

Beyond Face Value: Harnessing the Intellect by Looking Past Appearances and Offering Students Multiple Modalities to Participate in Online Discussions

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ABSTRACT

Covid 19 mandatory online teaching brought about insights and paradigm shifts experienced on a global level by educators and learners alike. One example of such a paradigm shift was explored at Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane, Morocco, in the English composition course. It was hypothesized that lower-level English composition freshman students may have had more cognition and confidence in whole-class discussions when offered multiple ways to participate because appearances on camera seemed to impede participation rates, performance and ideation, particularly with female students in the Muslim-majority nation. Subsequent in-class experiments examined the differences between participation rates and performances of students in whole-class discussions whilst online during Covid 19 in three response modes: audio, text and camera, and a follow-up survey collected opinions on using those modes. Findings substantiate the hypothesis that learners experience fewer inhibitions and more accurate English when responding through text compared with audio and camera, especially amongst female participants. Attitudes towards cameras also reveal inhibitions mostly stemming from concerns over appearances. Findings support Krashen's theory on the affective filter as well as Plato's theories on the physical senses as an impediment to the acquisition of knowledge. Specific cultural and religious beliefs, namely belief in the evil eye and guarding one's gaze, may also have played a part in explaining students' apprehension for using cameras. Recommendations for applications include allowing students multiple modes of participation in a blended learning approach, collecting data using automatic transcription through teleconferencing platforms such as MS Teams for language output analysis, and for educators to use this data to investigate their own implicit biases which may impede instructor performance.

Keywords: appearances, affective filter, online synchronous learning, reduced cognitive load, ancient Greek rhetoric

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1. Introduction

Mandatory teaching online in the middle of the spring semester, 2020, using MS Teams had unintended consequences in English composition courses. Sessions were suddenly switched from face-to-face, unrecorded lectures, to recorded classes with all videos turned off. Turning off videos was both a practical and moral choice. Initially, the decision was made because when all videos were switched on, the connection lagged terribly. Moreover, as a covered Muslim convert, the researcher preferred to keep her countenance under her control at all times, and the online platform posed a threat to that control. As a result, a shift was noticed in the teaching approach. How the audience perceived appearances was no longer befuddling, there was no need to provide each student with eye contact, a congenial smile, and often distracting colloquies. Instructions and lectures began to contain more substance and less fluff, and accountability for the accuracy of each statement came to the forefront, from the vocabulary chosen to the facts injected into lessons. Performance and credibility increased

because the focus had shifted from superficialities to pure transmission of thought. Teachers and students were no longer speaking to be seen but speaking to be heard and understood. This was especially relevant to the female professors and students who often felt pre-occupied with their appearance instead of harnessing the power of their intellect to discover and convey their personal truths hidden within.

To substantiate this growing shift in awareness, a study was conducted to draw observable links between appearances, learning, language production and Islamic culture. Specifically, the theoretical framework included ancient Greek philosophies on the physical senses, most notably sight, as impediments to the acquisition of knowledge and truth as proposed by Plato, the affective filter causing anxiety in the acquisition of a target language put forth by Stephen Krashen, cultural and religious practices and beliefs such as the evil eye and guarding one's gaze from Muslim-majority countries like Morocco, and finally, how all these factors may have contributed to apprehension during synchronous online emergency lockdown teaching due to Covid 19. It is believed there is a gap in the research drawing connections and conclusions between these variables since most university level lessons are not recorded and made available for later review, particularly during emergency online teaching. Previous research explores online learning from students who have willingly registered for an online course or from learning conducted in the traditional face-to-face environment without the facilitation of MS Teams offering multiple pathways for participation. Moreover, ancient Greek philosophies on attaining the truth in the context of English composition, or rhetoric, together with Krashen's theories on the affective filter have not been directly tested together to explain some of the behavioral phenomena encountered in the Covid 19 induced online learning environment.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Online Synchronous Learning, Feedback, and Reduced Cognitive Load

