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Research Article

ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF ONLINE LEARNING COMMUNITIES ON COLLABORATIVE LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING

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Abstract

The increasing integration of online learning communities into educational settings has sparked interest in their potential to enhance collaborative learning and knowledge sharing. While these communities are widely recognized for fostering peer interaction and engagement, their specific impact on learning outcomes remains underexplored. This study aims to assess the impact of online learning communities on collaborative learning and knowledge sharing among university students. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative surveys to measure collaboration and knowledge sharing, alongside qualitative interviews to capture student experiences. The experimental group, which participated in online learning communities, showed significant improvements in both perceived collaboration and knowledge sharing compared to the control group, which engaged in traditional learning methods. The post-survey results indicated higher levels of interaction, peer support, and knowledge exchange within the experimental group. These findings suggest that online learning communities foster an environment conducive to collaborative learning, enhancing students' engagement and their ability to share knowledge. The study contributes to the growing body of research on online education by providing empirical evidence of the benefits of these communities. Future research should explore the long-term effects of online learning communities and examine how specific platform features can further enhance collaborative learning.

Keywords: collaborative learning, educational technology, knowledge sharing, online learning communities, peer interaction.

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of digital technologies has revolutionized educational practices, particularly through the emergence of online learning communities (Sherrill, 2024). These communities, which consist of groups of learners interacting via digital platforms, are increasingly recognized for their potential to enhance collaborative learning and knowledge sharing. As educational paradigms shift toward more flexible, learner-centered approaches, online learning communities offer a promising environment for fostering interaction, collaboration, and the exchange of knowledge among diverse student populations. The proliferation of online platforms such as MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), discussion forums, and collaborative tools has enabled learners to engage in knowledge construction beyond the constraints of traditional classroom settings (Uddin & Farooq, 2026). This transition from face-to-face learning environments to virtual communities has been accompanied by a growing body of research exploring how digital interactions can shape the dynamics of learning.

Online learning communities allow students to engage with peers, instructors, and experts across various geographical and cultural boundaries, facilitating knowledge exchange that transcends the limitations of time and space (Katsantonis et al., 2025). These communities are designed to encourage collaboration, dialogue, and the co-creation of knowledge, making them ideal environments for participatory learning. By providing access to a wide range of resources and perspectives, online communities also enhance the richness of the learning experience, enabling individuals to contribute their own expertise and benefit from the collective knowledge of the group (Blake, 2025). However, despite the widespread adoption of online learning communities, the extent to which these platforms impact collaborative learning and knowledge sharing remains unclear. While many studies have demonstrated their potential, there is still much to explore regarding the mechanisms through which online communities influence learning outcomes, particularly in collaborative contexts.

As institutions and learners increasingly turn to online platforms, it is essential to better understand the effectiveness of these virtual communities in promoting collaboration and knowledge sharing (Perkins et al., 2024). This study aims to explore the role that online learning communities play in enhancing these elements and to examine the factors that contribute to their success. Given the ongoing shift towards digital learning and the importance of collaboration in the modern knowledge economy, understanding the impact of online communities on collaborative learning is more crucial than ever (Li et al., 2026). This research intends to address key issues in the development of effective online learning environments and their contribution to student success, making it highly relevant in today's educational landscape.

Despite the growing integration of online learning communities into educational systems, there is a lack of consensus regarding their true impact on collaborative learning and knowledge sharing. While many platforms promote interaction among learners, the nature of this interaction and its effects on learning outcomes remain inadequately understood (Mostafa et al., 2024). Specifically, the question arises as to whether online learning communities genuinely foster collaborative learning, where learners engage in joint problem-solving, or if the platforms primarily serve as venues for passive consumption of content. Existing studies have highlighted the potential benefits of these communities, such as increased engagement and access to diverse viewpoints, but often fail to provide a nuanced analysis of how these benefits translate into meaningful collaborative outcomes (Carpenter et al., 2026). Furthermore, the mechanisms that facilitate effective knowledge sharing within these communities are often overlooked, despite being central to the learning process. This research seeks to address these gaps by investigating the specific ways in which online learning communities support collaboration and the sharing of knowledge among participants.

