
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Online and Face-to-Face English as a Foreign Language Proficiency in Morocco: The Case of the Moroccan Baccalaureate Students during the Covid

Merzouk Farahi¹ ✉ and Redouan Saidi²

¹Ministry of National Education, Regional Academy of Education & Training, Beni Mellal 23000, Morocco

²Sultan Moulay Slimane University, School of Arts & Humanities, Beni Mellal 23000, Morocco

Corresponding Author: Merzouk Farahi, **E-mail:** farahi2412@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Due to the outbreak and alarming spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been a recognized need for alternative ICT-based methods like online and blended methods of teaching school topics, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in particular. It seems that this sudden transition to emergency remote teaching has presented a number of challenges and constraints for EFL practitioners, as well as opportunities throughout all the cycles of the Moroccan education system. In Morocco, EFL learning specifically has become of vital importance. Research on the status of English proficiency and input from an online or distance learning perspective, nonetheless, is scarce and focuses mainly on face-to-face learning and hardly on the impact of online and blended learning on language proficiency in EFL. However, the effectiveness of learning EFL in the Moroccan context - such as English as a foreign language fully online in the Moroccan education system has yet to be uncovered. The principal objective of this paper was to investigate whether learning EFL fully online can be as effective as learning it fully face-to-face. A quantitative methodological approach was adopted. Independent sample t-tests were carried out to compare online and face-to-face learners' performance in Moroccan secondary schools in a Baccalaureate-level EFL course in the Regional Academies of Casablanca-Settat and Beni-Mellal-Khenifra, Morocco. The key variables 'age', 'gender', 'learning outcomes', 'the residential environment', 'access to Internet', 'Net connection availability' & 'digital device used' are controlled. The main findings, wherein the t-value of the seven subtests represented a mean difference of 31,380 in the fully face-to-face group and -17,582 in the fully online group, indicated that online EFL learning in Baccalaureate education cannot be at least as effective as face-to-face EFL learning. This study should, therefore, be of value to language course providers wishing to implement flexible EFL learning and to, broadly speaking, course designers and practitioners and computer-assisted language learning researchers.

KEYWORDS

Online & Face-to-Face Groups; English Language Proficiency; Covid-19 Pandemic

ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: 27 December 2022

PUBLISHED: 02 January 2023

DOI: 10.32996/ijels.2023.5.1.1

1. Introduction

The current research orientation is not an attempt to verify theories about the status of language teaching and learning from an online perspective. Instead, it is a pioneering attempt to explore how online modes of teaching and learning have operated within the educational system in Morocco during Covid-19 and their possible impacts on the English learning performances of Moroccan students at the end of secondary school in Morocco. It would have been crucially interesting to verify such effects for all the topics on the school curriculum, but given the focus of the study, only the online-mode instructional impact will be studied on the language proficiency in EFL of the Baccalaureate students in Morocco in particular.

It should be signaled at this level that the present study reflects a research interest in the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic that has dramatically changed, among other landscapes, the educational setting in Morocco as well as in the rest of the world. It is, in

actual fact, part of a large-scale ongoing research put forward with the aim of evaluating the innovative practices in the educational system in Morocco in general. Undoubtedly, the new international crisis of the Covid-19 that has very recently hit Morocco as well as the rest of the world has called for the urgent use of ICT-based pedagogical methods, notably the new modes of instruction: online and blended teaching and learning methods. In the foreseeable future, such a move would, without any doubt, have staggering implications for curriculum design based on competencies, implementation of active learning methodologies, models for formative evaluation, and new forms of tutoring adapted to the realities of the country.

