community project (OLC) while the control group used the regular method. The adopted quasi-experimental design (see figure 1) in this research (pre-post-tests) was as follows:

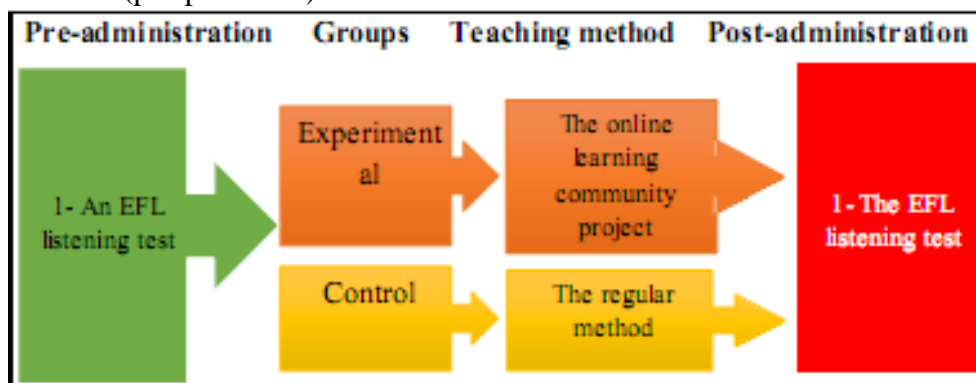


Figure (1): OLC Experimental Design

Instruments

The present research employed the following instrument:

Two equivalent EFL listening skills tests to measure students' listening skills on the pre- and post-EFL listening skills tests.

Definition of Terms

Listening Skill

Clark and Clark (1977, as cited in Fauziati, 2015) argued that listening is the mental process by which listeners take in the sounds uttered by a speaker and use them to construct an interpretation of what the speaker intended to convey.

Rukthong and Brunfaut (2019) also viewed listening as a process of getting what the speakers really say, processing information, enhancing meaning with the speaker, and reacting through involvement, creative mind, and sympathy.

Listening is operationally defined in the present research as a language ability that is carefully and thoughtfully exercised and aims to draw students' attention towards understanding and interacting with the audio material to be able to enhance the following skills: listening for gist, listening for detail, listening for attitude, and listening for synonyms or antonyms.

Online Learning Community

The online learning community was defined as "ensembles of agents who share a common language, world, and values in terms of pedagogical approach and knowledge to be acquired." They pursue a common learning goal by communicating and cooperating through electronic media in the learning process. The common interest of this type of community is the common interest in learning." (Seufert, Lechner, & Stanoevska, 2002, p. 47)

Online learning communities might include students from dispersed geographical locations, such as via teleconferencing or online collaboration on a common project with students from another school or country (Linn, Clark, & Slotta, 2003).

Online Learning Community is operationally defined in the present research as a study group that employs different online tools such as Facebook, Zoom, and YouTube videos, an online dictionary, and internet links to motivate their learning in addition to providing the opportunity to pose questions, have discussions, exchange ideas, guess solutions, and provide opportunities to work together to create things.

Statistical Analysis and Results

The results of the research are discussed in light of the statistical analysis of each instrument. A discussion of the results is provided after each statistical analysis as well as a discussion of the overall results.

Establishing the Homogeneity of the Groups

To establish the homogeneity of both the experimental and the control group, a pre (u) test was administered. The following table (2) shows the results of the pre (u) test concerning the listening skills:

Table (2): Comparing the Mean Ranks of Students' Performance in the Listening Skills Pre-Test in Both Groups

<i>Skills</i>	<i>The group</i>	<i>N.of cases</i>	<i>Mean Rank</i>	<i>Sum of Ranks</i>	<i>Z.Value</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
<i>Listening for gist</i>	Control	20	19.23	384.50	0.754	0.451 Not Sig.
	Experimental	20	21.78	435.50		
<i>Listening for detail</i>	Control	20	20.10	402.00	0.232	0.816 Not Sig.
	Experimental	20	20.90	418.00		
<i>Listening for attitude</i>	Control	20	20.13	402.50	0.235	0.814 Not Sig.
	Experimental	20	20.88	417.50		
<i>Listening for the synonyms or antonyms</i>	Control	20	20.10	402.00	0.243	0.808 Not Sig.
	Experimental	20	20.90	418.00		
<i>Total Score of Test</i>	Control	20	18.98	379.50	0.840	0.401 Not Sig.
	Experimental	20	22.03	440.50		

It is clear from the results in Table (2) that there are no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the students of the experimental and control groups in the sub-skills of the listening test and in the total score of the test in the pre-measurement, where all the “z” values were not statistically significant, and this indicates the homogeneity between the two groups.