During Covid 19 emergency lockdowns, students of rhetoric experienced growth and progress when given ample feedback on their performance through MS Teams, a phenomenon in learning supported by numerous studies (Orwell, 2006). Reciprocally, so too did professors. Crisp (2020), mentions that "Feedback is a powerful construct in the design of effective instruction, so it seems logical that feedback-delivery technology could be leveraged to increase efficiency by delivering immediate feedback, improve quality by delivering accurate feedback, and maintain appeal by being user-friendly." MS Teams and online learning in general increased not only the rate of feedback but also the range and quality. Both teachers and students had access to tools such as recordings for easier retention, language comprehension and reduced cognitive load through the elimination of requiring notetaking or being subjected to judgements when cameras were switched off. Krashen (1982), a founding philosopher on second language acquisition, proposes that a reduced cognitive load in learning environments, specifically those focused on language acquisition, is achieved when students are not anxious, tense or bored. Additionally, Krashen's theory on the affective filter states emotions act as a lens or filter through which new information is processed. If the affective filter is loaded with anxiety and negative emotions, very little new information will be allowed to flow through the filter. Both input and output of language will be impeded and unable to flow naturally. Thus, Krashen proposes moving away from outdated second language pedagogy, such as rote memorization of dialogue and grammar rules, to a less intimidating way of language acquisition where the focus is on communication and meaning resulting in reduced student anxiety.

2.2. Cultural and Religious Considerations

Moreover, because the trials in this study were conducted in Morocco, a Muslim-majority nation (U.S. Department of State, 2021) following the law of Islamic jurisprudence (sharia), cultural beliefs were also taken into consideration to explain student anxiety over appearing on camera including belief in the evil eye and guarding one's gaze (Pew Research Center, 2012; Pew Research Center, 2013). According to a study conducted by Pew research, 80% of Moroccans believe in the "evil eye" which is defined by Cambridge dictionary as "a look that someone gives other people that is believed to have the power to injure or harm them" (Cambridge University Press, 2022). Moreover, 83% believe in upholding Islamic jurisprudence, or sharia, as the official law of the land which implies that rulings outlined in the Quran should be adhered to. One such ruling states that both men and women should lower their gazes to avoid temptation or immoral thoughts (The Quran 24: 30-31).

2.3. Future Promise and Benefits of Online Synchronous Learning

Synchronous online sessions also facilitated student-faculty conferences and essay feedback sessions through recordings for improved subsequent drafts. Sharing live documents and PowerPoints provided live collaboration and instant feedback on student understanding and performance, and mistakes were intervened immediately for the benefit of all learners. Research shows that online synchronous learning providing a media-rich environment leads to better student outcomes and deeper engagement (Daft & Lengel, 1986; Themelis & Sime, 2020; Watts, 2016).

Online synchronous sessions offered students who may have been absent, tired or distracted access to the recorded sessions afterward. Screen sharing allowed not only the professor to control the visual aids for lectures but offered students the chance to become more engaged by sharing their own screens as well. Other tools that provided feedback included the running record of all meeting chat comments, shared files, and recorded session links to each class. This feature enabled professors to stay organized, reminded and punctual with student-faculty meeting schedules. Feedback sessions could immediately be switched from one student to the next for the 10-minute slots set up to look over drafts, which saved a lot of time and kept participants on track. Additionally, professors could watch their own streamed videos of lectures to assess the quality of their content, interaction with students, and speech patterns. Areas for improvement were noticed, such as the researcher's constant use of the expression: "In a sense . . ." Generally, professors and students alike improve with feedback, and the worldwide mandatory online teaching during Covid 19 provided an ocean of information that could not have been collected in the traditional setting. Since data serves as feedback, online tools should be embraced by educators upon experiencing just how powerful and accessible they are. It is doubtful that educators will go back to completely traditional teaching methods after experiencing the benefits that technology provides. According to Lister (2020), in an article for Global Workplace Analytics, it is predicted that 25 to 30% of employees will be working online remotely multiple times in a week even after Covid 19 and that online learning will also continue to be in high demand by students and universities to reduce costs (Chirikov & Kizilcec, 2020) with 22% of high school seniors in 2021 planning to attend colleges that offer online course (Fishman, & Hiler, 2020).

