The Effect of Online Collaborative Learning on Developing English Majors' Speaking Skills and Social Presence

By
Dr. Badr Abdelfattah Abdelkafy Badr
(Lecturer of EFL Curriculum & Instruction)
Department of Curriculum & Instruction
Faculty of Education
Ain Shams University
Egypt

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of online collaborative learning on developing English majors' speaking skills and social presence. The study employed the one-group pretest-posttest quasi – experimental design. The participants were 25 first year English department basic education students at Faculty of Education, Ain Shams University. The instruments of the study included an EFL speaking skill checklist, a pre-post speaking test, an English-speaking anxiety scale and a social presence scale. The pre/post speaking test and the English - speaking anxiety scale were pre administered to the study group. Then, the study group was trained through the program based on online collaborative learning to develop their EFL speaking skills (accuracy, fluency, vocabulary, structure, and interaction) and social presence (human contact & social interaction, a sense of support and a sense of comfort) in the online learning environment. The instruments of the study (the speaking test, English-speaking anxiety scale, and social presence scale) were post administered to the study group. Findings of the study 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 for the study group.
Key words: Online collaborative learning, EFL speaking skills, English-speaking anxiety, social presence.

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Speaking Skills and Social Presence

فاعلية التعلم التشاركي عبر الانترنت في تنمية مهارات التحدث والحضور الاجتماعي لدى طلاب قسم اللغة الإنجليزية

إعداد

د. بدر عبد الفتاح عبد الكافي بدر

مدرس المناهج وطرق تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية

قسم المناهج ـكلية التربيةـ جامعة عين شمس

المستخلص

هدفت هذه الدراسة الى التحقق من فاعلية التعلم التشاركي عبر الانترنت في تنمية مهارات التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية والحضور الاجتماعي لدى طلاب قسم اللغة الانجليزية. استخدم الباحث في هذه الدراسة المنهج شبه التجريبي للمجموعة الواحدة بقياس قبلي وقياس بعدي. وتكونت مجموعة الدراسة من 25 طالب وطالبة بالفرقة الأولى بقسم اللغة الإنجليزية تعليم أساسي بكلية التربية جامعة عين شمس. واشتملت أدوات الدراسة على قائمة بمهارات التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية واختبار تحدث قبلي وبعدي ومقياس القلق الخاص بتحدث اللغة الإنجليزية ومقياس الحضور الاجتماعي. تم تطبيق اختبار التحدث ومقياس القلق على مجموعة الدراسة ثم تم تدريب مجموعة الدراسة من خلال البرنامج القائم على التعلم التشاركي عبر الانترنت لتنمية مهارات التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية (الدقة، الطلاقة، المفردات، التراكيب، التفاعل) والحضور الاجتماعي (الاتصال البشري والتفاعل الاجتماعي، والشعور بالدعم والشعور بالراحة) في بيئة التعلم عبر الانترنت. ثم طبقت أدوات الدراسة بعديا على مجموعة الدراسة وتضمنت هذه الأدوات كلا من اختبار التحدث ومقياس القلق ومقياس الحضور الاجتماعي. أظهرت نتائج الدراسة فاعلية البرنامج وتحققت فروض الدراسة مما يعني ان البرنامج القائم على التعلم التشاركي عبر الانترنت أدى الى تنمية مهارات التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية والحضور الاجتماعي وتقليل القلق المتعلق بالتحدث باللغة الانجليزية لدى مجموعة الدراسة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التعلم التشاركي عبر الانترنت ـ مهارات التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية ـ الحضور الاجتماعي ـالقلق نتيجة التحدث باللغة الانجليزية

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1.Introduction

English is the most spoken language in the world when considering the total number of those who speak it as a first, second or foreign language. The ability to speak English has become the main focus when learning it as a second or foreign language as a big number of students learn English to develop their own speaking skills. It has been stated that the primary goal to learn a second or a foreign language is to be able to converse with speakers of that language which gives a strong reason why most ESL or EFL learners are interested in the speaking skills (Zhang, 2009).

Regarding English language skills, speaking is considered the most demanding and challenging foreign language skill to develop by EFL learners. This is because speaking requires more than just knowing a set of grammar rules or vocabulary. Instead, it is a complex skill that requires complicated linguistic items that need to come together naturally to produce the proper utterances (Shabani, 2013).

According to Khalil, El-Nagar, & Awad, (2019), EFL learners should learn how to speak English properly not only to pass their academic exams, but also for public use in the outside world. For them, speaking is mainly used for social interaction; therefore, students should learn it to be able to express themselves accurately and fluently. According to Al-ma'shy (2011) added that EFL

speaking skill is very important as it is the most used skill in class as it is used as part of the teaching of other skills such as listening, reading, and writing. In the same vein, Afshar& Rahimi (2014) emphasized that speaking is one of the skills that should be given special attention for EFL learners.

According to Richards and Renandy (2002), speaking is not an easy task as what happens in the speaking process makes of it a complex task to be achieved for second and foreign language learners. In this context, Bygate (2002) described speaking as a complex skill. Its complexity is represented in the fact that speakers need to use knowledge of the language and apply such knowledge in real life situations which is somehow requires several processes and actions to be performed by the speaker.

Moreover, Juhana (2012) confirmed that there are some psychological factors such as fear of making mistakes, shyness, anxiety, and lack of motivation that may make EFL learners not able to speak English properly. Actually, one of the key factors that affects EFL learners' ability to speak English properly is anxiety. Suleimenova (2013) defined anxiety as disorder or unrest that take place in the speaker's mind due to the fear of close danger. According to Yalkhong and Usaha (2012), most EFL learners may have high anxiety levels when they are asked to speak English. In fact, speaking is considered to be very anxious language skill for either EFL or ESL learners (Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2009). Such speaking anxiety becomes more complicated when the levels of proficiency increase.

In order to reduce students' English speaking anxiety levels and enhance speaking proficiency levels, scholars and educators have suggested that learners should be given enough time to practice speaking skills (Woodrow,2006), yet this is difficult to achieve in a typical face to face teaching because students have limited class time to practice speaking skills (Driscoll, 2005). Also, the teaching methods used by most teachers do not cope with the

changing challenges that EFL learners encounter nowadays. This is reflected in many Egyptian school and college contexts where speaking skills are still often taught in conventional classroom settings with traditional lectures and tools.

Over the previous decades, research has revealed that collaborative learning is considered an effective teaching and learning method which may have positive impact on student's learning (Lou et al. 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 discovery, discussion, and collaboration processes. Collaboration has also been recently considered as one of the four Cs skills of the 21st century along with communication, critical thinking skills, and creativity (Cox, 2014, Nadiyah & Faaizah 2015, Rodriguez, 2018). Such collaborative learning environment can be face- to- face or online.

Using online collaborative learning provides learners with many of the same benefits of face-to-face collaborative learning (Miller & Benz, 2008). Online collaborative learning or computer – supported collaborative learning aims to provide an online environment to a group of students to support and facilitate collaboration with the aim of enhancing and improving their learning (Kreijns et al. 2003). This is usually done by offering online tools that are designed to facilitate the process of co-construct and sharing information, knowledge and ideas as well as providing students with more opportunities and time to practice their learning (Fjermestad 2004).

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. Actually, 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 previous

videoconferencing 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.

One of the main challenges for online learning is how to achieve social presence in the online learning community. Many researchers claimed that physical separation caused by the online learning environment may reduce the sense of community as well as increase feelings of isolation and lack of personal importance (Besser & Donahue, 1996; Hardy & Boaz, 1997).

Most studies that tackled social presence have investigated the impact of social presence in regular classroom setting (Christophel, 1990; Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997). However, very few studies have investigated the impact of social presence in online learning. The present study is one of the few studies that examines the effect of online collaborative learning on developing speaking skills and social presence.

1.1 The context of the problem

As stated above, speaking skills are very important to language learners in general and EFL learners in particular. Even though EFL learners in Egypt begin learning English at a very early age, they may finish their studies and they are still unable to speak English properly. This might be due to several reasons as presented by Ezz (2017):

- Teachers do not provide students with enough opportunities to practice speaking either due to the limited class time or they do not think that speaking skills are important to be given much attention in their classes.

- Many students think in Arabic first and then they translate their thoughts and ideas into English which may lead to interference between their mother tongue and the target language they seek to learn.

- Students usually feel shy when they are asked to speak in front of their classmates.

- Some students feel embarrassed about making mistakes, especially regarding their pronunciation.

Also, the researcher conducted a pilot study on a number of 25 first year English department students (basic education) in the Faculty of Education, Ain Shams University as the researcher conducted a 15-minute structured interview. Each of the students was asked to answer the following questions individually:

- Introduce yourself and speak about your family.