Results of the Statistical Treatment

To investigate the change fostered by the implementation of the proposed project “Online Learning Community Project” on the target students’ performance in the listening skills tests, the hypotheses of the

research were tested. The following section tests each hypothesis individually.

Testing the Hypotheses

Hypothesis One

“There is a statistically significant difference at the 0.05 level between the mean rank of the control and experimental group in EFL listening skills test in favour of the experimental group”.

To investigate the change fostered by the implementation of the proposed online learning community project on the experimental students’ performance in listening skills and to compare their post level of skills performance developed by the proposed learning project, a u-test for the paired sample was used to determine any statistical differences between the students’ mean scores on the post test. These findings are presented in table (3).

Table (3): Comparing the Mean Ranks of Students’ Performance in the Listening Skills Post Test in Both Groups

<i>Skills</i>	<i>The group</i>	<i>N.of cases</i>	<i>Mean Rank</i>	<i>Sum of Ranks</i>	<i>Z.Value</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
<i>Listening for gist</i>	Control	20	14.30	286.00	3.745	0.01 Sig.
	Experimental	20	26.70	534.00		
<i>Listening for detail</i>	Control	20	14.80	296.00	3.386	0.01 Sig.
	Experimental	20	26.20	524.00		
<i>Listening for attitude</i>	Control	20	14.45	289.00	3.547	0.01 Sig.
	Experimental	20	26.55	531.00		
<i>Listening for the synonyms or antonyms</i>	Control	20	14.80	296.00	3.708	0.01 Sig.
	Experimental	20	26.20	524.00		
<i>Total Score of the Test</i>	Control	20	11.30	226.00	5.068	0.01 Sig.
	Experimental	20	29.70	594.00		

It is clear from the results in Table (3) that there are statistically significant differences between the mean ranks of the students of the experimental and control groups in the sub-skills of the listening test and in the total score of the post-measurement test in favor of the experimental group (higher average ranks), where all the "z" values are statistically significant at the (0.01) level. These results are consistent with or confirm the validity of the first hypothesis. These differences could be ascribed to the implementation of the online learning community project (OLC). Therefore, the first hypothesis of the research was verified and accepted.

Hypothesis Two

“There is statistically significant difference between the experimental group’s pre-post administrations of the EFL listening skills test in favour of the post-administration”.

To investigate the change fostered by the implementation of the proposed online learning community project on the experimental students’ performance in the listening skills and to compare their post level of skill performance developed by the proposed learning project, a u-test for the paired sample was used to determine any statistical differences between the students’ mean ranks on the pre-post tests. These findings are presented in table (4).

Table (4): Comparing the Mean Ranks of the Experimental Group Students’ Performance in the Listening Skills Pre/Post Test

Skills	Rank	N.of cases	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Z.Value	Sig.	η^2	Effect size
Listening for gist	Negative Ranks	2	5.50	11.00	3.051	0.01	68.2%	High
	Positive Ranks	14	8.93	125.00				
	Ties	4						
	Total	20						
Listening for detail	Negative Ranks	2	4.50	9.00	3.523	0.01	78.8%	High
	Positive Ranks	17	10.65	181.00				
	Ties	1						
	Total	20						
Listening for attitude	Negative Ranks	0	0.00	0.00	3.611	0.01	80.7%	High
	Positive Ranks	16	8.50	136.00				
	Ties	4						
	Total	20						
Listening for synonyms or antonyms	Negative Ranks	2	5.00	10.00	3.091	0.01	69.1%	High
	Positive Ranks	14	9.00	126.00				
	Ties	4						
	Total	20						
Total Score of the Test	Negative Ranks	3	2.00	6.00	3.715	0.01	83.1%	High
	Positive Ranks	17	12.00	204.00				
	Ties	0						
	Total	20						

It is evident from the results in Table (4) that there are statistically significant differences between the mean ranks of the experimental group students in the pre-and post-test in all listening skills and the overall score in favor of the post-test. All the values of (z) are statistically significant at the (0.01) level. These results validate the second hypothesis, and as a result,

they indicate the effectiveness of the online learning community project to improve the listening skills.

Estimating the Effect Size (η^2)

To calculate the effect size, the researcher used the effect size scale (η^2) as shown in table (5).

Table (5): The Effect Size of the Treatment on the Listening Comprehension Skills

<i>Skills</i>	η^2	<i>Effect Size</i>
<i>Listening for gist</i>	68.2%	High
<i>Listening for detail</i>	78.8%	High
<i>Listening for attitude</i>	80.7%	High
<i>Listening for the synonyms or antonyms</i>	69.1%	High
<i>Total Score of the Test</i>	83.1%	High

Table (5) points to the high effect of the proposed online learning community project on enhancing individual listening skills ($\eta^2 = 68.2, 78.8, 80.7,$ and $69.1,$ respectively). This means that the treatment effect on improving listening skills ranged from 68.2% to 81%. This high impact was evident by the total η^2 for the EFL listening test score ($\eta^2 = 83.1\%$). Therefore, it is evident that the OLC project made a significant difference in the use of the EFL listening skills of the experimental group. Consequently, the second hypothesis was verified and accepted.