Because this teaching phenomenon was implemented globally at roughly the exact same time, the researcher predicts that many other professors of rhetoric or any other subject for that matter may have experienced a similar teaching and learning paradigm shift, and thus, the phenomenon deserves closer inspection.

2.4. Ancient Greek Rhetoric in Relation to Online Synchronous Learning

Ancient Greek rhetoricians did not need streaming sessions of MS Teams to discover these phenomena. They had been preaching principles of effective rhetoric through heightened morality and truth-seeking without the impediments of the senses since Socrates (Plato, & Cope, 1875; Edwards et al. 2004; Ambury, 2021). In Plato's *Phaedo*, Socrates and Simmias converse about the acquisition of wisdom itself. Socrates addresses Simmias in his line of questioning:

Well and what about the acquisition of wisdom itself? Is the body an impediment or not, if a man take it with him as an associate in his search? To illustrate my meaning – do sight and hearing convey any certain truth to men? Or rather, are not the very poets constantly harping to us upon this theme, that there is nothing accurate in what we either see or hear? However, if these two of our bodily senses are not accurate nor to be depended upon, it is hardly likely that the rest are; for they are all, I presume, inferior to these. . . Is it not then in thinking, if at all, that any real truth becomes manifest to her? . . . But she thinks, I should suppose, then best when there is none of these accessories to annoy her, neither hearing nor sight nor pain nor pleasure of any kind, but when she is as much as possible alone by herself and bids adieu to the body, and as far as possible free from communication and contact with it, aspires to that which is. (Plato, & Cope, 1875, p. 16)

Plato further extrapolates on the importance of eliminating that which is perceived through the bodily senses to make way for the true nature of being in the next section of the *Phaedo* by portraying Socrates as imploring Simmias again with:

And would not this purity of thought be best attained by anyone who strives to reach each thing as much as possible with his intellect alone, and neither takes as an accessory the sight in thinking, nor drags after him any other of his senses whatever to keep company with his reasoning faculty; but employs his intellect by itself in its purity in the attempt to catch each particular being by itself in its purity, freed as far as possible from eyes and ears, and so to speak from all the body together, because he thinks it only disturbs the soul and will not let her obtain possession of truth and wisdom when it is in communication with her? Is not this he, Simmias, who, if any, will attain to the reality of things? (pp 17-18)

This research aims to show the efficacy of online synchronous teaching implementing philosophies from the Classical Greek age on leading a moral, examined life undeterred by the physical senses to attain truth and knowledge as well as principles of second language acquisition including the affective filter hypothesis proposed by Stephen Krashen. When students are not filled with anxiety and can separate their intellect from their physical senses, especially sight, the power of reflection, understanding and performance are harnessed.

3. Methods

Online trials consisting of a convenience sample were conducted on English composition students in three sections at the Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane, Morocco in the spring of 2022 during mandated emergency online teaching due to Covid 19. The first section had 13 male and 7 female students, the second section contained 6 male and 12 female students, and the third section of English composition contained 11 male and 4 female students, totaling 30 male and 23 female students. Each section was asked three introductory discussion questions on the first day of classes using MS Teams to record and automatically transcribe the sessions. The intention behind collecting data from the first day was to understand student

interactions before any power dynamics or familiarity had been established so that responses were based on their natural inclinations or independent personalities. Students were asked to respond to the discussion questions using only their microphones for the first question, only text for the second, and only their cameras for the third. The discussion was followed by a survey which collected 50 from the 53 English compositions students' attitudes towards the questions and modes of responding during the online synchronous sessions with both open and closed questions. Transcripts were later edited for accuracy and used to quantify and qualify the responses in each mode. Both the genders of participants were counted as well as the number of sentences produced by each, and the quality of sentences were assessed using the IELTS speaking and writing bands.