- Select one of your best friends and speak about what you like and dislike about him or her.

- Choose a movie that you have watched recently and speak about it.

- Speak about your dream or something you desire to achieve in the future.

The results of this interview were as follows:

- A total of 60% of the interviewed students found difficulty in expressing their ideas and choosing the appropriate vocabulary.

- A total of 70% of the interviewed students had problems regarding fluency as there were many hesitation and periods of silence that occurred frequently while they were attempting to address the questions of the interview.

- 50% of the total interviewed students mispronounced many of the words they used in their talks.

- 30% of the interviewed students offered to speak Arabic instead of English as they feel they are unable to deliver a speech in English.

- 60% of the total interviewed students informed the researcher that once they are asked to speak English; they feel anxious and most of their ideas seem to vanish or hard to retain.

In addition to the pilot study, the researcher interviewed a number of 4 instructors and lecturers who teach them and all of them assured that first-year English department students have a clear weakness regarding speaking English properly.

Moreover, the previous related studies that were reviewed indicate that there is a problem among EFL learners in general and university students in particular regarding their speaking skills. For instance, El Sakka (2016); Salem (2014); Diyyab, Abdel-Haq, & Aly (2013) & Hussein (2001) confirmed that in the Egyptian universities, the problems of speaking and its anxiety is more serious. Most students after many years of studying English in elementary, preparatory, and secondary schools are neither fluent nor confident English speakers.

1.2 Statement of the problem

The study problem could be identified in "English department students' poor mastery of the necessary EFL speaking skills which was partly attributed to the lack of opportunities and time to practice speaking skills in class and the traditional speaking instructional methods followed". Hence, this study attempted to answer the following main question:

"How can a program based on online collaborative learning be designed to develop speaking skills and social presence for first year English department (basic education) students in the faculty of Education, Ain Shams University?"

The following sub-questions were derived from the main question:

1- What are the EFL speaking skills necessary for first year English department students?

2- To what extent do first year English department students acquire these skills?

3- To what extent do first year English department students have English- speaking anxiety levels?

4- What are the features of the program based on online collaborative learning to develop speaking skills and social presence for first year English department students?

5- How far is the program based on online collaborative learning effective in developing EFL speaking skills for first year English department students?

6- How far is the program based on online collaborative learning effective in reducing English speaking anxiety levels for first year English department students?

7- How far is the program based on online collaborative learning effective in developing first year English department students' social presence?

1.3 Hypotheses of the study

In light of the discussion of literature and previous related studies, the following hypotheses were derived:

1- There would be statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the study participants on the pre- and post-applications of the overall speaking skill test and in each skill separately in favor of the post application.

2- There would be statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the study participants on the pre -post applications of the overall English-speaking anxiety scale in favor of the post application.

3- There would be statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the participants' post application of the social presence scale and the test value in favor of the former.

1.4 Purposes of the study

The purposes of the study were as follows:

1- investigating the effect of a program based on online collaborative leaning on developing first year English department students' EFL speaking skills.

2- investigating the effect of a program based on online collaborative leaning on developing first year English department students' social presence.

3- investigating the effect of a program based on online collaborative leaning on reducing English- speaking anxiety levels for first year English department students.

1.5 Significance of the study

The significance of the study derives from the following considerations:

1- The study may be useful for first year English department students as it helps them improve their speaking skills.

2- The EFL speaking skill checklist, the pre- and post-speaking skill test, the speaking anxiety scale, and the social presence scale might be beneficial for EFL researchers.

3- The study may be of importance to curriculum developers and designers who are interested in incorporating online collaborative learning in EFL courses and textbooks.

1.6 Delimitations of the study

This study was delimited to:

1- A sample of first year English department students (basic education) who study English as a foreign language at the faculty of Education, Ain Shams University. 25 students were randomly chosen to participate in the study.

2- Some speaking skills appropriate for first year English department basic education students who study English as a foreign language at the faculty of Education, Ain Shams University.

3- A limited time to implement the treatment (eight weeks) in the first semester of the academic year 2020-2021.

1.7 Definitions of terms

1.7.1 Online collaborative learning

According to Laal (2012). Collaborative learning can be defined as an educational teaching and learning approach that requires engaging students into groups who work together to solve a problem, complete a task, or create a product. Harasim (2012, p. 90) defines online collaborative learning as a model of learning that encourage students to work together, create knowledge, explore ways to innovate in order to be able to solve problems rather than recite what they think is the right answer. In this study, online collaborative learning is defined as an instructional approach where students collaborate online through zoom application to implement three main stages that include idea generating, idea organizing, and intellectual convergence to complete a speaking task.

1.7.2 Speaking skills

According to Channey (1998 p.13), speaking is the process of building and sharing meaning using verbal and non-verbal language, in various contexts. For Nunan (2003, p. 48), speaking is the productive oral skill which consists of producing verbal utterances to deliver meaning. In this study, speaking skills are operationally defined as a skill of comprehending, pronouncing, and being fluent and accurate in producing speech.

1.7.3 Social presence

Short, Williams and Christie (1976 p. 65) defined social presence as the level of remarkable quality of the other person in the interaction process and the resulting remarkable quality of the relational connections. On the other hand, (Leh, 2001, p. 110) defined social presence as the level to which a person feels socially present. In this study, social presence is defined as a sense of belonging in a course or group and the ability to interact with others although physical contact is not available.

2. Review of literature

The following section sheds more light on the main variables of this study which are speaking skills, online collaborative learning, and social presence.

2.1. Speaking Skills

There are several definitions for speaking skill. For Channey (1998, p.13), speaking is the process of building and sharing meaning using verbal and non-verbal symbols in various contexts. For Asrida (2016), speaking can be defined as the process of sharing information between the speaker and the listener in any circumstances. According to Richard (2016), speaking is defined as the act of sending information through expressing thoughts and feelings using spoken language.

In fact, developing speaking skill is challenging for EFL leaners because they should master several important sub skills, such as pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. In addition, learning to speak a foreign language is believed to be more difficult than listening, reading, or writing for two main reasons. The first reason is unlike reading and writing, speaking takes place in real time. The second reason is when someone speaks, he or she cannot edit and revise what he or she wishes to say compared to the situation where the person can edit if he or she is writing (Asrida, 2016).

According to Lackman (2010), some teachers prefer to adopt the sub-skill approach when delivering speaking skills instruction as they feel more secured. In the first place, they know what to teach in each class and students know what to learn. Overall, teaching sub-skills is better than only asking students to speak in the classroom without any purposes, directions, or guidance. For Lackman (2010), speaking has several sub- skills which include the following. The first one is fluency where students practice speaking without any preparation or previous planning and their speaking is characterized with a smooth flow of words, phrases, and ideas. The second speaking sub-skill is pronunciation. Pronunciation requires students to pronounce words correctly and accurately. The third speaking sub-skill is structures which involve using grammatical rules correctly. The fourth speaking sub-skill is appropriacy where students practice using appropriate language for appropriate situations which include making decisions about formality and choice of grammar or vocabulary. The fifth speaking sub skill is turn-taking skills where students practice ways of taking turns during conversation.

According to Al Bajalani (2018), fluency is considered one of the main speaking sub-skills. Fluency is defined in two ways. The first way relates to the narrowest domain which only includes features such as pausing, hesitations, and speech rate. The second way is related to the broadest domain in which fluency is the same as speaking proficiency. For Lackman (2010), lack of fluency is due to students' lack of vocabulary or grammar to deliver what they want.

Also, accuracy is considered one of the main speaking sub-skills. For Skehan and Foster (1999, p. 96), accuracy is the ability to avoid errors and to avoid challenging structures that might cause errors. Students need to be able to use and pronounce words and structures in a correct manner (Lackman, 2010).

Moreover, Al Bajalani (2018), considers communication strategies as one of the main speaking sub-skills. Communication

strategies as a speaking sub-skill involve many other components such as turn-taking and turn-giving which are the most important ones in conversation. Taking turns involve knowing how and when to interrupt a speaker politely.

According to Humaera (2015) and Leong & Ahmadi (2017), speaking problems are classified into linguistic and affective problems. The linguistic problems are the problems that prevent students from participating in conversations include grammar mistakes, lack of vocabulary, mispronunciation and mechanics related problems such as fluency and accuracy. The second category is the affective factors that include absence of motivation, absence of self-confidence as well as anxiety and shyness. Thus, speaking a foreign language seems to be difficult, challenging, and stressful for the learners.