Discussion of Results

It was clear that the experimental group students outperformed the control group students in all the EFL listening skills, and the z-values were highly significant at the 0.01 level. Besides, the experimental group's post-test results were much better than the pretest results, and the effect size was great (83.1%). These findings indicate that the online learning community project proved to be more effective in enhancing the participants' ability to be more active listeners and enhance their EFL listening skills.

The Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test results of the post-test revealed that "listening for attitude" was the most improved skill. The OLC project helped students by providing the appropriate audio materials that satisfied their needs and interests and were familiar to them as they daily experienced them from different news sources. In addition, the way it was displayed within the community meant that it attracted students' attention and keep it for as long as possible.

Furthermore, they learned how to listen well before the listening tasks or activities by learning the three listening stages. Some of the

listening activities, which they enjoyed, included living abroad, film critic and conservation.

On the other hand, the least improved skill was listening for gist, although it was significantly enhanced compared to the pretest results. Students seem to have needed more practice concerning this skill, especially with the length of the listening comprehension duration. Students could not specify the main idea the narrator due to the length of the listening comprehension (more than three paragraphs in one essay). In spite of this, all the listening skills were significantly enhanced due to the use of the OLC project.

The results discussed above reveal that there is an obvious improvement in the identified listening skills of the experimental group on the post administration of the proposed project; the Online learning Community Project as follows:

1. There is a statistically significant difference at the 0.05 level between the mean ranks of the control and experimental group in EFL listening skills test in favour of the experimental group.
2. There is statistically significant difference between the experimental group's pre-post administrations of the EFL listening skills test in favour of the post-administration.

It is worth mentioning here that the collaborative environment helped the students participate in the proposed project through their constructive discussion. Additionally, it was concluded that the proposed project was effective in developing the listening skills for the participants. For this reason, the research adds to the other studies that have investigated similar approaches for developing various aspects of learning and a variety of skills.

Furthermore, discussing the obtained results of this research revealed that they are in line with the studies of Yang, Chuang, Li, & Tseng (2013) and Liu (2014), which revealed the positive impact of online learning communities (OLCs) on improving students' English listening skills.

Moreover, the participants liked the overall project because of the clarity of the goals and objectives and the explanation of their roles. Besides, the friendly, encouraging attitude of the teacher, handling errors tactfully and encouraging errors to be corrected after providing constructive feedback.

In addition, the participants provided a sense of responsibility and self-evaluation when working online, participating in cooperative work, and interacting with peers during class sessions, besides participating in

gathering information related to the targeted projects, which helped them learn how to use the internet in a useful way and to be self-confident learners.

To sum up, the previous discussion revealed that all hypotheses of this research were accepted and proved that online learning community project was effective in enhancing the EFL students' listening skills.

Conclusions

With reference to the research results, the following points were concluded:

- The current research provided evidence of the effectiveness of using the online learning community project in enhancing EFL listening skills of second-year secondary stage students.
- It also clarified the important role of learning within online learning communities by helping students exchange ideas, make decisions, organize the roles inside the group, and help each other within their groups to set out their goals and solve problems.
- Furthermore, it shed light on the bright side of surfing the internet to find useful resources and relevant information.

Recommendations of the Research

With reference to the experimental evidence provided throughout the present research and its conclusions, the following recommendations are suggested:

- Students should know that mistakes are part of the learning process. Without making mistakes, they cannot make any progress.
- They should also change their attitude towards learning English in general and their listening skills in particular. They should listen more and more to be more confident and brave while speaking English rather than be afraid of making mistakes or being humiliated by their friends.
- EFL teachers should master the ability to design remedial projects systemically and to apply them effectively in real classroom situations, following the guidelines derived from the online learning community project used in this research for developing listening.
- They should also train their students on how to make the best use of language development projects like the one used in this research and encourage them to participate actively in such projects.
- Additionally, they should help students enhance their skills by making the best use of the internet and social networking sites.

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- Curriculum Designers should provide teachers with training so they may use the online learning community projects in the classroom.
 - Also, they should train teachers on how to select appropriate resources and activities based on certain criteria.
 - Above this, the teacher's guide should be enriched with more useful projects, strategies, and techniques as a tool to help teachers teach listening.
 - Furthermore, listening skills should receive appropriate attention so as to be developed, especially at the primary and preparatory stages.

Suggestions for Further Research

In the light of the previous recommendation, the following can be considered for future research:

- Using the online learning community project to teach other EFL skills, such as reading and writing.
- Using the online learning community project at different school levels and on larger samples.

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