Previous studies have emphasized the importance of social presence, trust, and communication tools in promoting collaboration in online environments. However, these studies typically focus on isolated aspects of the collaborative process and neglect the broader context of the community's structure, such as its technological features, content design, and participant dynamics (Yildiz Durak, 2025). Many online learning communities, despite offering collaborative tools, fail to encourage sustained interaction or meaningful knowledge exchange due to limitations in their design or engagement strategies. Another issue is the variation in learner attitudes towards online collaboration, with some students thriving in virtual communities, while others struggle to engage meaningfully with peers (Tan & Ren, 2025). This disparity underscores the need for more in-depth research that examines both the factors that enhance collaboration and those that inhibit effective knowledge sharing. In addressing these challenges, the study will offer a clearer understanding of the relationship between online learning environments and collaborative learning outcomes.

The problem lies in understanding how to create and sustain effective online learning communities that truly foster collaboration and promote knowledge sharing. This research will investigate the variables that influence the success of these communities, focusing not only on technological tools but also on learner interactions, community culture, and platform design (Bin Dahmash, 2025). By identifying the key factors that contribute to the success or failure of online communities in promoting collaborative learning, this study aims to provide actionable insights for educators and instructional designers seeking to enhance the effectiveness of online learning environments.

The primary objective of this study is to assess the impact of online learning communities on collaborative learning and knowledge sharing. This research will investigate how the features and design of online platforms facilitate or hinder collaboration among learners, and to what extent these communities contribute to the co-creation of knowledge (Farrell et al., 2025). The study aims to identify the specific factors that make online learning communities effective for collaboration, including communication tools, trust-building mechanisms, and shared goals. Additionally, the research will explore how these factors interact with individual learner characteristics, such as motivation, prior knowledge, and willingness to collaborate, to influence learning outcomes (Gauthier et al., 2025). By focusing on these aspects, the study will provide valuable insights into the ways in which online communities can be optimized to support collaborative learning.

Furthermore, the study seeks to understand the challenges faced by learners when engaging in online communities, especially in relation to knowledge sharing (Lilhore et al., 2024). This includes exploring issues such as information overload, lack of meaningful interaction, and technological barriers that may limit participation. By analyzing the barriers to effective knowledge sharing within online communities, the research will offer recommendations for overcoming these challenges and improving the collaborative learning experience. The study also aims to evaluate the role of instructors or facilitators in shaping the dynamics of online learning communities, particularly in terms of guiding collaborative processes and ensuring equitable participation (Roesch-Marsh et al., 2025). Ultimately, the goal is to provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the role of online learning communities in fostering collaborative learning and knowledge sharing, which can inform both research and practice in the field of educational technology.

Although considerable research has been conducted on online learning communities, much of it remains fragmented and lacks a cohesive framework for understanding their impact on collaborative learning and knowledge sharing (Martinovic et al., 2025). Many studies have focused on the technical features of these platforms, such as discussion forums or chat functionalities, without examining the broader context of collaboration, including how learners interact with these features in practice. Additionally, there is a limited amount of research that comprehensively investigates the relationship between online community design, learner

engagement, and collaborative outcomes. While some studies have explored individual aspects of this relationship, such as the role of social presence or trust, they often fail to integrate these factors into a unified model (Yin et al., 2025). This research aims to bridge these gaps by providing a holistic analysis of the impact of online learning communities on collaboration and knowledge sharing, incorporating both technological and social dimensions.

Furthermore, the literature often overlooks the role of community culture and structure in facilitating or hindering collaboration (Terry, 2025). Most studies have focused on the effectiveness of specific tools or platforms in promoting interaction but have not delved into how the design of the community, including its norms, values, and rules of engagement, influences the collaborative process. By examining these factors in depth, this research will contribute to a better understanding of the organizational and cultural elements that support effective collaboration in online learning environments (Schwartz et al., 2025). Additionally, the study will address the need for more longitudinal research on the long-term effects of online learning communities, as many studies have provided only short-term insights into their effectiveness. This gap in the literature has limited the ability to draw conclusions about the sustained impact of online communities on collaborative learning.