According to many researches in the field, speaking anxiety is reported to be as one of the most common problems that characterize EFL or ESL speaking lessons (El Sakka, 2016; Humphries, 2011; MacIntyre, 1999). For El Sakka (2016), many EFL students face many problems represented in the inability to expressing their own views as well as underestimating their abilities. Therefore, they always complain that speaking is their most anxiety experience. Therefore, examining speaking anxiety and trying to reduce it is a demand that research should attempt.

Other research studies added other problems that face EFL learners in the Egyptian context regarding speaking skills as many students do not have enough opportunities to practice the language outside the classroom which make it more challenging for them. In addition, Al Ghussain (2000) explained that in Egypt, most of the English language teaching methods adopted by English teachers and instructors do not follow the appropriate up-to-date tools and techniques that develop students' speaking skills better; instead, they still depend on traditional methods that focus on speaking practice which emphasizes the production of single and isolated

sounds. Also, students are not self- confident enough to practice speaking skills with their teachers and other students.

In the same context, Ezz (2017) revealed that despite the significance and importance of the speaking skills for EFL learners, it is still neglected by both teachers and students. In this regard, Lochana and Deb (2006) claimed that teachers and instructors who teach English as a foreign language usually use lectures and focus on grammar rules rather than speaking skills. Also, Al-Nasser (2015) added that many teachers along with the students usually speak Arabic most of the time in the English classes. All these aspects of English teaching may lead students to join colleges and universities and they are still unable to communicate effectively within contexts that need spoken communication in English even though they spent years and years studying English in schools. For this reason, there is an urgent need for university students to practice speaking skills more and use it for communication. Therefore, new strategies and tools are needed to provide students with more opportunities to develop their speaking skills. Two of the suggested teaching/ learning strategies are online collaborative learning.

2.2 Online collaborative learning

In recent years, the educational system has been occupied with Vygotsky's Social Development Theory, connectivism theory and many other educational theories that dominated the previous decades. These theories asked educators and scholars to involve students more in the learning process through searching for information, constructing knowledge and interacting socially with one another. In the same context, Vygotsky suggested the idea of the concept of zone of proximal development that requires to support the idea that students develop their skills better when they socially interact with one another or through peer collaboration compared to developing these skills on their own or alone (Thompson & Ku, 2006).

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 encourage them to work together to make use of one another's learning (Johnson & Johnson, 2004). It is also one of the best strategies that was proved to be effective and important as it provides students with the processes of learning represented in the ideas of sharing several sources of information and knowledge as well as providing students with opportunities to exchange experiences. In this context, the main goal is not only the acquisition of knowledge but also enhancing students with the ability of building knowledge in creative ways (Paavola et al. 2004). Collaborative learning changes the focus from transmitting information and knowledge to students by the teacher to help them construct knowledge by themselves through adopting the vision of learning as a social process (Hiltz, Coppola, Rotter, & Turoff, M. (2000). This social interactive process allows learning to take place through providing students with the opportunity to exercise, validate, and improve their mentality through sharing information and active discussion (Dooly, 2008).

Educators distinguish collaborative learning from cooperative learning as collaborative learning involves common participation and involvement from the side of students towards shared learning and problem-solving goals. On the other hand, cooperative learning demands the teacher to split the work and divides the tasks on students who work separately to achieve their own tasks; then, they combine the tasks together to create a single product for the group (Dillenbourg, 1999). In other words, collaborative learning forces all group members to participate in the discussion whereas cooperative learning just divides the work to be combined in a final phase. It should be clear that cooperative learning does not provide the advantages of collaborative learning. For example, collaborative learning provides students with an increase in their engagement, helps them enhance critical thinking,

promotes problem solving, and encourages students to learn and achieve (Raman & Ryan, 2004).

Several studies revealed the importance of collaborative learning (Springer, Stanne, & Donovan,1999), yet face to face collaborative learning is considered a challenging approach that may not achieve the expected outcomes in all cases and situations (Kirschner, Paas, & Kirschner, 2009); therefore, some modifications and treatments have been suggested to address these challenges among them the use of technology. In fact, there is a clear transformation of the learning and teaching process in higher education towards digitalizing learning. Digitalization has opened wide discussions regarding how to learn (Courtney & Wilhoite-Mathews, 2015). In this digital era, technology has a big impact on the learning process. Also, cloud services and applications have paved the way for increasing collaborative learning. Resta (2007) confirms that using technology to enhances collaborative learning in university education has been the focus of a big number of researches that use some aspects related to technology-supported collaborative learning. 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).

According to Lipponen et al. (2004), the term online collaborative learning was firstly used by O' Malley and Scanlon and was considered as an important domain. Online collaborative learning may have the tools that make it more effective than face-to-face collaborative learning due to several reasons; first, students no longer have any conflicts in their schedules; second, students feel more responsible for their own learning; third, it makes students' thinking more focused and clearer and fourth, it makes the learning process more organized and saved for later review and update (Klemm, 1998). Also, 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. However, research findings on the implementation of online collaborative learning are not consistent; that is, some cases were successful than others (Thompson,2008) and hence comes the importance of the current research.

According to Hathorn and Ingram (2002), several researchers have found four critical features of an online collaborative learning. These four features are participation, interdependence, synthesis of information, and independence. For Thompson & Ku (2006), one of the essential requirements of an online collaborative learning is participation because it is not possible to achieve collaboration without individual participation. The second feature of online collaborative learning is interdependence which in turn requires interaction between group members to exchange information and ideas with one another. The third feature of online collaborative learning is synthesis of information. It requires the product or task of collaboration to be the outcome of every group member. Finally, online collaborative group should be independent of the instructor, which means that whenever a group member has any questions, they should attempt to ask each other rather than immediately ask the teacher for answers.

According to Harasim (2012), online collaborative learning has three main pillars that should be addressed. These three main pillars are online collaborative learning pedagogy, online technology tools that facilitate collaboration and online collaborative learning environments as follows:

- **Online collaborative learning pedagogy**

The main aspect of online collaborative learning pedagogy is that students learn they should collaborate together in order to negotiate and change meaning. In this context, Harasim (2012) divided the collaboration process into four main stages. These four stages are idea generating stage, idea organizing stage, intellectual convergence stage, and final position stage. In the idea generating

stage, students present their opinions by brainstorming ideas about the task they are given. In the idea organizing phase, students are required to interact with one another and as a result of such interaction process and being exposed to new ideas of their peers, they begin to organize, analyze, and change the different ideas through either agreeing or disagreeing with some of the ideas presented by their peers, as well as elaborating, expanding or refusing other ideas. When comparing between the first phase and second stage, it becomes clear that in the second phase of online collaborative learning idea organizing phase, students' perspective of the task being approached is expanding due to the different input they gain from other peers and the teacher. In the third stage, intellectual convergence, students begin to have a position on the topic / task or the solution to the problem which can be presented in the form of a report, final scenario, summary, or presentation. The final position stage is achieved when students start to change a concept or an idea due to the interaction process that took place in the previous stages of collaboration.

- **Online technology tools**

The second element of online collaborative learning is the online technology tools. Through such online tools, the process of knowledge exchange is implemented. Online learning tools are web tools that can facilitate or enable tasks in an online learning setting to be delivered (Harasim, 2012). Such tools can be web tools or other tools that are mainly designed for education. These tools help the teacher or the instructor to incorporate the online collaborative learning pedagogy.

- **Online learning environments**

The third element of online collaborative learning is the online learning environment. Online learning environment refers to web-based software that is designed to embrace the learning activities (Harasim, 2012). These environments are not just channels for transferring information, yet through these online channels,

students are able to negotiate meaning and engage in conversations with one another. Some common examples of such online environments are video conferencing systems such as zoom and Microsoft teams. These environments are free from place, and time limitations and delivered through the Internet (Harasim, 2012).

According to Garrison, Anderson, & Archer (2011), 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 When students are involved in online collaborative learning within an educational context or task-based learning, they engage in learning group tasks and activities that do not occur in individual learning context (Kharrufa, 2010).

Laal and Ghodsi (2012) classified the advantages of collaborative learning into three main aspects: social, psychological, and academic:

Social benefits

collaborative learning helps to enhances social support; It results in building the culture of understanding and accepting diversity among students and staff.

Psychological benefits

Student-centered learning derived from collaborative learning promotes learners' self-esteem. Also, it decreases anxiety and increases positive attitudes towards the overall learning process.

Academic benefits

collaborative learning develops critical thinking skills; students' active participation and involvement in the learning process is highly guaranteed.