IELTS bands are internationally recognized, respected and relied upon to assess English language proficiency for admission to higher education institutions and for work visa requirements in countries such as the UK, Canada and Australia. They accurately measure the quality of the language output produced in the spoken and written sections of the IELTS test by examining the range and appropriateness of vocabulary used, the ability to address prompts with relevant, specific details and organization, produce sentences with a fluid and flexible range of structural complexity and appropriate tense, and create coherent sentences using accurate spelling, punctuation and capitalization or pronounce words clearly with appropriate intonation. For this trial, pronunciation was not assessed, but rather, the grammatical accuracy, lexical range, coherence, relevance, and depth of the responses, both oral and written. Notes were made comparing the utterances from the audio, text and camera responses on such features to judge which mode had produced higher quality sentences. Another reason that IELTS bands were an appropriate measuring tool to assess quality is that they aligned with the CEFR bands (Common European Framework of Reference,) for language proficiency, allowing the researcher to place utterances in well-known and established language proficiency levels (Council of Europe, 2024). For example, cases of stuttering, false starts, incomplete sentences and a narrow vocabulary range could easily be judged as either an IELTS band 4, or the equivalent CEFR level A2 to B1 (British Council, 2022; IELTS.org, 2023) which is deemed to be between a basic and independent user of the target language. On the other hand, utterances or texts containing a wide lexical range, message coherence and relevance, and grammatical complexity might be judged at a higher proficiency level, such as an IELTS band 7 to 9, or CEFR C1-C2 (proficient user).

4. Results

The table below shows the number of participants who responded to each discussion question using microphones, text messages and cameras as well as the number of sentences produced by each.

Table 1.

Number and Gender of Participants and Number of Sentences by Each in Online English Composition, Sections 1, 2, and 3

Eng 1301 30 male 23 female	Audio only	Number of Audio Only Sentences	Text only	Number of Text Only Sentences	Camera only	Number of Camera Only Sentences	Average Number of Sentences Per Student
Male	6 (20%)	79	18 (60%)	71	4 (13.3%)	50	6.66
Female	5 (21.7%)	69	11 (47.8%)	48	0 (0%)	0	6.04
Total	11(20.75%)	148	29 (54.7%)	119	4 (7.5%)	50	6.39

The findings show that the participation rates for both male and female students in the audio only discussion were somewhat proportionate to the number of male and female students in the English composition course. The audio only question elicited a response rate of 20% for males and 21.7% for females. English composition students participated at a much higher rate than audio in the text only question with three times the rate for males at 60% and more than twice for females at 47.8%. The table above also clearly shows the rate of participation dropped dramatically for the third question requiring the use of cameras indicating a very real apprehension for appearing on screen. The results also show that while 4 out of 30 male students were willing to answer using their cameras, no female students out of 23 responded using their cameras, thus implying there is a particular strain on female students when having to reveal physical appearances. These findings manifest a clear linkage to the hypothesis of this study, that Krashen's theories on cognitive load and the affective filter are indeed prevalent in speaking and writing in a second language. The results also substantiate the theories proposed by Plato on sight and the senses in general as inhibiting the ability to formulate and express one's truth, especially in a foreign language. Women are particularly implicated in these findings as being negatively affected emotionally, cognitively and linguistically by the influence of appearances. This finding may also be explained by the cultural and religious context where the evil eye and guarding one's gaze navigate much of the behavior and social norms.

The findings also show that the amount of language, or number of sentences, produced by each participant was relatively similar for both audio and textual responses at 79 male and 69 female produced sentences in audio and 71 male and 48 female produced sentences in text. Again, there was a major drop in the amount of language elicited in the camera response due to the low rate of participation at only 50 sentences for males and none for females. The ability to produce language, either spoken or written, especially in an English-medium composition course, is vital to the success of students who aim to think critically, formulate ideas, communicate personal interpretations, and commit ideas to writing. When this process is inhibited due to the use of cameras or physical appearances, the retention of information and ability to perform and master the skill of thinking and writing is also impeded as discussed earlier.

In addition to the clear difference in participation rates in audio and text responses compared to the camera, there was also a noticeable difference in the sentence quality of spoken ideas and text messages. Using the IELTS speaking and writing band descriptors, it was found that audio and video sentences were often more flawed in grammar and coherence compared to text messages. See table 2 below for a side-by-side comparison of the sentence quality of all three response modes.