1.1 Development of online language teaching in Morocco

With respect to the teaching of foreign languages in Morocco, there has been some development of innovative ways of learning and teaching French L2 and EFL, including the less commonly taught languages like the Tamazight. In the pre-pandemic period, face-to-face instruction mode was the rule, and modes like blended, online, and distance learning were gradually integrated into the educational system in general ways to enlarge the scope of the EFL language exposure. In the last decades, and in order to boost the effects of the educational system, the Moroccan educational authorities have started to look for the implementation of active learning ICT-based methodologies, which could be crucial to the future development of the educational system of the country. Still, since the beginning of the Covid-19 crisis, Morocco has strived to apply innovative technological developments to online learning as an alternative to face-to-face interactions. Likewise, the government encouraged teachers and lecturers to create their own multimedia instructional resources in order to bring the courses offered by schools and universities into the digital era. Still, with the sudden outbreak and rapid spread of the pandemic, there has been a strong need for online classes through the intensive use of remote and blended modes of instruction instead of full face-to-face teaching and learning. The research objective of assessing online and face-to-face language learners' learning EFL and the skills involved during the pandemic in Morocco is motivated mainly by a keen interest in investigating Moroccan student gains in language proficiency as a means of establishing the effectiveness of distance language teaching environments and processes, and/or as a means of assessing particular English language knowledge and skills and providing feedback to the Moroccan Baccalaureate learners in particular on their progress. The current study focuses on the first motivation: the impacts of distance learning on EFL language proficiency and to find out whether online EFL learning can provide an alternative to face-to-face EFL learning for those students who are in need of a different learning format because of the pandemic.

1.2 Online learning in Covid times

At an international level and as the Covid-19 pandemic swiftly spread out, educational institutions (i.e., universities, schools, institutes...etc.) in Europe and the United States mainly have suddenly decided to close their building and campuses with the aim of containing the spread of the virus. Many of these adopted emergency remote teaching through learning management systems like Blackboard, Moodle, and Canvas or such video-conferencing software like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Collaborate Ultra. This unexpected and forced shift to emergency remote teaching has generally been challenging for school demography all over the world, and especially learners of English as a foreign language (EFL), English as a second language (ESL), Business English (BE), and English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Morocco is obviously no exception to the pandemic spread. Despite the increased interest in blended L2 learning and teaching and the growing number of initiatives to set up blended language courses, there is a dearth of studies on fully online language courses, especially in terms of studies comparing the learning results of fully online and face-to-face learners.

1.3 EFL during the pandemic crisis

In Morocco, learners of English rely on EFL or English for Academic Purposes courses to transition from secondary school to higher education and generally succeed in their academic studies. With respect to higher education institutions, especially English-medium universities (i.e., *Al-Akawayn*, *Ben Guerir*) or Departments of English Studies that use English as the main medium of instruction (EMI) in Moroccan state universities as well, students often follow classes in English to develop their language proficiency in EFL or English for Academic Purposes. In lower education cycles, Moroccan Baccalaureate students are most often involved in advancing their language development in ways that expand their knowledge of such basic skills as grammar and their academic lexical range and build their proficiency in academic writing conventions. Through these classes, Baccalaureate students can be prepared to successfully enter higher education institutions and even in English-Medium-Instruction environments.

1.4 English online instruction modes in higher education

Fragmented research information documented English language practitioners in the Moroccan higher education context and their efforts to transition to emergency remote teaching during Covid-19 while simultaneously preparing their students for further studies.

The post-pandemic move to online facilitation has only hastened the digital transformation of Moroccan higher education. The integration of online and blended learning teaching and learning modes has become the new norm. Like in a considerable segment

of countries worldwide, Morocco has established online and blended learning platforms to facilitate language learning, provide an authentic and engaging learning experience, and support pedagogical innovation. Moreover, technology-mediated instruction can help EAP practitioners to deliver interactive, flexible, and individualized online education while fostering student autonomy.

1.5 English online instruction in secondary schools

In Moroccan secondary schools, educational authorities have opted through regional academies of education for both online and blended modes of teaching EFL and other school topics. Still, the current situation is unique. The course of EFL delivered online during emergency remote teaching was not purposefully designed to be delivered entirely online and, thus, did not focus on quality course design, teaching, and learning. Instead, these courses were solely intended to maintain the academic calendar during the crisis in a country wherein face-to-face teaching has been the rule. In a similar vein, the educational authorities claim that the newly established teaching modes play an instrumental role in the implementation of EFL teaching by delivering the necessary English provision as Baccalaureate learners of EFL transition from secondary to higher education and by providing systematic second-language instruction. English language development is the primary role of English lessons in secondary school, especially for Baccalaureate students. Proficiency in English remains an expected outcome as well as a necessary end for academic success. In secondary schools, the Baccalaureate level, in particular, classes of EFL target specific needs of learners in a way that general English secondary school classes do not, cultivating both the grammar of English, writing language proficiency, and communicative competence. The impact of this type of teaching mode on Moroccan students is largely unknown.