Course characteristics, individual characteristics, various aspects of the collaborative learning process, and satisfaction are the

most important elements that have an influence on implementing online collaborative learning (Dewiyrant et al., 2007). The first one is course characteristics. Course characteristics include the group size and the type of product that students are required to collaborate in order to achieve the intended goal. Implementing collaboration in small groups is very useful especially for the lazy students. Also, it helps to increase the contribution of students and social engagement (Dewiyrant et al., 2007). Second, individual characteristics are represented in students' opinions about collaborative learning and the use of technology (Dewiyrant et al., 2007). The third one is the idea that collaborative learning involves a process of dynamic group work where the main aim of the group members is to achieve a task. Together, students plan the learning process and support one another during this process through discussing the content, determining techniques, and contributing thoughts, in order to achieve the desired goals (Dewiyrant et al., 2007). Fourth, student satisfaction which makes a learner feel positively associated with collaborative learning experience (Dewiyrant et al., 2007).

Tu (2004) added four important issues that should be taken into account when implementing online collaborative learning. These four issues are empowering learners, continuing support, being patient and building community.

• Empowering learners: students should be empowered to be responsible for their learning process as in online collaborative learning, the key role of the teacher is to act as a facilitator who guides learners through different learning tasks to meet the different learning styles (Tu, 2004; Palloff & Pratt, 2005).

• Continuing support: intellectual, technical, social, mental, and emotional support should be provided by the teacher throughout the learning process to support the online collaborative learning process.

• Being patient: teachers should be patient and should take into account that social interaction in an online collaborative learning

environment requires much time to construct social ties to help students achieve their tasks.

- Building communities: teachers should build a sense of community in the online collaborative learning environment to enable students to feel relaxed to express their opinions, thoughts and share their perspectives.

As for the teacher's role when implementing online collaborative learning, it can be said that online collaborative learning represents an important transition for the teacher's role in the learning process from the typical teacher centered approach to learner centered approach where teachers are merely responsible for transferring information and knowledge for students, but in the online collaborative learning approach, teachers are facilitator and guide who seek to provide help and support for students (Rodríguez, Riaza, & Gomez, 2017).

As for the process of online collaborative learning, it passes through the following steps and procedures:

- **Orienting students**: starting from day one, teachers should begin orienting students to the online collaborative learning process which requires new roles from the students' side. It has been proved that acquainting students with how to implement the process of collaboration can promote learning outcomes (Nussbaum et al, 2009).

- **Forming the collaborative learning group**: collaborative learning groups differ in terms of the aim, the activity, and the duration of time students are supposed to collaborate (Barkley et al.,2005). There are three main types of forming groups: formal, informal, and base (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1991). The informal group is formed randomly, and its members work together for a short time. The formal group is formed when learners seek to work together through out several sessions or weeks to complete complicated tasks. The base group is kept

over a long-term period in which students work together in the same groups for the entire term or academic year. As for the group size, the effective collaborative learning group usually range from two to six members ((Barkley et al., 2005).

- **Group agreement**: using team contracts has been considered as an effective technique that may impact satisfaction among students when implementing online collaborative learning (Doran, 2001).

- **Structuring the collaborative learning task**: It involves creating a collaborative task and the procedures that should be followed by students to collaborate properly (Barkley et al., 2005).

- **Assessment and evaluation of collaborative learning**: the main challenge in collaborative learning is assessing collaborative groups while respecting individual contribution. (Diaz, Brown, & Salmons, 2010). In this regard, both formative and summative assessments are highly recommended.

Review of the literature in the field of online collaborative learning reveals that several studies have confirmed the importance and effect of online collaborative learning on achievement and different learning aspects (Chiu et al. 2010; Liu, Tao, and Nee 2008; Macdonald 2003). Other studies included Ismail's (2013) investigated the effect of a proposed collaborative learning environment based on the employment of social networks as an instructional – social space on developing electronic networking communication skills and attitudes towards chemistry learning via the web. The study revealed that there are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the pre- and post-applications in favor of the post application of the chemistry learning scale, and of the scale of social communication skills. The study recommended the need to expand the use of online collaborative learning. Also, 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. Moreover, Wali's study (2010) emphasized the effectiveness of a training program based on collaborative networking learning in developing teacher's competences in the recruitment of e-learning technology in teaching.

2.3 Social Presence

According to Akcaoglu & Lee (2016), one of the basic human needs is to form social connections whether in face to face or online contexts. In fact, even when online, students are not only searching for information and knowledge, but they are also searching for support, and belonging. Such aspects involve social sides and social interactions which are for Sung & Mayer (2012) considered to be the heart of the learning process.

Compared to face-to-face learning contexts, online learning in general is highly criticized by many scholars and educators for not creating an effective social presence atmosphere among its participants which in turn may lead to the feeling of isolation and absence of social belonging to the group (Veletsianos & Navarrete, 2012). New research has revealed that successfully creating an effective social presence atmosphere among online participants may increase motivation and enhance learning (Borup et al., 2012; Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997; Richardson & Swan, 2003; Rourke, Anderson, Garrison, &Archer, 1999; Tu & McIsaac, 2002).

According to Toader et al (2019), social presence is reflected by the feelings that the persons involved in conversation with one another is interacting as humans regardless of any other barriers that may hinder this process. For them, social presence is formed with human contact, human warmth, sociability, source of comfort, sense of support.

According to Aragon (2003), creating a sense of comfort where people or students in the educational context have the feeling of relaxation with the teacher or with other participants is the main goal of social presence in the learning process. In the same regard, Leh (2001) stated that when social presence is missing in the learning process, students do not learn properly as the process of sharing information among them in this case is less due to the absence of social presence. Moreover, creating social presence in online environment may help to enhance the quality of the learning process (Newberry, 2001). In addition, social presence creates a sense of affection among learners as it helps to turn the learning process into a warm and collaborative environment (Whiteman, 2002).

In fact, the advantages of social presence can be observed more when it comes to the concept of satisfaction, yet recent research suggests that it has an impact on learning achievement as well. Therefore, it is important for many educators and scholars to know how to provide their students with such effective social presence in online contexts which helps overcome the isolated nature of these settings (Aragon, 2003).

Aragon (2003) presented some tips related to the strategies for creating social presence as follows:

- Course Design: establishing social presence when designing courses require designers to adopt some techniques that may facilitate and promote social presence including:
- Develop welcome messages. Welcome messages from the teacher to the students should be incorporated in the design of the course to create effective social presence. In this video message, the instructor should welcome the learners, introduce himself or herself, and provides a short introduction about the course.
- Include student profiles: these student profiles should include a picture of the student, e-mail address, and a short bio.
- Limit class size: class size should be taken into account when seeking an effective social presence. In this regard, Rovai

(2001) suggested a student-teacher percentage to be not more than 30:1.

- Structure online collaborative learning activities and tasks: collaborative learning activities and tasks can increase student to student interaction which in turn leads to social presence (Rovai, 2001, 2002; Whiteman, 2002).

• Instructors: instructors play an important role in creating social presence for online environments which can be achieved as follows:

- Provide continuous feedback: feedback is very important and should be taken seriously when designing online courses to achieve effective social presence. Whiteman (2002) recommends that this feedback should be individual rather than given as group feedback to the entire class. Although group feedback is needed, it is the individual feedback that establishes social presence.

- Share personal stories and experience: sharing personal stories and experiences promotes social presence in online courses as they allow students to see teachers as human.

- Use humor: humor reduces social distance and delivers a message of well-being in an online learning.

• Participants: to create an effective social presence, students should share their personal stories and personal experiences with other students and the teacher as well as use humor whenever the situation allows.

To conclude, the present study aimed at investigating the effect of online collaborative learning on developing EFL speaking skills and social presence. Based on the discussion of literature review, it became crystal clear the close links between the independent variables and the dependent variables of the study.

3. Method

This part of the research sheds light on the research methodology that has been followed to investigate the effect of a

program based on online collaborative learning on developing EFL speaking skills and social presence for first year English department (basic education) students.

3.1. Research design

This study employed the one-group pretest-posttest quasi – experimental design. This design was selected because the instruments of the study aimed at investigating the effect of the program based on online collaborative learning on the same students before and after the implementation of the program; therefore, the participants were compared to themselves. In addition, the study group did not study any speaking skill course concurrently with the proposed program, which controlled other experience variables that might have interfered with the effects of the program. To further ensure the validity of the program, control of participants' maturation and developmental growth was ensured as the instructional program lasted for only eight weeks, which was a relatively short period of time. Students' developmental levels are stable over short periods of time, and consequently, spontaneous changes that a control group might detect are unlikely to occur, so the study lends itself to this design better than it does to other designs (Shadish et al., 2002). Quantitative data was collected and driven from the results of the pre/posttests which assessed participants' speaking skills and the English- speaking anxiety scale. On the other hand, quantitative and qualitative data were elicited from analysis of the social presence scale after implementing the program.