Table 2.

English Composition, Section 1 Sentence Quality in Online Synchronous Sessions Using Teams

Eng 1301, section 1 - 13 male/7 female	Audio	Chat Text	Camera	Comments
E.M.L. Male	Yeah, in terms of how COVID well, first of all I didn't catch COVID.	AUI cares more about its outside reputation than continuing students lol.	I got to choose my major like my parents didn't force me to choose one or to go to AUI.	While there are more words in the audio and camera responses, the sentence written in the chat employed more advanced vocabulary and more concise syntax without repetition, fillers (like, uh, um, well), or run-on sentences. The ideas themselves may be more insightful and sophisticated in the chat text, as well, compared to the other two types of responses.
A. A. Male Student	Uh, for me personally, my family hadn't caught the COVID thankfully.	I found Aui is as expected, good, fun, and productive (if you are willing to put in the effort).	Hello everybody so uh for me I'm a computer science major.	The 2 nd student who responded to all three questions also showed more proficiency, sentence structure variety, and a broader vocabulary range with his text response. There is the use of passive voice in "as expected", three different adjectives with "productive" being a more advanced choice, and the use of the conditional "if" within parentheses to show elaboration on the final point. The other two sentences use a limited range of vocabulary, less sophisticated ideas, and sentence fillers ("Uh").
W.A. Male	Uh, yes, OK so for me the COVID like affected me in many areas to be fair.	I genuinely think that AUI is a great university.	1. OK so hi. 2. Uh, well, my goal actually is pretty simple, 3. like I just want to create, uh, create things virtually.	Again, this student uttered more words in the audio and video responses, but they didn't deliver a clear message efficiently. In fact, three sentences from the video response had to be included in order to grasp the meaning of the first idea. The text message was more direct, had no fillers (uh, ok, well, like) and no redundancy (repetition of the word "create", for example). The sentence structure is more stream-lined with an advanced use of a qualifying adverb between the subject and verb.

Note: Grammatical inaccuracies are purposely left unedited to illustrate how sentence structure fluctuates across modes.

A feature of speaking and writing relevant to this study is the language of immediacy and the language of distance. Koch (1999) explains that both the written and spoken forms of language can be produced with communicative immediacy (spontaneity) or communicative distance (preplanned). For example, discussions and instant messaging would fall on the spectrum near communicative immediacy, and well-prepared, rehearsed speeches for graduation or final drafts of an essay would fall on the opposite end of the spectrum towards communicative distance. In this study's case, both the spoken and written forms of communication employed in the experiments relied on immediacy. Both featured language which was spontaneously derived. Thus, while the modalities were different, language features dependent on immediate communication were shared by both the spoken and written responses, therefore making side-by-side comparisons appropriate.

The language in the audio and camera-only responses contained features placing them at a lower proficiency level according to the IELTS speaking and writing band descriptors including stuttering, false starts, fillers, redundancy, limited vocabulary, and a narrow range of sentence complexity. The texts, however, often featured complex sentences, higher order vocabulary words, and a clear, coherent message as outlined in the table above. The higher proficiency level of the texted responses would indicate that not only are participation rates higher in modalities that do not require students to perform in front of a camera, but ideas are also eloquently and, consequently, more efficiently communicated. Invoking language output which more accurately expresses the students' intended meaning during classroom discussions is a natural desired outcome of a college-level course, especially English composition. Therefore, it would be pedagogically wise to allow students who perform better when offered a layer of anonymity to participate in class discussions through alternative modes, such as texting.

Upon completion of each online discussion, students were invited to fill out a survey on their attitudes towards various response methods used during the session. Results showed a clear dislike for cameras with 62% of students saying video responses were their least favorite. The table below shows the results of the follow-up open-ended question, "Why was that your least favorite mode," which often explains how students are quite apprehensive about their appearances on camera.

Table 3.