1.6 Paucity of research on online-based EFL instruction impact

With the aim of evaluating the efficiency of ICT-based modes of instruction, especially during the pandemic, there have been several studies, as shown by the relevant burgeoning literature, conducted differently in relation to proximity or face-to-face and online or remote teaching and learning with respect to a number of school topics, EFL in particular. While in Europe and the United States, some comparative studies have been carried out to determine learning results in blended learning or online and face-to-face ESL and EFL language learning settings, there is a notable paucity of well-controlled studies in the field of EFL learning specifically comparing learning results in fully online and fully face-to-face courses. Studies of this kind have not been carried out yet in the Moroccan context. The effect of such modes of teaching and learning EFL is not yet known. In Morocco, only very few and often fragmented and non-experimentally empirical studies have been conducted involving the case of online EFL teaching in Morocco during the pandemic in Moroccan secondary schools. Against this vantage point, it must be signaled at this level that EFL proficiency in Morocco under the Covid circumstances has been - and is still, a terra incognita and an uncharted area of research.

The aim of the current research thus can be said to be twofold (1) to monitor if there are any differences in impacts on the English language proficiency of the Moroccan Baccalaureate students language proficiency with respect to the face-to-face taught group and remotely taught group; and (2) if there are, what differences are there in language learning between the two groups in terms of aspects of the English language taught during the end of secondary school level. While relegating the issue of the blended mode of instruction to a later stage of research, online teaching of EFL in the Moroccan setting is dealt with from a comparative perspective involving proximity teaching so as to profile a preliminary view of the impact of both teaching modes on the EFL language proficiency of Moroccan students at the Baccalaureate level.

2. Literature Review

Early formats of distance education date back to 1840 when Isaac Pitman used mail and a shorthand technique in order to teach and collaborate with students, and it is taught that the term e-learning began to be used in the educational field in the mid-1990s (Lee, 2009). Aparicio et al. (2016) specified 23 various concepts that belong to the use of computers in learning activities, used especially for learning purposes from 1960 to 2014. A more complex and inclusive definition states that distance learning can be considered a particular form of teaching and learning that integrates electronic resources and mediums whose role is to make education and to train more qualitative (Sangrà et al., 2011). E-Learning systems are an embryonic conception entrenched in the concept of Computer-Assisted Instruction (CAI) (Zinn, 2000). The concept of CAI first appeared in 1955 as a means of teaching problem-solving (Zinn, 2000).

The temptation to compare online learning to face-to-face in-person instruction under the pandemic circumstances will yield valuable data (Zimmerman, 2020). As a matter of fact, numerous comparative studies, among others, have been formerly carried out to explore whether traditional face-to-face teaching methods are more productive or whether online or hybrid learning is better (Lockman & Shirmer, 2020). Results of the studies show that students perform much better in online learning than in traditional learning. In the same vein, several research studies have been carried out on online learning to explore student satisfaction, acceptance of e-learning, distance learning success factors, and learning efficiency (Yen et al., 2018) or to highlight factors affecting students' satisfaction and performance in online classes during the pandemic (Rajabalee & Santally, 2020).

However, a scant amount of literature is available on the impact that in-person, face-to-face, online, or hybrid models have on the learners' English language proficiency.