3.2. Participants of the study

The participants of the study were 25 male and female first year English department (basic education) students enrolled in the Faculty of Education, Ain Shams University during the first semester of the academic year 2020-2021. All of them had been studying English for at least twelve years in formal primary, preparatory, and secondary schools. They were randomly selected from more than 200 students which formulated the total number of

the enrolled students in the first-year English department, basic education and assigned as the study group.

3.3. Instruments of the study

The present study utilized six main instruments as follows:

3.3.1 The EFL speaking skill checklist: this checklist was designed to identify the most important EFL speaking skills necessary for first year English department (basic education) students. It was designed and developed after reviewing the literature and the studies related to EFL speaking skills. The researcher made benefit of this checklist to develop the pre-post speaking skill test. The list was also helpful in developing the course book, the lessons and tasks which aimed at developing these skills.

The initial form of the checklist included five main speaking skills and a number of 18 speaking sub-skills and was presented to a panel of jury members in the field of EFL methods of teaching and applied linguistics (See Appendix A). They were asked to determine the appropriateness of the suggested EFL speaking skills to first year English department basic education students (See Appendix B). Based on the modifications of the panel of jury members, five main speaking skills and a total of 14 sub-skills were chosen and used in the study. The selected speaking skills according to their high percentages were as follows:

Accuracy	- Pronouncing correctly
	- Speaking comprehensible English.
	- Applying appropriate intonation.
Fluency & Coherence	- Speaking fluently almost with no repetition or minimal hesitation.
	- Developing topics fully and coherently.
	- Speaking at a reasonable rate smoothly.
Vocabulary	- Employing vocabulary items correctly.
	- Using a variety of vocabulary
	- Using some sophisticated words.
	- Using aesthetic aspects of language

		(figures of speech, idiomatic expressions, sayings, proverbs, puzzles, and jokes)
Structure	-	Applying a variety of structures accurately and consistently.
	-	Using words, phrases, and sentences in the correct order.
Interaction (communication strategies)	-	Initiating and logically developing simple conversation on familiar topics.
	-	Using fillers appropriately.

3.3.2. The pre-post speaking skill test

The purpose of the pre-post speaking test was to measure participants EFL speaking skills. A speaking skill test, with five main sections (with a total number of 15 questions) in the form of a structured interview, was designed by the researcher in light of a table of specifications based on the specified five main speaking skills. Each section measures two specific speaking skills except for section five which measured only one speaking skill because it was somehow longer than the previous sections. Each section worth 10 points according to a rubric designed for the purpose of grading students' EFL speaking skills. The topics of the speaking skill test were used for the pretest and posttest in order to control topic effects. The test consisted of five main question sections. The first and second question sections measured students' accuracy and communicative strategies. The third and fourth question sections measured students' vocabulary and structure. The fifth question section measured students' fluency. The total score of the test was 50.

3.3.2.1. Piloting the test

To pilot the test, it was administered to a group of 25 first year English department basic education students prior to the actual treatment. Those 25 students did not participate in the study. The purpose of the piloting was to:

- measure validity and reliability of the test.
- investigate clarity of questions.
- check the suitability of the language level to the participants.

- determine the appropriate time needed to answer the test. No problems were reported regarding the clarity of questions and suitability of the language level to the participants. As for the appropriate time needed to answer the test, the researcher calculated the mean time spent by the first and the last learner to complete the test and found it to be 15 minutes.

3.3.2.2. Test validity

To estimate the content validity of the speaking skill test, it was presented to a panel of jury members in the field of EFL methods of teaching and applied linguistics (See Appendix D) to determine whether each item measures the speaking skill it was intended to measure and the suitability of the phrasing of each item to first year English department basic education students' academic level. Very few modifications were made according to the opinions of the jury members until the test was prepared in its final form (See Appendix E).

To estimate the construct validity of the EFL speaking skill test, the correlation coefficient was calculated between the total score for each dimension/skill of the five parts of the speaking test and the total score of the overall test by using the statistical package for social science software (SPSS). The correlation coefficient and the significance level are presented in table (1)

Table 1

Correlation coefficients between each dimension and the overall score of the speaking test

N	Test dimensions	Correlation coefficients	Level of significance
1	Accuracy	0.754**	0.01
2	Fluency	0.756**	0.01
3	Vocabulary	0.924**	0.01
4	Structure	0.901**	0.01
5	Communication strategies	0.821**	0.01

Table (1) shows that the correlation coefficient of the EFL speaking skill test was statistically significant at 0.01 level for the five parts of the test. Therefore, the test was internally consistent and valid.

3.3.2.3 Test reliability

The reliability of the test was calculated through Cronbach's Alpha (Coefficient Alpha). Cronbach's alpha is the most common measure of internal consistency ("reliability"). It is most used when you have multiple questions, and you wish to determine if the test is reliable. In order to calculate the reliability of the test, it was applied to a sample of 25 students who were not included in the treatment and it was done for the overall test using the following equation:

$a = N.\bar{c} \ \bar{v} + (N-1).\bar{c}$

N = the number of items.

$\bar{c}$ = average covariance between item-pairs.

$\bar{v}$ = average variance.

Table 2

The reliability coefficient of the test

The test	Alpha
Coefficient	0.812

Based on the results above, it can be said that the coefficient reliability of the overall test is high.

3.2.2.4 scoring the test

The total score of the test was 50. Each section of the test worth 10 points and assesses two speaking skills except for the last section which assesses only one skill. All questions were scored in light of the analytical speaking skill rubric that was designed by the researcher. Students' answers were recorded and were sent with the rubric to another rater to do inter- rater reliability.

3.3.3. The analytical speaking skill rubric

The speaking skill rubric is an analytical rubric designed by the researcher to evaluate students' performance in the pre/post speaking test. Since one of the main aims of this study was to develop students' EFL speaking skills, the rubric was designed to assess students' speaking skills. The speaking skills were analyzed, summarized, and stated in the speaking skill checklist prepared by the researcher. These skills were then used to determine the assessment criteria which represented the desired standards or expectations of students' performances. These criteria were then grouped into five main categories (i.e., accuracy, fluency, vocabulary, grammar, and communicative strategies). To determine the degree to which a student's performance met the criteria of the task, five levels of descriptors which differentiate several levels of performance (i.e., Poor, Fair, Average, Very good and Excellent) were specified and described in a qualitative and/ or quantitative manners.

For detailed analysis of students' speaking skills, each section of the rubric can be scored independently then totaled. The score was calculated by multiplying the level number by the number in parentheses under each criterion. For example, if the performance matched level 3 for "context", the score was 3×1. The number 3 would be put in the Score column in the "Context" row, and then added to the other points for a total. The highest possible score was

25 points, and the lowest possible score was 5 for each separate skill (See Appendix F).

3.3.3.1 validity of the analytical speaking skill rubric

Content validity of the analytical speaking skill rubric was established through ensuring that the rubric measures and reflects the speaking skills prepared earlier by the researcher. The analytical speaking skill rubric was given to EFL specialists to determine if the items of the rubric measured and reflected the targeted speaking skills and accordingly, the final version of the rubric was gleaned.

3.3.3.2 reliability of the analytical speaking skill rubric

Reliability of the analytical speaking rubric was estimated using the inter-rater reliability by calculating the correlation coefficient between the researcher and another rater who scored the speaking skill test of the study group. The correlation coefficient between the two raters' scores was 0.92.

3.3.4 English speaking anxiety scale

The researcher developed an English-speaking anxiety scale in light of related literature and previous studies in order to investigate students' anxiety levels before and after the treatment. The speaking anxiety scale included 20 items. All the items were reversed items except for items number (5, 16, 19, 20) that were positive statements in order to balance and verify students' answers. All the items of the scale were answered on a 5- point Likert scale. Scoring should be reversed for the items that indicate speaking anxiety as follows: 1 strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neutral, 4 agree, and 5 strongly agree. For the positive statements, points: 1 strongly agree, 2 agree, 3 neutral, 4 disagree, and 5 strongly disagree.

3.3.4.1 The content validity of the English-speaking anxiety scale

The first version of the English-speaking anxiety scale (See Appendix G) was given to TEFL specialists and experts to determine if the items of the scale measured English speaking anxiety in general. The number of the items of the scale in its first version was 34. The jury members omitted some items, but they

accepted most of its designed items as they were, which proved the validity of the scale.