Responses to "Why didn't you like it?" Categorized by Response Method in Online English Composition, Sections 1, 2, and 3

Response Number	Audio Method of Response	Chat Method of Response	Video Method of Response – 9 male, 6 female
1.	I still need to improve my English	I felt like there is no interaction between students and the professor	Since we haven't met face to face yet, it makes me a little bit uncomfortable (male)
2.	Ineffective	I did like it but compared to the other ones it has less potential for interacting.	Because it wasn't comfortable. (male)
3.		We can't find an interaction.	I don't feel comfortable on camera. (male)
4.		Because it takes more time to turn your ideas into words and write them. It's better for me to talk freely	Because I don't like to use the camera. (female)
5.		It's less effective because I feel very comfortable when I write than I talk. (This student may	It is more comfortable to communicate through audio. (female)

Response Number	Audio Method of Response	Chat Method of Response	Video Method of Response – 9 male, 6 female
		have misunderstood the question for asking which method was her favorite.)	
6.			I don't feel comfortable while my camera is on. (male)
7.			I feel uncomfortable. (female)
8.			Because using the camera makes me feel more stressed and less confident, but I can get used to it. (female)
9.			It feels weird to talk while the camera is on (male)
10.			The online will only last 2 weeks, then we are going to see each other face to face. (male)
11.			Cause I don't feel good. (male)
12.			To be honest I just feel uncomfortable with the camera, and it makes me less confident. (male)
13.			Sometimes I am not ready to open the camera. (female)
14.			I just do not feel comfortable with it. (female)
15.			I am not usually professionally presented to activate the camera. (male)

While text messaging was seen by some students as the least favorite discussion mode because it lacked interaction, this only accounted for 4 of the 50 responses. The 5th comment under the audio column indicated the student's preference for writing ideas over speaking, and thus, they misunderstood the survey question. Most respondents indicated camera (video) use was their least favorite because they felt uncomfortable about their appearance or were not familiar enough yet with their cohorts. There was a total of 15 elaborations on why cameras were the least favorite mode of response for 62% of English composition students, and these were provided by 9 male and 6 female respondents. Responses 8 and 12 specifically link discomfort for speaking on camera with a reduction in confidence. Discomfort with spontaneous language production in front of a camera can be explained by the theories put forth by Plato on "sensory overload," compounded anxiety maxing out the affective filter as hypothesized by Krashen, and/or paranoia stemming from the potential harm of the evil eye or the unguarded gaze.

Table 4.
Follow-up Discussion Survey Results on Response Mode Preferences in Online English Composition, Sections 1, 2, and 3

Discussion Response Mode	Most Confident Using	Least Favorite	More Ideas	Better English
Audio	64%	12.5%	34%	32%
Text	34%	25%	64%	66%
Camera	2%	62.5%	2%	2%

Relevant findings of four insightful survey questions are represented in table 4 above. The survey found that not only did the majority of students find speaking through their cameras the least favorite response mode, but also 64% of respondents felt more confident responding through audio while only 2% thought cameras increased their confidence. Additionally, 64% of students said that texting gave them more ideas compared with 34% for audio and only 2% for cameras. Finally, 66% thought their English was better when using the text chat compared with 32% who chose audio and, again, only 2% who chose cameras. In all four cases, cameras were shown to be the least liked and the most debilitating. Students' opinions about their own performances in generating more ideas at a higher English proficiency standard were paralleled with the actual findings of the sentence quality comparisons and response rates. The quality of their sentences was, indeed, better when texting than in any other mode, and more students appeared to have ideas they were willing to share when allowed to text their responses. This indicates a self-awareness likely stemming from intuitive knowledge of how anxiety and appearances are inhibiting, and the cultural and religious implications of performing under the scrutiny of "the gaze."