Covid-19 has provided decision-makers, teachers, and students, both locally and globally, to use digitalized tools extensively in teaching and learning. Due to the pandemic, all the schools, institutions, colleges, and universities were shifted to the online instructional mode by their respective governments. Covid-19 and the medical emergency state adopted in Morocco from the mid of March to the mid of July 2020 have obliged students and teachers to study and work from home by using ICT-based tools. The Moroccan Ministry of Education has set up e-learning platforms to ensure continuity in teaching and learning. Public television and radio are also programming pedagogical content for students in collaboration with the ministry. Hence, research in this field is strongly needed to address some throbbing questions related to the total efficacy of ICT in learning, in general, and English as a foreign language, in particular. Indeed, there is still a dearth of knowledge about the total impacts of these adopted means and formats on the EFL secondary schooled learners' utmost proficiency in particular.

Previous studies have mostly examined the teachers' and students' beliefs and practices concerning ICT integration and distance learning. A recent study (Benhimaa & Benabderrazik, 2020) investigated the role of using Information Communication Technology in motivating Moroccan English Department Students to learn during the COVID-19 quarantine. It stressed that the most highly motivating factor behind using ICT to learn is linked to extrinsic factors, whereas the demotivating factors are about lack and absence or weakness of Net connection and lack of orientation. (Benhimaa et al., 2020).

Likewise, El Ghouati (2017) examined the relationship between e-learning styles and achievement in English among English Department students. Learning styles are subdivided into visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and read/write learning styles. Another study conducted on Moroccan teachers concluded that most teachers use the computer to word-process their lessons or to download materials from the Internet (Biaz et al., 2009). Another paper reported the current situation of the Moroccan higher educational system in terms of equipment, e-learning platforms, digital learning content, and the current ICT practices by Moroccan university students in distance learning and achievement of collaborative work by proposing cartography which represents the allocation of ICT tools for collaborative tasks (Riyami et al., 2016).

Laabidi (2017) conducted a survey on barriers affecting the successful use of ICT. Forty-seven teachers at Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdeallah University in Fes and Moulay Ismail University in Meknes participated in the survey. The results revealed that teachers reported many obstacles like the internet, technical skills, lack of institutional support, and big class sizes.

The empirical findings of the aforementioned studies have highlighted valuable experimental data about the importance of ICT integration and factors affecting students' and teachers' practices. These studies had not actually examined the impact of the online and face-to-face instructional patterns on students' aggregate proficiency from an analytic perspective of their outcomes. The present study tries to fill this research gap. The designated instruction unit that has been taught remotely online and physically face-to-face is aimed at reviewing, expanding, practicing, and exploring new linguistic and life skills. The pre-pilot proficiency test that the 2nd year baccalaureate students sat for contains seven sub-tasks (Grammar Structure; Written Vocabulary; Communicative Functions; Reading Comprehension; Writing; Listening Comprehension; Speaking) covering all the taught components in the second-year baccalaureate syllabus along with the key variables at play.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Fieldwork Activities Plan

The fieldwork and the research activities were carried out during the period 2020-2021 throughout the whole academic year with four differentiated phases. Table (1) provides an outlook of the whole process: The preliminary pre-pilot exploratory study was conducted in the period spanning from March to June 2021. The involved informants are Moroccan 2nd year baccalaureate EFL high school learners. The data were attained by analyzing forty learners' seven-section English Language Proficiency Test products in two distinct Moroccan Regional Academies of Education and Training. Table (1) outlines the fieldwork activities undergone since March 2021:

Table (1): Fieldwork activities plan

March 2021	March 2021	April 2021	May 2021	September 2021
Beginning of the research for the two groups (FFG & OG).	Meeting with the involved teachers in Beni-Mellal & Casablanca to agree on the teaching unit, the test format & mode, and the students who will be involved.	The forty 2 nd year BAC students in the two groups are taught a whole unit, respectively face-to-face and online. The forty students' background information is collected through a questionnaire.	The students in the two groups sit for a seven-section proficiency test in-person under the supervision of the involved teachers. The students' outcomes are assessed.	Data analysis, and reporting of the research results. Reshuffling & refining.