3.3.4.2 The reliability of the English- speaking anxiety scale

The reliability of the English-speaking anxiety scale was calculated through Cronbach's Alpha (Coefficient Alpha). Cronbach's alpha is the most common measure of internal consistency ("reliability"). It is most used when you have multiple items, and you wish to determine if the scale is reliable. In order to calculate the reliability of the English-speaking anxiety scale, it was applied to a sample of 25 students who were not included in the treatment and it was done for the overall scale using the following equation:

$a= \dfrac{N.\bar{c}}{\bar{v}+(N-1).\bar{c}}$

N = the number of items.

$\bar{c}$ = average covariance between item-pairs.

$\bar{v}$ = average variance.

Table 3

Reliability of the English- speaking anxiety scale

Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
.863	20

Based on the results above, the reliability of the English-speaking anxiety scale was high.

3.3.5 Social presence scale

The researcher developed a social presence scale in light of related literature and previous studies in order to investigate students' social presence after implementing the program that is based on online collaborative learning. The social presence scale included 20 items that covered three main dimensions/ domains: human contact & social interaction, a sense of support and a sense of comfort. Each domain included 5 items except for the first one

(human contact & social interaction) that included 10 items. All the items were positive items except for items number (18) in order to balance and verify students' answers. All the items of the scale were answered on a 5- point Likert scale as follows: For the positive statements, points: 1 strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neutral, 4 agree, and 5 strongly agree. For the reverse statements, points: 5 strongly disagree, 4 disagree, 3 neutral, 2 agree, and 1 strongly agree.

3.3.5.1 The content validity of the social presence scale

The first version of the social presence scale (See Appendix I) was given to TEFL specialists and experts to determine if the items of each domain measured its domain in particular and social presence in general. The number of the items of the scale in its first version was 24. The jury members omitted four items, but they accepted most of its designed items as they were, which proved the validity of the scale (See Appendix J).

3.3.5.2. The construct validity of the social presence scale

To estimate the construct validity of the social presence scale, the correlation coefficient was calculated between the total score for each dimension of the three domains of the social presence scale and the total score of the overall social presence scale by using the statistical package for social science software (SPSS). The correlation coefficient and the significance level are presented in table (4)

Table 4

The correlation coefficients between each dimension and the overall score of the social presence scale

N	Scale dimensions	Correlation coefficients	Level of significance
1	human contact & social interaction	0.877**	0.01
2	Sense of support	0.617**	0.01
3	Sense of comfort	0784**	0.01

3.3.5.3 The reliability of the social presence scale

The reliability of the social presence scale was calculated through Cronbach's Alpha (Coefficient Alpha). Cronbach's alpha is the most common measure of internal consistency ("reliability"). It is most used when you have multiple items, and you wish to determine if the scale is reliable. In order to calculate the reliability of the social presence scale, the researcher used the following equation:

$$a = \frac{N.\bar{c}}{\bar{v}+(N-1).\bar{c}}$$

N = the number of items.

$\bar{c}$ = average covariance between item-pairs.

$\bar{v}$ = average variance.

Table (5)

Reliability of the social presence scale

Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
0.803	20

Based on the results above, the reliability of the social presence scale was acceptable.

3.3.6 The program

The program that was based on online collaborative learning was developed to enhance first year English department basic education students' speaking skills and social presence in an online community.

3.3.6. 1 The aim of the program

This program aimed at developing EFL speaking skills, reducing English speaking anxiety levels and enhancing social presence for first year English department basic education students at faculty of education, Ain Shams University.

3.3.6.2 The objectives of the program

Objectives related to speaking skills: accuracy, fluency & coherence, vocabulary, structure, and interaction (communication strategies):

By the end of this program students would be able to:

- Pronounce English correctly related to the required tasks.
- Speak comprehensible English related to the required tasks.
- Apply appropriate intonation related to the required tasks.
- Speak fluently almost with no repetition or minimal hesitation about the topics of the program.
- Develop the topics related to the required tasks fully and coherently.
- Speak at a reasonable rate smoothly.
- Employ vocabulary items related to the required tasks correctly.
- Use a variety of vocabulary related to the required tasks.
- Use some sophisticated words related to the required tasks.
- Use aesthetic aspects of language (figures of speech, idiomatic expressions, sayings, proverbs, puzzles, and jokes) related to the required tasks.
- Apply a variety of structures accurately and consistently.
- Use words, phrases, and sentences in the correct order.
- Initiate and logically develop simple conversation on familiar topics.
- Use fillers appropriately.

Objectives related to online collaborative learning:

- Recognize the concept of online collaborative learning.
- Generate ideas related to the required program tasks.
- Negotiate ideas related to the required program tasks.
- Negotiate meaning related to the required program tasks.
- Judge the quality of the information related to the required program tasks.
- Select information related to the required program tasks.
- Justify choices related to the required program tasks.

3.3.6.4 Content of the program

The program includes a teacher's book as well as student's material. The content of the program is task based. The content of the program was selected and organized by the researcher and included the online collaborative learning tasks that students should do synchronously through zoom in breakout rooms assigned for different groups to collaborate and complete the speaking tasks and present them. The content of the program employed the use of online collaborative learning for enhancing speaking skills and social presence for first year English department basic education students. The content of the program was adapted from various sources and websites (See Appendix K).

3.3.6.5 Description of the program:

The program consisted of 12 lessons. The first three lessons were orientation sessions about online collaborative learning and speaking skills. The other nine sessions were instructional ones through which EFL speaking skills and online collaborative learning were practiced. These lessons were taught to first year English department basic education students at Faculty of Education, Ain Shams University during the first semester of the academic year 2020-2021. The lessons of the program as follows:

- An introduction to online collaborative learning.
- Online collaborative learning tools.
- Tips for developing speaking skills and reducing anxiety.
- Online shopping
- Utopia
- Mobile phones
- Movies
- Marriage
- Trips
- Heroes in the news
- Cooking
- Recent events

3.3.6.6 The implementation of the program

Before delivering the program to the study group, the researcher applied the instruments of the research as on week 2 of the first semester of the academic year 2020-2021, the researcher administered the speaking skill test and the English-speaking anxiety scale on the participants of the study who were randomly selected. Starting from week 3, the study group has received the online collaborative learning program according to the following stage procedures:

- **Program orientation procedures**

• The researcher explained the aims and objectives of the program to the study group.

• The researcher oriented students on using some online collaborative tools focusing on zoom as one of the approaches that aims at developing and enhancing speaking skills. In this context, the researcher trained the participants on using zoom. The researcher informed the participants that they would use zoom which required every participant to have a google account.

• The researcher discussed the importance of developing one's speaking skills and some of the problems that most EFL learners encounter when speaking English; namely, English speaking anxiety.

- **Delivering lesson procedures**

• **Warming up:** The instructor started the online lesson through zoom by asking students questions that prepare them for the online collaborative learning task of the lesson. Then, the instructor presented some vocabulary, phrases and sentences that are related to the online collaborative learning task.

• **Orienting students**: starting from day one, the researcher started to prepare students for the online collaborative learning process which required new roles from the students' side.

- **Forming the collaborative learning group**: In this program, the researcher used the informal group technique where students were randomly grouped to give more opportunities for participants to collaborate with different participants each time. As for the group size, it ranged from 3 to 4 members at the maximum to maximize the potential benefits of the small group size.
- **Group agreement**: The instructor urged each group to set their group agreement which served as a contract among group members.

Table 6
Online collaborative learning group contract

	We will collaborate properly to complete the required task.
	We will listen carefully to one another.
	We will respect each other's opinion and viewpoints.
	We will submit the required task on time.
	Other items to be added by each group

- **Structuring the collaborative learning task**: a nine online collaborative learning tasks were designed and structured by the researcher to engage students to collaborate actively and practice the targeted EFL speaking skills.
- **Students' engagement in the speaking task in the online environment through a three-step process:**
  -idea generating stage,
  -idea organizing stage,
  -intellectual convergence.
  - **Assessment and evaluation of collaborative learning**:

- The instructor assessed each group and provided formative feedback about their speaking skills and collaboration.
- Students prepared the last draft of the task.
- Each collaborative group rehearsed together the speaking tasks and everyone started to speak.

3.3.6.7 Duration of the program

The program lasted for about eight weeks in the first semester of the academic year 2020-2021. The total of the instructional sessions was 12 sessions, two lessons per week, around 80 minutes each.

3.3.6.8 Assessment of the program

Assessment of the program proceeded through two phases:

The first one was to assess the study group' gradual progress in speaking skills and online collaborative learning and provide feedback. This was represented in the speaking tasks students were asked to complete during and after each lesson.

The second one was to determine whether the students achieved the objectives of the program. Such type of assessment was conducted at the end of the treatment period through the application of the pre-post speaking skill test, the English- speaking anxiety scale, as well as the post application of the social presence scale.

4. Findings of the study

The quantitative results of the study are presented by relating them to the study hypotheses.