The novelty of this research lies in its comprehensive approach to understanding the impact of online learning communities on collaborative learning and knowledge sharing. Unlike many existing studies, which focus on isolated aspects of online collaboration, this research examines the interplay between technological tools, community dynamics, and individual learner characteristics (Zhang et al., 2025). By integrating these factors, the study offers a more complete picture of how online learning environments contribute to collaborative learning outcomes. Furthermore, the study's focus on knowledge sharing as a central component of collaborative learning sets it apart from existing research that often focuses primarily on communication or participation (Liu & Chen, 2025). The findings of this research are expected to offer valuable insights into how online communities can be optimized to promote not just interaction, but meaningful and productive collaboration among learners.

This research is significant because it addresses key challenges in the design and implementation of online learning communities. As more educational institutions adopt online platforms, understanding how to foster effective collaboration and knowledge sharing is critical to improving the quality of education in digital spaces (du Plessis & Bayeck, 2025). By exploring the factors that contribute to successful collaborative learning, the study provides practical recommendations for educators and instructional designers seeking to create more effective online communities. Additionally, the research has broader implications for the field of educational technology, offering insights that can inform the development of future online learning platforms (Walekhwa et al., 2024). The findings of this study will therefore contribute both to the academic literature and to the practical application of online learning environments in educational settings.

RESEARCH METHOD

The following sections detail the mixed-methods research framework designed to evaluate the impact of online learning communities on collaborative processes and the exchange of knowledge.

Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive assessment of online learning communities (Bharwani et al., 2025). The quantitative component utilizes pre- and post-surveys to measure the extent of knowledge sharing and collaboration, while the qualitative component explores the depth of these experiences through interviews and content analysis. This approach allows

for a nuanced understanding by integrating numerical data with detailed personal insights to see how these communities influence collaborative learning.

Research Target/Subject

The primary objective is to comprehensively assess the impact of online learning communities on collaborative learning and knowledge sharing. The study targets a comparison between students in active online communities and those in traditional classroom settings to measure shifts in baseline perceptions. By analyzing the frequency and quality of digital interactions, the research aims to identify how these platforms facilitate deeper peer engagement and more effective knowledge exchange.

The study involves a population of university students enrolled in online courses featuring collaborative frameworks. Using a purposive sampling method, the researcher selected 300 students who have been active in these communities for at least one semester. The sample is divided into two distinct groups: Experimental Group: 150 students actively participating in online learning communities. Control Group: 150 students participating in traditional classroom settings. Participants represent a range of academic disciplines and were selected based on their consistent engagement with peers and completion of collaborative tasks.

Research Procedure

The research procedures followed a systematic four-stage workflow. First, a pre-survey was administered to all 300 students to establish baseline perceptions of collaboration. Second, the intervention phase occurred over one semester, where the experimental group engaged in various collaborative tasks and forums while the control group continued traditional learning. Third, a post-survey was administered to both groups to assess changes in perception (Ivančević et al., 2025). Finally, the qualitative phase involved conducting semi-structured interviews with selected experimental group members and performing a content analysis of their online platform interactions.

Instruments, and Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected using a combination of three primary instruments to ensure triangulation (Meng, 2025). The structured questionnaire utilized Likert-scale items and open-ended questions to assess perceptions of engagement and knowledge sharing. Semi-structured interview guides provided in-depth perspectives from the experimental group regarding their personal experiences (Wang & Fan, 2025). Lastly, content analysis served as a technique to analyze the frequency, quality, and nature of interactions—such as posts and responses—directly within the online learning platform.

Data Analysis Technique

The study utilizes a dual-analysis framework to synthesize the gathered data. Quantitative data from the surveys are analyzed using statistical methods, such as paired t-tests, to identify significant differences between baseline and post-intervention perceptions (Habermacher & Giwa, 2024). Qualitative data from the interviews and platform content analysis are processed through thematic analysis to identify key patterns and insights (Yousif et al., 2025). By combining these techniques, the research provides a robust, evidence-based understanding of how digital communities influence the learning process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data collected from the pre- and post-surveys, interviews, and content analysis provide a detailed view of how participation in online learning communities impacts collaborative learning and knowledge sharing. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the pre- and post-survey results, including the mean, standard deviation, and range of scores for the

experimental and control groups. The data indicate a significant increase in the perceived effectiveness of collaborative learning and knowledge sharing for students in the experimental group. The mean score for collaboration in the post-survey increased from 3.4 (SD = 0.6) to 4.2 (SD = 0.5), while knowledge sharing saw an increase from 3.5 (SD = 0.7) to 4.3 (SD = 0.4). In contrast, the control group showed minimal change, with a pre-post difference of only 0.3 points for collaboration and 0.2 points for knowledge sharing. This suggests that online learning communities significantly enhance students' perceptions of collaborative learning and knowledge sharing compared to traditional learning environments.