3.2 Data Collection Technique

During 2020-2021, the data on the English language proficiency of Moroccan Baccalaureate students were collected using a testing instrument, using quantitative techniques only. The aim was to get a global view of the newly introduced online mode of teaching the language proficiency of the students involved in EFL in the times of Covid. English Language Proficiency Test instrument was administered to 40 students enrolled in the Moroccan Baccalaureate classes in the local secondary schools of the *Beni-Mellal-Khenifra & Casa-Settat* regions, Morocco. All test participants, who were evenly divided into two groups, were then enrolled in the second-year Baccalaureate levels and following EFL classes as part of the school curriculum: the face-to-face group (FFG) was previously taught a unit in the face-to-face instruction mode, and the online group (OG) was taught the same unit but via an ICT-based distant pattern. The study was conducted in English language teaching (ELT) classrooms at two main Regional Academies of Education in Morocco, *Beni Mellal-Khenifra* and *Casablanca-Settat* Regional Academies. A total of 40 Moroccan participants in their final level of public upper secondary education sat for and answered a seven-section English Language Proficiency Test, including three language components: grammar, vocabulary, and functions; and the four skills- reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

3.3 Research Question

3.3.1 Research Questions

The main aim of this study is to investigate the differences in learning outcomes between fully online and FFG EFL learners and, thus, to find out if fully online EFL learning can be as effective as face-to-face learning. Therefore, this study seeks to answer the following major research questions:

RQ1. Are there any differences in terms of impact on the English language proficiency with respect to the English language proficiency performances of the face-to-face taught group and an online taught group of Moroccan Baccalaureate students?

RQ2. If there are any, what differences are there in language learning between the FFG and OG groups in terms of some aspects of the English language FL taught during the end of the Moroccan secondary school level?

With this emphasis on language proficiency, the current study does not deal with proficiency as a uniform entity. Rather, it is conceived of as a multifaceted concept involving crucial underlying components, notably (grammar structures, vocabulary building, communicative functions, reading comprehension, writing, listening comprehension, and speaking). Thus, the following sub-research questions are put forth to address this line of inquiry:

SRQ1. Are there differences observed in terms of students' mastery of the grammar structure of English as displayed by both OG and FFG groups? If there are, what are these differences?

SRQ2. Are there differences observed in terms of students' mastery of the vocabulary building of English as displayed by both OG and FFG groups? If there are, what are these differences?

SRQ3. Are there differences observed in terms of students' mastery of the communicative functions of English as displayed by both OG and FFG groups? If there are, what are these differences?

SRQ4. Are there differences observed in terms of students' mastery of the reading comprehension of English as displayed by both OG and FFG groups? If there are, what are these differences?

SRQ5. Are there differences observed in terms of students' mastery of the writing of English as displayed by both OG and FFG groups? If there are, what are these differences?

SRQ6. Are there differences observed in terms of students' mastery of the listening comprehension of English as displayed by both OG and FFG groups? If there are, what are these differences?

SRQ7. Are there differences observed in terms of students' mastery of the speaking of English as displayed by both OG and FFG groups? If there are, what are these differences?

3.4 Participants

The current study provides a quantitative analysis of the Baccalaureate students' performance in both fully online and fully face-to-face EFL courses. It accommodates some of these challenges mentioned above by controlling the key variables 'previous knowledge', 'course level', 'content', 'teacher', 'assessment', and 'learning outcomes'. The study is set in formal secondary education in Casablanca-Settat and Beni-Mellal-Khenifra, Morocco. By the time the research was carried out, it was observed that there was an increasing interest in blended learning too. The educational authorities called for the use of a blended mode of EFL instruction. Moreover, so many schools and higher education institutions as well in the country have set to organize blended learning EFL courses in addition to the mainstream, face-to-face curriculum. The proportion of distance learning may vary greatly. Still, it has largely been unknown in Morocco the proportion of blended or even online learning in the teaching of EFL.

In general, the two groups display socio-pedagogical similarities at the level of the teaching-learning experiences. Table (2) provides background information on the participants taking part in this experiment, notably their numbers, mean age, and gender, in each of the groups involved, the face-to-face group (FFG) and the online group (OG):

Table (2): Participants and their numbers, mean age, gender in each of the groups included in this experiment, face-to-face group (FFG) and Online group (OG).