Hypothesis one

The first hypothesis of the present study is "there are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the study participants on the pre- and post-applications of the overall speaking skill test and in each skill separately in favor of the post application.

In order to check the validity of this hypothesis the researcher calculated students' scores on the pre /post speaking test using Paired Samples T-test (SPSS, Version 23). In order to use Paired Samples T-test, data must meet the following requirements:

- Dependent variable that is continuous (i.e., interval or ratio level)
- Random Selection of sample from the population

- Normal distribution (approximately) of the difference between the paired values, for samples of 25 participants or fewer.
- No outliers in the difference between the group Scores, for samples of 25 participants or fewer.

The collected data from the pre/post-speaking tests met all these criteria as follows:

- The dependent variable is continuous as it is interval.
- The same students were given each of the two tests.
- Students were selected randomly.
- Scores of students in the two tests were calculated by SPSS to check their normality as shown in table (1).

Table 7

Test of Normailty for the speaking pre/post-tests

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
pre	.187	25	.024	.907	25	.026
post	.149	25	.157	.939	25	.141

- The significance of the pre application of the speaking test is (0.024) according to *Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test*, and (0.026) according to *Shapiro-Wilk Test*.
- The significance of the post application of the speaking test is (0.157) according to *Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test*, and (0.141) according to *Shapiro-Wilk Test*.
- The significance of each of the two applications of the speaking tests is greater than (0.05), and this means that the scores of the two applications of the speaking test follow the normal distribution.
- There were no outliers in the scores of the students in the pre post speaking test.

Meeting all the requirements, the data of the two applications of the pre - post speaking test was then analyzed using the *Paired Samples T-test*, using *SPSS*. Tables (8) show the statistics of the pre/post-applications of the speaking test according to the study participants.

Table 8

Paired Samples Statistics for the Pre/Post Speaking Test

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t- value	P- value
Accuracy	pre	25	2.5200	.58595	6.53	0.000
	post	25	3.1600	.62450		
Fluency	Pre	25	2.0400	.53852	14.21	0.000
	Post	25	3.4800	.58595		
Vocabulary	Pre	25	2.8000	.40825	7.14	0.000
	Post	25	3.4800	.50990		
Structure	Pre	25	3.2400	.52281	4.00	0.001
	Post	25	3.6400	.48990		
Communication strategies	Pre	25	2.2800	.45826	5.25	0.000
	Post	25	3.0400	.61101		
Speaking Skills	Pre	25	12.8800	1.45258	11.02	0.000
	Post	25	16.8000	2.17945		

As shown in table (8), there is a significant difference between the mean scores of the participants on the post application of the speaking test regarding accuracy (M=3.16, SD=0.62) and its pre application (M=2.52, SD=0.58); $T(24) = 6.53$, $p = 0.000$. The significance of T is (0.0.000), which is smaller than (0.05), means that there are statistically significant differences between participants' mean scores of the post-test and those of the pre-test on Accuracy.

Also, there is significant difference between the mean scores of the participants on the post application of the speaking test regarding fluency (M=3.48, SD=0.58) and its pre application (M=2.04, SD=0.53); $T(24) = 14.21$, $p = 0.000$. The significance of T is (0.000), which is smaller than (0.05), means that there are statistically significant differences between participants' mean scores on the post-test and those of the pre-test on fluency.

Moreover, the table shows that there is significant difference between the mean scores of the participants on the post application of the speaking test regarding vocabulary (M=3.48, SD=0.50) and its pre application (M=2.80, SD=0.40); $T(24) = 7.14$, $p = 0.000$. The significance of T is (0.000), which is smaller than (0.05), means that there are statistically significant differences between the participants' mean scores of the post-test and those of the pre-test on vocabulary.
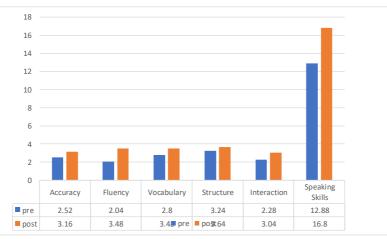
In addition, there is a significant difference between the mean scores of the participant on the post application of the speaking test regarding structure (M=3.64, SD=0.48) and in the pre application (M=3.24, SD=0.52); $T(24) = 4$, $p = 0.001$. The significance of T is (0.001), which is smaller than (0.05), means that there are statistically significant differences between participants' mean scores of the post-test and those of the pre-test on structure,

There is a significant difference between the mean scores of the participants on the post application of the speaking-test regarding communication strategies (M=3.04, SD=0.61) and its pre application (M=2.28.26, SD=0.45); $T(24) = 5.25$, $p = 0.000$. The significance of T is (0.000), which is smaller than (0.05), means that there are statistically significant differences between participants mean' scores of the post-test and those of the pre-test on communicative strategies.

Finally, there is a significant difference between the mean scores of the participants on the post application of the overall speaking skill test (M=16.80, SD=2.17) and the pre application of the overall speaking skill test (M=12.88, SD=1.45); $T(24) = 11.02$, $p = 0.000$. The significance of T is (0.000), which is smaller than (0.05), means that there are statistically significant differences between participants' mean scores of the post-test and those of the pre-test on overall speaking skills, and these results assure that the first hypothesis has been verified according to the scores shown above.

Figure (1)

differences between participants' mean scores of the post-test and those of the pre-test on overall speaking skills and on each skill separately.

	Accuracy	Fluency	Vocabulary	Structure	Interaction	Speaking Skills
pre	2.52	2.04	2.8	3.24	2.28	12.88
post	3.16	3.48	3.44	3.64	3.04	16.8

Hypothesis two

The second hypothesis of the present study is "there are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the study participants on the pre -post applications of the overall English-speaking anxiety scale in favor of the post application. Scores of students on the pre- and post-applications of the anxiety scale were calculated by *SPSS* to check their normality as shown in table (9).

Table 9

Test of Normailty for the Anxiety pre/post-tests

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro–Wilk		
	Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Pre	.146	25	.177	.923	25	.060
Post	.149	25	.156	.964	25	.493

- The significance of the pre application of the scale is (0.177) according to *Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test*, and (0.060) according to *Shapiro-Wilk Test*.

- The significance of the post application of the scale is (0.156) according to *Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test*, and (0.493) according to *Shapiro-Wilk Test.*
- The significance of each of the two applications is greater than (0.05), and this means that the scores of the two applications of the English-speaking anxiety scale follow the normal distribution.
- There were no outliers in the scores of the participants on the two applications.

Meeting all the requirements, the data of the two applications of the English-speaking anxiety scale was then analyzed using the *Paired Samples T-test*, using *SPSS.* Tables (10) show the statistics of the pre- and post-applications of the English- speaking anxiety scale according to the study participants.
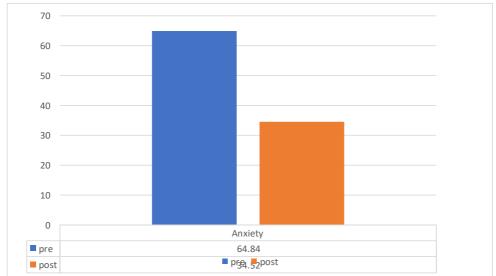
Table 10

Paired Samples Statistics for the pre- and post-applications of the anxiety scale

Anxiety		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t- value	P-value
Pair 1	Pre	25	64.8400	12.31422	21.04	0.000
	Post	25	34.5200	10.67755		

As shown in table (10), there is a significant difference between the mean scores of the participants on the post application of the English-speaking anxiety scale (M=34.52, SD=10.67) and its pre application (M=64.84, SD=12.31); $T(24) = 21.04$, $p = 0.000$. The significance of *T* is (0.000), which is smaller than (0.05), means that there are statistically significant differences between participants' mean scores of the post application of the scale and those of the pre application of the anxiety scale, and these results assure that the second hypothesis has been verified according to the scores given above.

Figure (2)

differences between participants' mean scores of the post-application and those of the pre-application of the English – speaking anxiety scale

	Anxiety
pre	64.84
post	34.52

Hypothesis Three

The third hypothesis of the current study is "There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the participants' post application of the social presence scale and the test value in favor of the former."

In order to check the validity of this hypothesis, the researcher calculated the mean scores of the participants on the social presence scale and the Test value using *one Sample T-test (SPSS, Version 23).*

Testing the social presence scale given by the study group:

Scores of the participants on the two tests were calculated by *SPSS* to check their normality as shown in table (11).

Table 11

Test of Normailty for the social presence test value/post-administration

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Post social presence scale	0.151	25	0.146	0.957	25	0.352

- The significance of the post application is (0.146) according to *Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test*, and (0.352) according to *Shapiro-Wilk Test*.
- The significance of the post application is greater than (0.05), and this means that the scores follow the normal distribution.
- There were no outliers in the scores of the students in the post test.