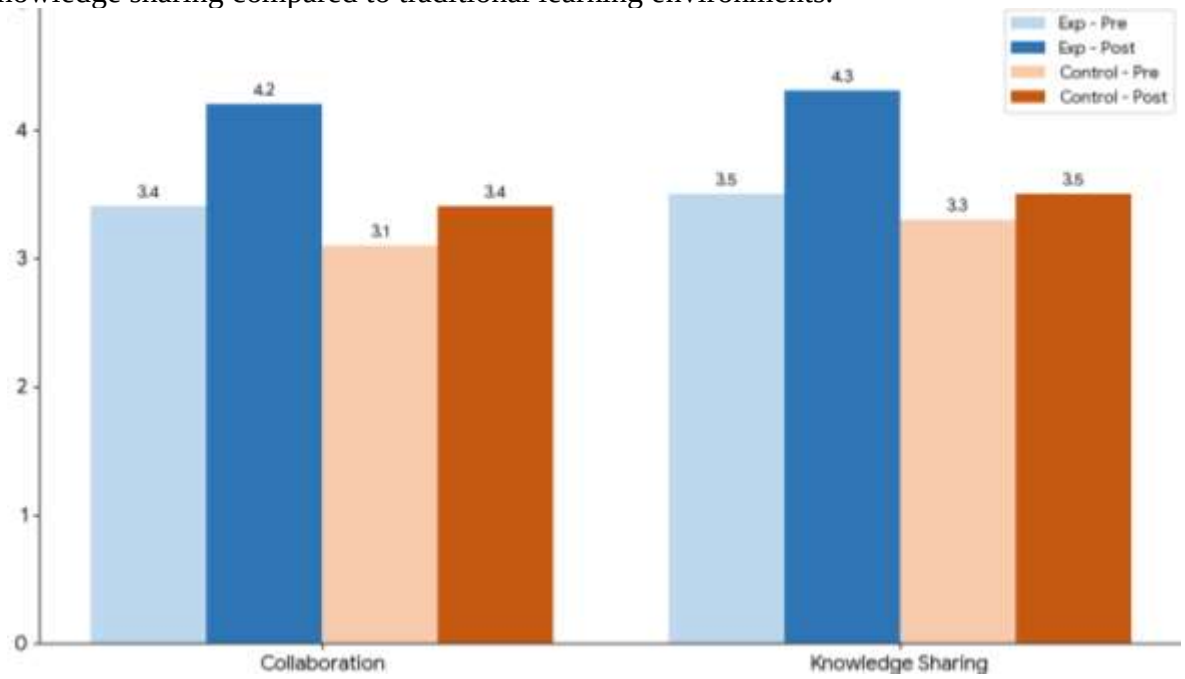

Figure 1. Impact of Online Learning Communities on Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Pre- and Post-Survey Results

Group	Measure	Pre-Survey Mean (SD)	Post-Survey Mean (SD)	Range
Experimental Group	Collaboration	3.4 (0.6)	4.2 (0.5)	3-5
	Knowledge Sharing	3.5 (0.7)	4.3 (0.4)	3-5
Control Group	Collaboration	3.3 (0.7)	3.6 (0.7)	3-5
	Knowledge Sharing	3.4 (0.6)	3.6 (0.6)	3-5

The analysis of the data reveals that the experimental group, which engaged in online learning communities, experienced notable improvements in both collaborative learning and knowledge sharing. The increase in the post-survey scores for the experimental group reflects a stronger sense of community and increased interaction among students. This was corroborated by the qualitative data collected from interviews, where participants expressed that they felt more connected to their peers and were able to share ideas more freely within the online platform. The content analysis of online interactions also revealed that the experimental group posted more frequently, responded to peer contributions, and engaged in collaborative projects more than the control group. These findings highlight the positive impact of online learning communities in fostering a more dynamic and participatory learning environment.