Groups	N. Ss	Gender	Mean age	SD
Face-to-Face Group (FFG)	20	FFG Male 07 Female 13	18.07	1.08
Online Group (OG)	20	OG Male 08 female 12	19.00	1.12

N. Ss = number of students
SD = Standard deviation

The first twenty students were taught using the in-person face-to-face pattern at *Beni Mellal- Khenifra* Regional Academy of Education (RAoE), while the second twenty learners were remotely taught online at Casablanca-Settat Regional Academy of Education. Table 3 shows the various residential locations of the subjects in the two groups.

Table (3): Residential environment of both the face-to-face group (FFG) and the Online group (OG).

Mode group	Region	Rural	Suburban	Urban
FFG	<i>Beni-Mellal-Khenifra</i>	2	6	12
OG	<i>Casablanca-Settat</i>	2	5	13

All two groups (n=40) were taught all the components of the unit (i.e., vocabulary, grammar, functions, receptive & productive skills) in seven continuous and successive sessions using two different instructional patterns. Only after the 7-session instruction did both the FFG and OG groups take the EFL language proficiency test during the final two weeks of the course in order to give a more accurate representation of their proficiency at that particular level. The performances of the two groups, FFG and OG, were then compared. It was predicted that course format (face-to-face or online) would not affect outcomes at the lower-division level with respect to the English proficiency tasks.

4. Research Findings

This task is developed with the aim of exploring the English language proficiency of the Moroccan Baccalaureate students, FFG and OG in this case, with respect to their ability to produce grammatically accurate sentences and their ability to use a wide range of grammar structures. Overall, the test of the 2nd Baccalaureate students completed comprises seven tasks adapted from an official accredited Moroccan textbook. Each task aims to review, expand, practice, and explore new linguistic and life skills numbered here as 1 through 7, notably Grammar Structure, Written Vocabulary, Communicative Functions; Reading Comprehension; Writing; Listening Comprehension; Speaking. Data were calculated and presented based on the participants' responses to the English language proficiency subtests. Then, they were statistically analyzed through SPSS, as reported in the tables below, showing the mean scores and the number of participants' responses on each task (Table 1 – 7).

4.1 The Grammar Structure Task

Overall, the aim of the Grammar Structure task is to control for mistakes of grammar produced by the involved students and their ability to use correct tense inflection, modal auxiliary verbs, infinitives/gerunds, and to form correct sentence structures (affirmative/negative/interrogative). Table 4.1 provides the results of both groups with respect to their performance on the Grammar Structure Task:

Table 4.1 Overview of the Grammar Structure Task and the number of items in each task, along with the mean scores for both groups, the face-to-face taught group (FFG) and the remotely taught group (OG).

Proficiency Task	Group	Mean	SD	T-value
Grammar Structure (15 Items)	FFG	10,10	1,21	4,067
Grammar Structure (15 Items)	OG	6,75	1,84	-4,873

For the Grammar Structure Task, the maximum score is fifteen. As is clear from the results described in Table 4.1, the scores for the Grammar Structure Task between FFG (M=10,10; SD=1,21) and OG learners (M=6,75; SD=1,84) are actually surprising. The scores are higher of the Moroccan Baccalaureate learners of EFL for the Grammar Structure Task in the face-to-face instruction mode. The mean scores of the remotely taught students are somewhat lower with respect to the same proficiency task (Grammar Structure Task).

4.2 Written Vocabulary Task

With respect to the Written Vocabulary task, the aim is to measure the student's ability to form correct collocations, correct word associations, and correct word definitions. For the Written Vocabulary Task, the maximum score is sixteen. Table 4.2 provides the mean scores of both the face-to-face group and the online group on the Written Vocabulary Task, along with the number of items in each task:

Table 4.2 Overview of the Written Vocabulary Task and the number of items in each task, along with the mean scores for both groups, the face-to-face taught group (FFG) and the remotely taught group (OG).