Meeting all the requirements, the data of the post administration of the social presence scale was then analyzed using the *Paired Samples T-test*, using *SPSS*. Table (12) shows the statistics of the test value/post-administration according to the participants.
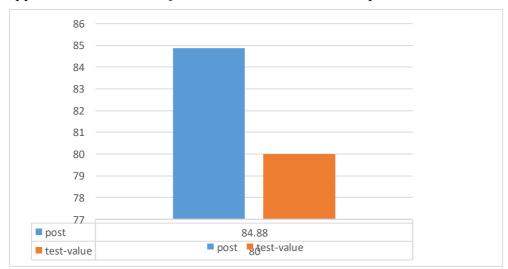
Table 12

One Sample Statistics for the social presence scale

Online collaborative learning attitude scale		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t- value	P-value
Pair 1	Test value	25	80.00	0.000	5.48	0.000
	Post	25	84.8	4.44		

As shown in table (12), there is a significant difference between the mean scores of the participants on the post-application of the scale (M=84.8 significance of *T* is (0.000), which is smaller than (0.05), means that there are statistically significant differences between participants' mean scores of the post-application and those of the test value on the social presence scale, and these results assure that the third hypothesis has been verified according to the scores given above.

Figure (3)

differences between participants' mean scores of the post-application and those of the test value on the social presence scale

5. Discussion

This part sheds light on the interpretation and discussion of the findings presented in the previous section. The findings are interpreted and discussed in light of the study hypotheses.

The primary purpose of the present study was to develop EFL speaking skills and social presence for first year students enrolled in the English department, basic education section at Faculty of Education, Ain Shams University, Egypt through using a program based on online collaborative learning. The program included online collaborative learning tasks that were required to be implemented by the different collaborative groups through zoom breakout rooms. The results of the study revealed that the program based on online collaborative learning proved to be statistically and educationally effective on developing EFL speaking skills, and social presence as well as reducing English-speaking anxiety levels for first year students enrolled in the English department, basic education section at Faculty of Education, Ain Shams University.

Concerning the first hypothesis, the findings revealed that there are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the study participants on the pre- and post-applications of the overall speaking skill test and in each skill separately in favor of the post application. Also results showed variation in the significant differences among the EFL speaking skills as follows: accuracy (6.53); fluency (14.21); vocabulary (7.14); structure (4.00); communication strategies (5.25). According to the significant differences among the speaking skills, fluency is considered the most developed skill and structure is the least developed skill when comparing the T values of each speaking sub skill. These findings indicate that the program that is based on online collaborative learning was effective in developing participants' overall speaking skills as well as each sub-skill separately. This development can be attributed to several factors:

- Online collaborative learning 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 their face-to-face learning experience where students had somehow limited time and limited sources of information.
- The online collaborative learning tasks which aimed at pushing students to collaborate and practice their speaking skills were authentic based tasks which made participants more involved to do the required discussion and more attentive to respond to the speaking tasks.
- Online collaborative learning tasks gave students opportunities to collaborate and speak English in a non-threatening environment where participants had enough time to search for information, vocabulary, phrases, check their structure and check their pronunciation before they had to engage in discussion with their peers.

- Online collaborative learning provided participants with sufficient opportunities to evaluate their fellow team members and other peers which could enhance self-reflection as well.
- Online collaborative learning shifted the assessment process from being norm-referenced to criterion-referenced as well as from summative to formative assessment.
- The feedback participants received from the researcher and other peers during their collaborative groups on the zoom breakout rooms enabled them to learn more from their mistakes regarding English language speaking skills.
- Zoom provided participants with more practice time to acquire and practice their EFL speaking skills and it also gave the researcher better chance to monitor students' speaking progress along with their online collaborative discussion.

To sum up the first hypothesis, it can be concluded that the present study found that the program based on online collaborative learning was statistically significant on developing EFL speaking skills for first year English department basic education students at faculty of Education, Ain Shams University. The significant difference was at 0.01 between the mean scores of the participants in the pre- and post-applications of the overall speaking skill test and in each sub-skill in favor of the post application. These findings are consistent with many other studies that reported significant impact for online collaborative learning such as Chiu et al. 2010; Liu, Tao, and Nee 2008; Macdonald 2003; Ismail, 2013; Al Sayed ,2013; Wali 2010.

Concerning the second hypothesis, the findings revealed that there are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the study participants on the pre -post applications of the overall English-speaking anxiety scale in favor of the post application. According to the pre application of the English-speaking anxiety scale, which was administered before the treatment, the total mean scores of the study group were (64.8) as most of the participants reported they suffered from anxiety when

they were asked to speak English in general. They also expressed their reasons for anxiety such as fear of speaking in public or in front of other learners or native speakers, shyness and inaccuracy of speaking. They reported that they were avoiding eye contact with the English teacher or instructor. According to the post application of the English-speaking anxiety scale, the total mean scores of the study participants reduced to (34.5) after being exposed to the program based on online collaborative learning. Therefore, the results indicated that the program that is based on online collaborative learning is effective in reducing English-speaking anxiety levels as the results showed that there is a reversed relationship between online collaborative learning on one side and English-speaking anxiety levels as the mean scores of the participants' post application of the English-speaking anxiety scale was less than that of the pre application which indicated that online collaborative learning reduced participants' English-speaking anxiety. This may be attributed to the following reasons:

- The online collaborative learning environment was a safe environment where students practiced speaking through sharing their ideas and opinions without being afraid of making mistakes or receiving negative feedback.
- The program based on online collaborative learning helped the participants feel comfortable.
- The change in the teacher's role from an assessor of students' speaking skills to facilitator, and organizer.

Concerning the third hypothesis, the findings revealed there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the participants' post application of the social presence scale and the test value in favor of the former. One of the purposes of this study was to investigate if the participants' social presence (human contact & social interaction, sense of support and sense of comfort) were impacted as a result of participating in the program that is based on online collaborative learning. The results of the social

presence scale indicated that the participants felt more connected with their instructor and peers. This study extends results from previous research that investigated the effect of online learning on social presence such as Clark, Strudler, and Grove (2015); Palloff and Pratt (2007); Gallagher- Lepak et al., (2009); Conrad, (2005).

Online collaborative learning has been found to be fundamental for facilitating social group emotional support which is necessary for providing guidance, help and support and they also promote social presence. These results were also in consistent with other studies such as (Ornellas & Muñoz Carril, 2014) & (Lee et al., 2011), Hernández-Sellés, et al. (2019).

To sum up, considering the existing research and the results of the present study, it can be said that online collaborative learning can enhance and develop speaking skills and social presence.

6. conclusions, implications, and suggestions for further research
6.1 Conclusion

It can be concluded that the program based on online collaborative learning is effective in developing EFL speaking skills and social presence among first year English department basic education students at the Faculty of Education, Ain Shams University. Online collaborative learning suggests a way of dealing with students that respects and highlights collaborative group members' abilities and contributions which lead in turn to more engagement in the learning process. Also, zoom helps students to practice their EFL speaking skills through interacting orally with one another and receiving feedback from peers and the researcher. The results of the present study are in consistent with results that proved the positive impact of online collaborative learning on learning and achievement in general such as Chiu et al. 2010; Liu, Tao, and Nee 2008; Macdonald 2003; Ismail, 2013; Al Sayed ,2013; Wali 2010. To sum up, the results drawn from the present study can

provide the basis for many other studies to be based on online collaborative learning to develop other language areas and aspects.

6.2 Implications of the study

Based on the findings of the study, some implications for researchers, educators and curriculum designers are recommended as follows:

- It is recommended that EFL instructors and teachers should be trained on using online collaborative learning to be able to deliver their teaching practices of EFL speaking skills using such effective approaches and tools.
- Students' English-speaking anxiety should be investigated from the very beginning because, as observed in this study, it is one of the serious barriers of speaking skills in English classes.
- Social presence in an online environment should be enhanced as it plays a vital role in the learning process and positively affects students' academic performance according to recent research.
- EFL curriculum and course designers should take online collaborative learning into account when addressing EFL speaking skills.
- Engaging students into collaborative groups and training them on practicing online collaborative learning are highly recommended.

6.3 Suggestions for further research

- While the main focus of this study was to investigate the effect of a program based on online collaborative learning on developing EFL speaking skills and social presence, further research is needed to address other language skills and aspects.
- Investigating the effect of Online collaborative learning on EFL speaking skills in other educational stages.
- Research in the field of training pre- and in-service teachers on using online collaborative leaning is highly recommended.

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