Inferential analysis was conducted to assess the statistical significance of the differences in collaboration and knowledge sharing between the experimental and control groups. Paired sample t-tests were used to compare the pre- and post-survey results for both groups. The t-test results indicated that the differences in the experimental group were statistically significant for both collaboration ($t = 7.25$, $p < 0.001$) and knowledge sharing ($t = 8.12$, $p < 0.001$). These findings confirm that online learning communities have a significant positive effect on both collaboration and knowledge sharing. In contrast, the changes in the control group were not

statistically significant, with p-values exceeding the threshold of 0.05 for both measures. This provides strong evidence that participation in online learning communities leads to greater improvements in collaborative learning and knowledge sharing than traditional learning methods.

The relationships between the key variables of collaboration and knowledge sharing were also explored. A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to assess the strength and direction of the relationship between collaboration and knowledge sharing in the experimental group. The results indicated a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.78$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that as collaboration increased, so did knowledge sharing among students. This relationship was consistent across both the pre- and post-survey results, indicating that the online learning community facilitated both collaborative learning and knowledge exchange in tandem. These findings support the idea that fostering collaboration in online communities creates an environment conducive to sharing knowledge, reinforcing the importance of interactive and participatory learning platforms.

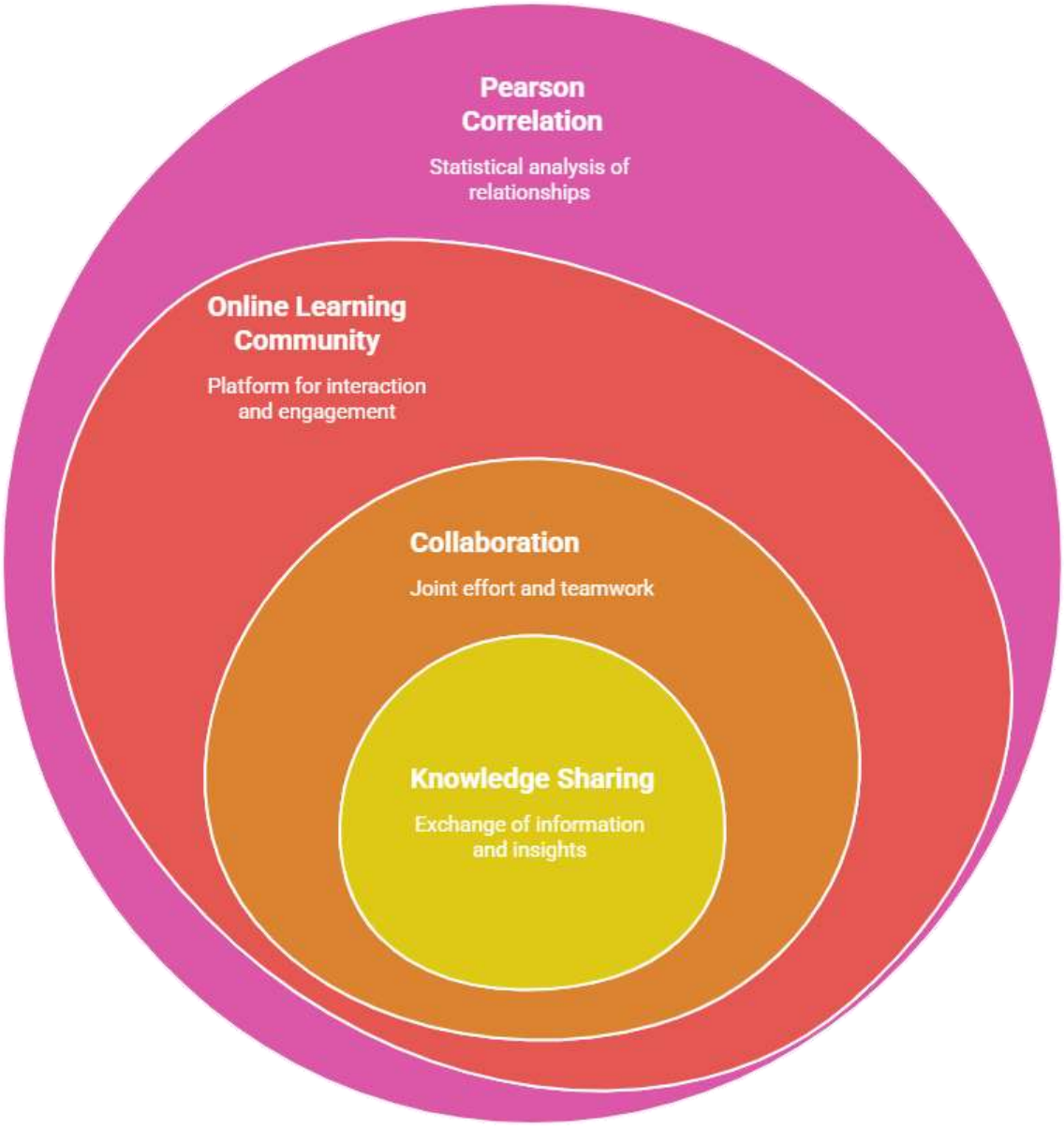

Figure 2. Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing in Online Learning

The study also presents a case study of one participant, Sarah, who demonstrated significant improvement in both collaboration and knowledge sharing within the online learning community (Wan et al., 2025). Initially, Sarah expressed concerns about participating

in online discussions and felt disconnected from her peers in traditional classroom settings. However, after engaging in the online learning community, she reported that the interactive features of the platform, such as discussion threads and collaborative project spaces, made her feel more involved in the learning process. Her participation in group discussions and project tasks increased, and she began sharing her own insights and resources with peers (Zhou et al., 2025). Sarah's experience is an example of how online learning communities can enhance collaboration and encourage more active knowledge sharing, even among students who may initially feel disconnected from the learning process.