Proficiency Task	Group	Mean	SD	T-value
Written Vocabulary Building (16 Items)	FFG	11,45	1,57	6,970
Written Vocabulary Building (16 Items)	OG	7,52	1,99	-2,698

The results described in Table 4.2 noticeably demonstrate the scores are higher of the Moroccan EFL learners for the Written Vocabulary Task in the face-to-face instruction mode (11,45; SD=1,57). The mean scores of the remotely taught students are, to a certain extent, lower (7,52; SD=1,99) regarding the Written Vocabulary Building proficiency task.

4.3 Communicative Functions Task

For the Communicative Functions task, the purpose is to gauge the correct use of expressions of opinion, agreement, and complaint. The maximum score for the Communicative Functions Task is 15. Table 4.3 provides the mean scores of both the face-to-face group and the online group on the Communicative Functions Task, along with the number of items in each task:

Table 4.3 Overview of the Communicative Functions Task and the number of items in each task, along with the mean scores for both groups, the face-to-face taught group (FFG) and the remotely taught group (OG).

Proficiency Task	Group	Mean	SD	T-value
Communicative Functions (9 Items)	FFG	11,15	1,73	5,573
Communicative Functions (9 Items)	OG	7,57	1,90	-2,708

With respect to the Communicative Functions proficiency task, the scores, as described in Table 4.3, are striking. The results obtained confirm once again the superiority of the face-to-face group with respect to the Communicative Functions Task (11,15;

SD=1,73). The mean scores of the online group of students are somewhat lower (7,57; SD=1,90) on the same Communicative Functions proficiency task.

4.4 Reading Comprehension Task

As far as the Reading Comprehension task is concerned, the aim is to measure the student's ability to read a text, correctly work out *Wh*-questions, True/False statements, and correctly infer word meaning. The maximum score for the Reading Comprehension Task is fifteen. Table 4.4 provides the mean scores of both the face-to-face group and the online group on the Reading Comprehension Task, along with the number of items in each task:

Table 4.4 Overview of the Reading Comprehension Task and the number of items in each task, along with the mean scores for both groups, the face-to-face taught group (FFG) and the remotely taught group (OG).

Proficiency Task	Group	Mean	SD	T-value
Reading Comprehension (15 Items)	FFG	10,45	1,64	3,960
Reading Comprehension (15 Items)	OG	7,52	1,82	-2,942

The scores, as is clear from the results described in Table 4.4, are higher of the Moroccan face-to-face group of learners for the Reading Comprehension Task (10,45; SD=1,64). The mean scores of the online group of students are fairly lower (7,52) with respect to the same receptive proficiency task (Reading Comprehension Task).

4.5 Writing Task

With regard to the Writing task, the aim is to control the student's ability to write a correct descriptive paragraph using given cues and his/her ability to correctly underline mistakes (capitalization/punctuation/spelling) in a poorly written paragraph. The maximum score for the Writing Task is 15. Table 4.5 provides the mean scores of both the face-to-face group and the online group on the Writing Task, along with the number of items in each task:

Table 4.5 Overview of the Writing Task and the number of items in each task, along with the mean scores for both groups, the face-to-face taught group (FFG) and the remotely taught group (OG).

Proficiency Task	Group	Mean	SD	T-value
Writing (2 Items: Open & Close Questions)	FFG	8,40	1,82	5,904
Writing (2 Items: Open & Close Questions)	OG	6,04	1,92	-1,751

The results described in Table 4.5 conspicuously show that the scores are somewhat higher of the Moroccan EFL learners for the Writing Task in the face-to-face instructional mode (8,40; SD:1,82). The mean scores of the remotely taught students are rather lower (6,04; SD=1,92) regarding the same productive proficiency task (Writing Task).

4.6 Listening Comprehension Task

The aim of the Listening Comprehension task is to measure the student's ability to correctly answer questions while listening for specific details in the spoken input. The maximum score for the Listening Comprehension Task is 12. Table 4.6 provides the mean scores of both the face-to-face group and the online group on the Listening Comprehension Task, along with the number of items in each task:

Table 4.6 Overview of the Listening Comprehension Task and the number of items in each task, along with the mean scores for both groups, the face-to-face taught group (FFG) and the remotely taught group (OG).