5. Limitations and Recommendations

Since the researcher was limited to the courses, sections, and class sizes allocated by the university, the sample size was quite small at only 53 students. It was also a convenience sample, and therefore, contained students of varying English proficiencies despite being placed in the same freshman-level course. Therefore, the data does not necessarily represent the entire population of Moroccan, freshmen-level university students. Additionally, since the data comes from a Muslim-majority nation, the results may be influenced by beliefs that are not held by similarly aged university students in non-Muslim regions of the world. Moreover, there could be unintended implicit bias stemming from the design and interpretation of the results since the researcher adheres to the same Islamic beliefs as the majority of the students. The discussion questions themselves may have influenced the response rates. In particular, topics surrounding overly personal, problematic or uninteresting questions may have elicited lower response rates. For example, the audio-only question asked how Covid 19 had affected students' lives. This may have been too personal to answer on the first day of class. The text-only question asked what students thought about their university. Perhaps this was seen as a conflict of interest and students did not want to criticize their institution with an unknown group. The final, camera-only question asked how students chose their major. While this was perhaps the least problematic of the three questions, students may not have responded because they found the topic boring, or they had not chosen the major for themselves.

To increase the sample size, future studies may be conducted over multiple semesters or years by a single researcher and their allocated sections. It is also recommended that future studies involving multiple professors are conducted in non-Muslim contexts to compare findings on how appearances either impair or boost student confidence, participation, idea creation and performance. It may be more effective to test random or stratified samples of freshman English composition classes online from other English-medium universities in Morocco and around the world. For similarity, the first-day discussions would have to be conducted online with a cohort that will eventually meet face-to-face for the remainder of the semester since students in this study had not voluntarily signed up for an online course. Areas of inquiry into the performance, participation rates and perhaps more importantly, the biases of both the professors and students could be tested using content knowledge instead of ice breakers. For example, similar online sessions could gauge the aforementioned factors when students are asked to recall key course concepts instead of rapport-building discussions to observe patterns in behavior, such as biases based on gender or appearance, and accuracy of

content when using different response methods. Research questions may explore which students are perceived to have more mastery over content and when utilizing which response mode, which gender participates at a higher rate and is more accurate, and if appearances seem to have a positive or negative effect on student participation and accuracy. Further studies may also allow students to express their perceptions of faculty performance and content mastery when utilizing various response modes.

6. Conclusions

The implications of the findings have profound potential in the fields of online education, language learning, educational psychology, and general pedagogy. Based on the findings, it is clear that appearances affect students' abilities to perform and participate. While appearances may enable and empower some, they clearly inhibit and impair learning for the majority. Results of the research explicitly show that English composition students participated at a higher rate and quality when offered the choice to respond in online discussions using text, a tool which anonymizes appearance. Out of 53 participants, only four male students voluntarily responded to the camera-only question. Conversely, the highest participation rate came from the text-only question with 18 male and 11 female respondents. Additionally, the highest quality of language was also produced in the text-only question with sentences containing higher-order vocabulary, concise messages and complex sentence structures compared with audio and camera sentences which often contained simple ideas, false starts, fillers, and redundancy. Female students benefited from being offered multiple modalities to participate since none of the 23 participating female students opted to answer through video. The follow-up survey showed over 60% of students intuitively understood they performed better in English and had more ideas when texting their responses instead of answering through audio or camera. On the other hand, cameras were consistently shown to be the least favorite response mode with only one student from 53 saying it made them more confident with better English and more ideas.

Indeed, Krashen's cognitive load and affective filter theories are substantiated by the results as well as Plato's perspective on the senses as an impediment to the acquisition of knowledge and attainment of the truth. Appearances clearly have a detrimental effect on learners' ability to generate ideas, express themselves openly in a new situation, and produce coherent, grammatically correct sentences. Additionally, these findings may also exhibit the deeply held cultural and religious beliefs of the Moroccan population, that the evil eye of jealousy potentially inflicts harm and that unhinged gazing at the opposite sex is in direct disobedience with religious jurisprudence. Online synchronous sessions should, therefore, employ multiple modalities to equip and empower students of all dispositions to participate in discussions and express their personal truths, especially those from more conservative, Muslim-majority societies. A blended learning approach to traditional, face-to-face classes is also recommended to allow the more apprehensive, conservative, and introverted students to participate in discussions through discrete means such as texting in an online forum or platform during in-person sessions. Researchers and educators are encouraged to use the imbedded tools found in teleconferencing platforms such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams to conduct their own experiments and analyze not only the modalities that work best with their students, but those that create more equitable, unbiased, and nonjudgmental learning environments.

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