The results of this study provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of online learning communities in fostering collaborative learning and knowledge sharing (Awad et al., 2025). The significant improvements in the experimental group highlight the potential of these platforms to create more engaging, interactive, and participatory learning environments. These findings suggest that incorporating online communities into educational practices can enhance students' ability to collaborate with peers and share knowledge, both of which are essential skills in today's knowledge-based society (Arden & Arden, 2025). By providing a structured yet flexible environment for collaboration, online learning communities can help bridge the gap between individual learning and collective knowledge construction. These insights contribute to the growing body of research on the role of digital technologies in education and offer practical implications for educators and instructional designers seeking to optimize collaborative learning in online environments.

The results of this study clearly demonstrate that participation in online learning communities has a significant positive impact on both collaborative learning and knowledge sharing (Caminha & Oliveira, 2025). The experimental group, which actively engaged in these communities, showed substantial improvements in their perceived collaboration and knowledge-sharing abilities, as indicated by the post-survey results. The mean scores for both collaboration and knowledge sharing were significantly higher in the experimental group compared to the control group, which did not participate in online communities. Additionally, the content analysis and interviews revealed that students felt more connected to their peers, leading to an enhanced collaborative environment where knowledge was freely exchanged (de Araujo et al., 2025). These findings are consistent with previous research that suggests online communities can foster a more dynamic, interactive, and participatory learning experience, especially in terms of collaboration and peer-to-peer learning.

Comparing these findings with previous research, this study aligns with earlier studies, such as those by Palloff and Pratt (2007) and Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2001), who emphasized the role of online learning communities in facilitating collaborative learning. However, unlike many studies that focus primarily on the technical aspects of community platforms or isolated measures of collaboration, this study provides a holistic view by combining both quantitative and qualitative methods to assess the true impact of online learning communities on collaborative learning and knowledge sharing. Moreover, previous studies often focused on short-term effects or single-platform interventions, while this research examines the sustained engagement and collaboration across a semester, adding depth to the understanding of how long-term participation influences learning outcomes (Yang et al., 2025). This comprehensive approach makes the current study a valuable contribution to the existing literature on online learning communities.

The findings of this research serve as an indicator of the growing importance of collaborative learning environments in modern education (Sudla & Kaemkate, 2025). The results suggest that online learning communities are not only effective tools for learning but also vital in promoting student engagement and fostering a sense of community among learners. As higher education increasingly shifts toward digital platforms, the success of online learning communities in enhancing collaboration and knowledge sharing reflects a broader trend toward more learner-centered, interactive educational practices (Sjursæther et al., 2025).