Proficiency Task	Group	Mean	SD	T-value
Listening Comprehension (6 Items)	FFG	5,70	1,95	1,584
Listening Comprehension (6 Items)	OG	4,84	1,65	-1,352

With respect to the Listening Comprehension proficiency task, the scores, as described in Table 4.6, strikingly validate being somewhat similar with noticeable primacy of the Moroccan EFL learners in the face-to-face learning mode ($M=5,70$; $SD=1,95$). The mean scores of the remotely taught students are somewhat lesser ($M=4,84$; $SD=1,65$) in the same Listening Comprehension proficiency task.

4.7 Speaking Task

With regard to the Speaking task, the goal is to control the student's ability to correctly answer all six questions with very few major errors and adequate vocabulary throughout choosing from the provided prompts. The maximum score for the Communicative Functions Task is 12. Table 4.7 provides the mean scores of both the face-to-face group and the online group on the Speaking Task, along with the number of items in each task:

Table 4.7 Overview of the Speaking Task and the number of items in each task, along with the mean scores for both groups, the face-to-face taught group (FFG) and the remotely taught group (OG).

Proficiency Task	Group	Mean	SD	T-value
Speaking (6 Items)	FFG	6,30	1,75	3,322
Speaking (6 Items)	OG	4,85	1,78	-1,258

The scores, as is clear from the results described in Table 4.7, are relatively higher for the Moroccan EFL learners for the Speaking Task in the face-to-face instructional mode ($M=6,30$; $SD=1,75$). The mean scores of the remotely taught students are fairly lower ($M=4,85$; $SD=1,78$) with respect to the same productive proficiency task (Speaking Task).

5. General Discussion & Conclusion

In the present study, the authors evaluated the aggregate efficacy and productivity of the Moroccan EFL students' utmost ELP performances with respect to online and face-to-face classes during Covid-19. The current research orientation is not an attempt to verify theories about the status of language teaching and learning from an online or face-to-face perspective. Rather, it is a ground-breaking attempt to explore how online modes of teaching and learning have operated within the Moroccan educational system during the times of Covid-19 and their possible impacts on the learning performances of Moroccan EFL students at the end of secondary school in Morocco compared to physical face-to-face in-person instruction.

The t-test results, as noticed in the tables above, indicate a noteworthy difference being relevant to the sample size in the two groups of the study. This variance is validated by the t-value mean scores, which are negative in all the fully OG subtests and affirmative in the fully FFG subtests. The main findings of this research indicated then that online EFL learning in Moroccan Baccalaureate education could not be at least as effective as face-to-face EFL learning. The key factors at play here validating the low proficiency level of the online taught group as opposed to the face-to-face taught group includes 'gender', 'the residential environment', 'access to Internet', and 'digital device.' Five respondents' total proficiency from the online-taught group has been perceived to be somewhat high. All of them are females belonging to urban areas and have the necessary digital tools, Internet coverage, and connectivity. Thus, the low efficacy and productivity of the face-to-face EFL taught group compared to the online-taught group is also due to the lack or nonexistence of ICT learning tools and the locality of the learner's institution.

The results of this study have numerous significant practical implications for educators, students and researchers. Therefore, this study should be of value to language course providers wishing to implement flexible EFL ICT-based learning and, broadly speaking, alphanumeric lesson designers, practitioners, and computer-assisted language learning researchers. A significant limitation concerns the study's small sample size and the focus solely on the students' proficiency perspective. It is recommended that further research should be undertaken to understand the other major players', viz. teachers, parents, and administrators' views and experiences towards the newly adopted learning modes, that is, the online, blended, and HyFlex patterns in EFL classes during the pandemic.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflict of interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgment: The authors are grateful to the Regional Academies of Education & Training (RAET) both in Casablanca-Settat and in Beni Mellal-Khenifra for supporting the researchers. The authors would also like to thank teachers and their students who took the time to take part in this fieldwork study.

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