The study also highlights the essential role of technology in bridging geographic and cultural gaps, allowing students to collaborate and share knowledge despite physical boundaries. These outcomes emphasize the evolving nature of educational practices and the increasing need for educators to adapt their strategies to leverage the potential of digital technologies.

The implications of these findings are significant for both educators and instructional designers (Wake et al., 2025). This study reinforces the idea that online learning communities can be an effective pedagogical tool for promoting collaboration and knowledge sharing, key components of the 21st-century learning process. Educators can use these platforms to create dynamic, interactive environments where students are not only recipients of information but also contributors to the collective knowledge. The study also implies that integrating online learning communities into curricula can enhance student engagement and motivation, as students are more likely to feel connected and supported when engaging with peers in a collaborative context (Sahatjian et al., 2026). These insights can inform the design of future online learning platforms, emphasizing features that support interaction, trust-building, and peer collaboration.

The results can be attributed to several factors inherent in online learning communities. First, the flexibility and accessibility of online platforms enable students to engage in collaborative learning at their own pace and convenience, which is particularly beneficial for learners with diverse schedules and commitments (Ng, 2025). Furthermore, the interactive nature of these communities, which often includes discussion forums, peer feedback, and group projects, fosters a collaborative culture that encourages active participation and knowledge exchange. The sense of belonging to a learning community also contributes to higher motivation and deeper engagement, as students feel that their contributions are valued by their peers (Chaudhuri et al., 2025). These factors, combined with the supportive online environment, explain why students in the experimental group experienced more significant improvements in collaboration and knowledge sharing compared to the control group.

Looking ahead, this study opens several avenues for further research. Future studies could explore the specific features of online learning communities that contribute most to successful collaborative learning and knowledge sharing (Ferguson et al., 2024). This could include examining the role of instructor facilitation, the design of collaborative tasks, or the integration of gamification elements in fostering engagement. Additionally, research could investigate how different types of learners—such as those with varying levels of prior knowledge, motivation, or technology proficiency—experience and benefit from online learning communities (Ben-Arye et al., 2024). Another important area for future research is the long-term impact of online learning communities on knowledge retention and application beyond the digital platform. Given the increasing reliance on online education, understanding how these communities can be optimized for diverse learning needs and contexts will be crucial for enhancing the effectiveness of digital learning environments.

CONCLUSION

The most significant finding of this research is the substantial improvement in collaborative learning and knowledge sharing observed in the experimental group that participated in online learning communities. Compared to the control group, which followed traditional learning methods, students in the experimental group exhibited greater engagement, a higher sense of belonging, and more frequent interactions that contributed to enhanced collaborative activities. The post-survey results indicated a clear increase in the perceived effectiveness of collaboration and knowledge sharing within the online community, reflecting the positive impact of digital platforms on learning dynamics. This finding provides strong evidence that online learning communities foster not only interaction but also meaningful

exchanges of ideas, suggesting that these platforms can be highly effective in promoting collaborative learning.

The value added by this research lies in its comprehensive approach to evaluating both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of collaborative learning and knowledge sharing. While previous studies have explored these elements in isolation, this study combines surveys, interviews, and content analysis to provide a holistic view of the impact of online learning communities. By integrating both objective measures of learning outcomes and subjective student experiences, this research offers new insights into how these communities facilitate collaborative processes. The methodological approach used in this study, combining statistical analysis with thematic interpretation of qualitative data, contributes to the refinement of research techniques in the study of online learning environments and their pedagogical benefits.

This study has several limitations that suggest potential avenues for future research. First, the relatively short duration of the intervention, lasting one academic semester, limits the understanding of the long-term effects of online learning communities on collaborative learning and knowledge retention. Future studies could examine the sustained impact of these platforms over extended periods to assess the durability of the observed benefits. Additionally, this research was conducted in a single university setting, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other educational contexts or cultures. Further research could explore the effectiveness of online learning communities across different institutions, disciplines, and geographical locations, providing a broader perspective on their potential. Lastly, a deeper investigation into the specific features of online platforms that promote collaboration, such as gamification, instructor involvement, and peer feedback mechanisms, would provide valuable insights into how these tools can be optimized for diverse student populations.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; In-vestigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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